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Liberated Voices an Online Course in Speaking Up

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

LIBERATED VOICES

AN ONLINE COURSE IN SPEAKING UP



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

SETH J. THOMAS

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. EKAPUTRA TUPAMAHU

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Seth J. Thomas

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 15, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

Evaluation Committee:

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to all the courageous faith leaders who take the risk to speak up for justice and support this faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the ongoing support of so many people through this doctoral journey. First, to my Project Peer Group, Scott Shelton and Dan Hues – thank you for your earnest co-working in this project process. To my esteemed Project Faculty, Dr. Ekaputra Tupamahu, thank you for your patience, encouragement, and challenges throughout this journey.

I also must acknowledge the community of St. James Presbyterian Church of Bellingham, WA and my pastoral ministry colleagues in Northwest Coast Presbytery. Thank you for championing me along this journey, making space for me to have “too much on my plate” and giving me places where I can practice what I am trying to articulate in this work. I am blessed to serve Christ with you all.

My dear friends who weathered the COVID-19 pandemic and this doctoral journey with me. To the ones who challenged me to think deeply about institutional racism. To the ones who stood at the rallies for George Floyd and tabled alongside me at the Bellingham LGBTQ Pride Festival – thank you for stepping out into this work with me publicly. We are better together. And also...sorry for being so bad at responding to texts and messages for the last 3 years!

Finally, I want to say a sincere, overwhelmed word of thanks to my partner and best friend, Stacy, and my son, chess opponent, and movie-watching buddy, Asher. You two sustained me through this journey. Thank you.

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Research Method

"This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called *Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts*. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder workshops, and an iterative development process, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change."

Abstract

NPO Statement

The white church and its leaders have demonstrated postures of silence and privilege, which need to be lovingly disrupted to leverage and encourage the liberative witness at the heart of the biblical narrative.

Key Insights

Faith leaders from the white church are hungry for resources that encourage them to participate in the struggles for social justice in this present era of ministry. Many desire to speak the truth with love but need encouragement and permission to leverage that witness they find in the scriptures. The liberation theology tradition offers excellent historical and present examples of God's preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. Connecting this with practical examples of preaching and speaking, we can offer faith leaders a fresh, encouraging approach to proclaiming God's good news.

Ministry Context

I serve as Minister of Word and Sacrament at St. James Presbyterian Church in Bellingham, WA. We are a theologically progressive, social justice-oriented neighborhood church. This congregation serves as a backdrop to this project, as it is with these people that I have practically explored the concepts of bold preaching I hope to encourage others to employ. The project will be launched through The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology's Center for Transforming Engagement. I am a staff member of this institution and an alum of their M.Div program, and I hope to contribute this course to their broad offerings.

Description of the Project

I am designing and developing an online course of eight 25-minute lessons titled "Liberated Voices." This course will be offered as asynchronous video content through The Center for Transforming Engagement in Fall 2023. The course includes assignments of an 8-10 page paper describing speaking up in the participant's context, reflective journaling, and various readings from liberation theology, preaching, and engaging healthy discourse in the community.

Introduction

Presentation Of the Project

I created an online course that will encourage and support speakers in naming injustice through the frame of the Gospel and the liberating love of Jesus. Over the course of this doctoral project process, I have discerned alongside other pastors and ministry leaders that the white church needs to be disrupted from postures of silence and learn to actively engage with issues of justice all around them.

The Doctoral Project is an outline and script for an online course titled "Liberated Voices." I have developed a course syllabus, readings, and activities outlined in the following pages. The latter half of the lessons are still in development. I also have focused my attention on the Syllabus and first courses to give a sense of the course's direction and to submit for feedback to the instructional staff at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. As my Project Launch Plan outlines, I intend to finalize and record the lessons in May 2023.

Introduction

My doctoral project is developing and delivering an online, asynchronous course titled "Liberated Voices." The intention is that this course meets the problem of the white church's ongoing silence and complicity in racial injustice in the United States and has applications to many other critical social issues that the church must engage and bear witness to the liberating word of Jesus. This doctoral project process has been a journey in inner discovery and outer understanding, seeking to engage a problem I have witnessed in the church for many years: our inability to speak up during difficult social upheaval. It is a project of liberation and freedom, as it attempts to offer pastors and ministry leaders the encouragement to be bold in their witness to the power and love of Jesus Christ.

Discovery

In the Summer of 2020, we witnessed a great rise in conversation and activism for racial justice following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. This, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, catalyzed a movement in the United States to look more directly at systemic racism in our nation and institutions like the Church. I was struck as I witnessed this ongoing work that people of color have been engaging in for centuries as it took center stage in the minds of white pastors like me. I found dissonance as the conversation developed, as I watched many white pastors shy away, ignore, or downright publicly repudiate the calls for justice from the Black Lives Matter movement and other vocal communities.

The Need/Problem/Opportunity for this project crystallized into a simple question: Why is it so hard for the white church to speak up? I had wondered at versions of this question for years. Why were churches I attended so afraid to say “racism” or talk about “justice” beyond the confines of God’s ultimate restoration of all things in the Kingdom to come? Are the Scriptures not filled with accounts of God setting people free from bondage to the powers of the world? Why would we not connect this present struggle for racial justice with our historical legacy of being a people set free by God?

I am reminded of when an elder in the theologically progressive, neighborhood-sized Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation I serve said I was being “controversial” when I talked about climate justice and the Church’s calling to steward creation well. Or how my college ministry staff was requested not to counsel and support LGBTQ students as they discerned their sexuality because that “lifestyle” fell outside the definition of our church’s understanding of belonging. Or ministry colleagues and parishioners who warned me to “not be too political” for the threat of invalidating the church’s nonprofit status or alienating influential members (read: donors).

Through these ministry phases, questions about permission and authority became critical to me. As a people ordained and called by God to serve as witnesses to the Kingdom in the world, do we not have the authority to address the dissonance we see in the world as contrasted to the diverse mosaic that is God’s people? It felt like an unseen body of people needed to “give their yes” to saying hard things like naming our complicity in systemic racism. And that elusive group was unwilling to do so, so we mustn’t.

For my capstone paper in my undergraduate program at Western Washington University, I researched and wrote about Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador in the 1980s and his impact on the liberation theology movement of that period. As I approached this doctoral journey, I wanted to look at how liberation theology might impact this issue of speaking up. I found that so few people in my white church community and its periphery knew that liberation theology existed.

I then gathered an insightful, empathetic group of Discovery Workshop participants to discuss the “why” behind these questions. We gathered over Zoom in December 2020 to help explore this question: “why is it so difficult for the white church to speak up?” Participants described their hunger to hear their church leaders join the conversation and offer a bold word, coming alongside the rising tide of public calls for racial justice. They also wanted the church to have a voice, not simply remain on the fringe or disengaged from something that could be decisive. Our group discussed the historical factors that led the white church to hold onto power and privilege rather than yielding it to BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) voices. We talked about the complexities of encountering the word of Jesus in mixed racial and ethnic communities and how the church does or does not make space for minority voices to be heard.

Completing my Topic Expertise Essay, “The Liberated Witness of a Church That Learns to Speak Up,” helped me turn a corner from theorizing and wondering how liberation theology could teach the white church. In writing, I discovered the “permission” I had been looking for. Countless voices

have risen to name injustice throughout the history of the Church. It is from those voices that we must learn. My NPO gathered focus, stating, “faith leaders must be lovingly disrupted from postures of silence and privilege to discover and leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Design

Entering the second year of this project, I set about the design and prototyping process. This was probably the most difficult year of the three for me, as I wondered how to make such immense theological and social issues come into some sort of deliverable project that would provide a helpful contribution to the conversation. I am grateful for my Design Workshop participants who helped challenge me to get clear about what I wanted people to learn through my work and help me brainstorm potential prototypes for this project.

Our Design Workshop team identified the root causes of the NPO as 1) a fear of disrupting the status quo, 2) the “stuckness” of pastoral leaders because of how their bold witness could impact their position or financial situation, and 3) a specific desire to speak the truth, with love, to the particular people God calls you to, and how disruptive that can be. I hold dearly to a brief conversation about this Design Workshop process with a church member. He simply asked me, “Is there some unwritten rule that the Church has to be neutral?” From here, I began to see how my project might lovingly disrupt some of this holding onto the status quo.

I articulated an NPO that states: “The white church and its leaders have demonstrated postures of silence and privilege, which need to be lovingly disrupted to leverage and encourage the liberative witness at the heart of the biblical narrative.”

I am also an active staff member with the Center for Transforming Engagement at The Seattle School during this doctoral process. The mission of this newly launched Center is to “transform your engagement with God, neighbor, and self.” We do this by equipping “leaders and teams to awaken social change.” The Center has begun offering online courses that are available for asynchronous participation around several issues that support this awakening social change. They approached me with an opportunity to share my doctoral work as a course, and with that in mind, I brought that as one of the three options for prototypes to my Design Workshop team.

Alongside the concept pitch of an online course, we also explored a church curriculum on “practices of liberation,” aimed at teaching liberation theology and its methods to lay people in a church context, offering a connection to what is an unfamiliar tradition in the white church. We also explored establishing a more unbound blog space to explore liberation and racial justice concepts. Ultimately, these two other prototype concepts seemed to lead towards the Most Viable Prototype I chose, developing this online course, as they integrated into the broader scope of a course.

In August of 2022, I made the decision to follow through on developing a course prototype for the Center for Transforming Engagement. They have a course development process that walked me

through several helpful clarifying questions regarding scope, objectives, and outcomes that helped connect the dots between the expectations of the Portland Seminary Project Portfolio and a practical prototype project for another audience.

This submission process, with clear ideas about scope, objectives, and outcomes, became My Most Viable Prototype. It helped me shape these big ideas into something practical and executable, with a formal institution supporting my process, which I desperately needed.

Delivery

This project will be offered as an online course for The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology, delivered asynchronously with synchronous conversation groups held over Zoom. It will likely launch in Fall 2023 as a supplemental offering for continuing education.

Who is this project for?

This project is designed to be a continuing education, non-degree offering for pastors, ministry leaders, and speakers to develop their careers and skills. The course will be offered through The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology's Center for Transforming Engagement (CTE). The Center currently offers a handful of non-degree, asynchronous online course offerings, including Centering Prayer, a Way of Life course, and Career & Calling (Vocational Discernment).

What is outside the scope of this project?

Outside of the scope of this project, but on the horizon, are a few additional opportunities:

1. Offering for secular professionals: this is not a course for business professionals, speakers, and non-religious leaders.
2. Seminary-level preaching course: This is not a graduate-level course for preaching. Although I could develop something helpful for Master of Divinity or Theology students, this project is not aimed at them.
3. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) distribution: This project is not directly intended for the wider context of Northwest Coast Presbytery and other church councils in my denomination.

Benchmarks

Institutional Benchmark

The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology chooses to feature the Liberated Voices course in their online, non-degree offerings in the Fall of 2023. With the support of their Marketing and Design departments, my video presentation will reach the same quality they expect from other online course offerings in their catalog.

Students' Success Benchmark

I will assign students to write an 8–10 page paper¹ on a topic they plan to speak of to their community, which requires them to push into uncomfortable or disruptive territory for their audience. They will display their successful integration of liberation theology and apostolic/prophetic preaching by naming their own discomfort and teaching the content with a courageous, inviting posture.

Contextual Implementation Benchmark

Participants will be readily able to identify taboo and uncomfortable topics their communities need to engage in, and they will develop personal and communal strategies for establishing trust with their constituencies which allows them to speak up about these things. They will do this by identifying individuals in their communities with whom they can open uncomfortable dialogs to strengthen trust and understanding.

Course Registration Benchmark

10 people sign up for my initial offering of this course in Fall 2023.

Assessment Of The Project

Assessment #1: Institutional

At this point in the development process, I feel confident my course will be accepted as a contribution to The Seattle School's online offerings through The Center for Transforming Engagement. In my discussions with The Seattle School staff, they have encouraged me that they hold a "high degree of confidence" in my ability to create and guide this course. I have been a part of The Seattle School community for over a decade and know I can make a culturally connected, consistent offering to their catalog.

Assessment #2: Participants' Success

I see this assignment as an opportunity for participants to "break the ice" around their professional communication and practice in testing their courageous witness to the Gospel of Jesus in a safe and responsive environment. Success here will not simply be that a pastor preaches a bold sermon on racial justice but that a deeper sense of freedom and surety is fostered in leaders at an inner, personal level.

¹ The paper length is based on what I find to be a typical sermon length in my ministry context. I find that this length gives adequate space for developing an idea and providing examples/stories to illustrate.

Assessment #3: Contextual Implementation Benchmark

The project is designed to raise internal awareness of the work for liberation we are all called to and show participants that they cannot do this work alone. Liberation and bold voices come from people who have built networks of support and accountability. This course will be successful as it encourages leaders to establish communities of trust within their contexts.

Assessment #4: Course Registration

This benchmark feels the most out of my control. I can create compelling resources and provocative content. I am not, however, a salesperson or marketer, and I must rely on the support from The Seattle School's staff and faculty for this to be successful. They are already working on launching online courses, so I know I can trust their feedback and guidance along the rest of this journey to help this course be successful.

Evaluating the Experience

I have grown in significant ways through this process. It has encouraged me to be bold in sharing my ideas, developing trust in my intuition and perspective, and realizing that it is something I have to offer the world. I have also found it easy to get stuck in process work and lose sight of the "why" behind what we are creating. I want to do things "right," and the open-ended nature of this Project Portfolio has been daunting. In addition, I have encountered the fear of failure and ostracization from working with this kind of challenging and disruptive material. To say that the white church needs to learn to speak boldly is to implicate my colleagues and me, who rest firmly in these positions of power and privilege.

My priority is to make this project accessible to learners not pursuing an advanced degree and needing encouragement to keep speaking up in such difficult times. I have found the inner permission to do this work and want to offer that same permission to others, especially those who sometimes feel they do not have a voice that is valued and listened to. I want to encourage young leaders to be bold now, not down the road in their careers. I want to encourage seasoned preachers to question their process and ask how they address God's liberating way.

The course assignments will need further refinement. For example, I do not know if writing a paper and doing reflection activities will adequately challenge them to move deeper into their speaking work – but these are the initial vehicles I will use, and I must trust the process.

Next Steps

According to the schedule outlined in my Project Launch Plan, I plan to film the course videos at St. James Presbyterian Church in May 2023 with the support of the Design and Marketing departments at The Seattle School. I intend to gather further feedback on the course outline from The Seattle

School's staff, refine the lessons, and complete filming, hoping to launch the asynchronous course in Fall 2023.

Conclusion

Reflecting on three years' worth of discernment work in creating this project is incredible. There have been moments of great joy for me, realizing I have something to contribute to the Church and its leaders. The times I have shared my project ideas with parishioners, friends, and colleagues have been so rewarding as each has responded enthusiastically to this kind of content.

I also must admit that this Project Portfolio journey has been confounding and discouraging at many points. The freedom and open-ended structure of what the NPO could become led me to stall several times, second-guessing what I was discerning, questioning whether what I could offer was "good enough" to graduate or contribute. I would have benefited from more direct instruction on several concepts throughout the journey, including benchmarking, prototyping, and setting learning objectives. These concepts were all new to me, and I felt that I had to figure them out on my own, as if I had missed a course on benchmarking somewhere in my journey. This was quite frustrating.

This work has stretched me and shown me that I can design and launch large-scale work. It has also reinforced for me the power of group discernment. I have grown more self-reflective, seeing how much this project has been about me finding my own voice, trusting it, and then using it to speak up in the world. As much as this project is for the Church, it is also for me. I am finding my voice through this. I love speaking and preaching, and I hope this work will propel me into further study and teaching around this craft.

Doctoral Project

Online Course – “Liberated Voices”

Course Description:

Liberated Voices is an online course for preachers and speakers who want to expand their sense of what it means to speak boldly and powerfully for the work of liberation in their contexts. This course will challenge participants to evaluate their current preaching and speaking process to help them align their practice to boldly representing God’s heart for the oppressed and marginalized. Participants will be lovingly disrupted from patterns of silence to discover a more open, liberated form of speaking. The course includes eight self-paced lessons, approximately 20-25 minutes each, and is supplemented by weekly readings and assignments. In addition, participants will gather four times over an academic term to discuss the content and explore ways to implement a courageous speaking and preaching model in their contexts.

Course Outcomes:

- Through this course, participants will evaluate their ministry or speaking context to determine how to deepen trust, supporting an ability to speak boldly when necessary.
- Participants will discuss their own social privilege and power in order to understand how it impacts their ability to address difficult topics.
- Participants will be asked to apply concepts of liberation theology and prophetic and apostolic preaching to their ministry context.
- Participants will apply their learning from discussions, reflections, and an 8-10 page paper to demonstrate their learning about speaking boldly.
- By the end of this course, participants will be able to redesign and modify their existing preaching or speaking preparation to attend to the needs of the oppressed and marginalized.

Readings:

Introducing Liberation Theology, chapters 1-4. pgs. 1-65. Leonardo Boff & Clodovis Boff

Preaching to Those Walking Away, ch. 2: “Are We Transforming or Merely Conforming?”, pgs 45-76. N. Graham Standish.

Shame-less Lives, Grace-Full Congregations, ch. 2 “Yours, Mine, and Ours: Overlapping Dynamics of Shame.” Karen A. McClintock, pgs. 31-46.

Subversive Witness: Scripture’s Call to Leverage Power, ch. 1: “Understanding Privilege and Its Power.” Dominique DuBois Gilliard, pgs. 1-19.

The Cross and the Lynching Tree, ch. 4: "Bearing the Cross and Staring Down the Lynching Tree: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Struggle to Redeem the Soul of America"

Assignments:

Readings, Activities, and Reflections

Lesson 1:

- Listen to "The Daily" podcast and read Luke 4:16-30. How does this modern example of troublesome preaching and Jesus' sermon in the synagogue confront you? What stirs you as you consider these examples, and how might you be called to speak up in your context?
- Podcast: The Daily - "The Pastors Being Driven Out By Trumpism"
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/23/podcasts/the-daily/evangelicals-trumpism.html>
- Jesus and the Isaiah scroll: Luke 4:16-30 – <https://biblia.com/bible/nrsv/luke/4/16-30>

Lesson 2:

- Reading - *Shame-less Lives, Grace-Full Congregations*, ch. 2 "Yours, Mine, and Ours: Overlapping Dynamics of Shame." Karen A. McClintock, pgs. 31-46
- Activity: One conversation - Think of one person you want to talk to within your community with whom you might not see eye-to-eye—someone who might not like what you have to say. Sit down with them, not to convince them, but to ask questions and listen. Listening to those who are different than us or hold different views can help us understand and develop empathy.

Lesson 3

- Activity – Make an exhaustive list (as many as possible) of taboo or untouchable topics for your ministry context. These could be talking about racism, gender equality, money, food, etc. What does your community *need to hear*?
- Journal reflection: 1000 words
 - What do the scriptures say about these topics?
 - Why are they off-limits?
 - Where does your understanding of freedom intersect with them?
- Reading: *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, ch. 4: "Bearing the Cross and Staring Down the Lynching Tree: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Struggle to Redeem the Soul of America."

Lesson 4

- Reading: *Preaching to Those Walking Away*, ch. 2: "Are We Transforming or Merely Conforming?"
- Activity: Considering the apostolic, prophetic, and priestly speaking traditions, frame three separate statements about this challenge that call your community to action and

engagement based on the three frameworks.

Lesson 5

- Reading: *Subversive Witness*, ch. 1: "Understanding Privilege and Its Power"

Lesson 6

- Reading: *Introducing Liberation Theology*, chapters 1-3
- Assignment: Loving Disruption Application Paper (see guidelines below)
- Due before the final Zoom session following Lesson 8.

Lesson 7

- No assignments or readings, working on Loving Disruption paper.

Lesson 8

- No assignments or readings. Loving Disruption paper due before final Zoom session.

Loving Disruption Application Paper

Students will complete an 8-10 page paper focusing on discomfort or taboo for their community. They will write from the perspective of attempting to teach this topic with courage and faithfulness to the biblical text while keeping in mind concepts of liberation theology (God is on the side of the oppressed) and apostolic/prophetic preaching (God's people must bear witness to God's justice boldly). **Due Week 8, before the Final Zoom conversation.**

Assignment Guidelines

- Choose one you will address in this paper based on the taboo/difficult topics you identified in your ministry context. What does your community *need to hear* that draws them into God's liberating story? How might you lovingly disrupt people in your context to see the grander liberation story of the scriptures? (*Example: money can be a very touchy subject in churches...how does the scripture instruct us to steward money in order to care for the poor, the widow, and the outcast?*)
- This paper is modeled after a preaching manuscript. Therefore, considering your topic, consider 1-2 scriptures you will study (exegesis, commentary work, etc., based on your process and context). Examine these scriptures for how they speak to this topic. What is the good, liberating news to be found in these texts?
- The final section of the paper should include thoughtful reflection on your ministry context, the people you work alongside, and their growth. How can you *land the plane* with this paper to support your community's integration of these ideas? In what practical ways can they begin to apply the concepts of liberation you teach?

Lesson 1 – Introduction

Lesson 1 – Purpose

An invitation to be disrupted and rethink our preaching and speaking postures. We hope to encourage one another towards boldness where there has been reluctance and silence.

Lesson 1 – Learning Objective:

This lesson will frame the “problem” of silence and complicity in churches, focusing on how it plays out in white-dominant contexts. The problem is this – faith leaders, specifically white faith leaders, have ceded their voices of authority and truth regarding social justice issues. Various other “authoritative” voices have risen in this vacuum to speak of bigotry and division. This course’s task is to guide leaders back to their explicit role of telling the truth about God’s justice for the oppressed.

Lesson 2 – Building Trust, Setting Expectations

Lesson 2 – Purpose:

Learning to trust and use your voice requires the system you participate in to be prepared and accepting of disruption. This can only come through trust-building work, setting clear expectations, and establishing the understanding that the message is meant to draw closer, not alienate or harm.

Lesson 2 – Learning Objective:

Participants will be able to identify communities of trust and influence they currently operate in and be able to consider where they have opportunities to cultivate and grow trust. They will also be able to identify places where they do not trust their voice and begin to unpack why and how to adjust.

ZOOM Gathering 1

- Introductions: What is your context? Who are the people you work with? Why draws you to this course?
- Discussion of “One conversation” activity: How did that go? What did you learn?

Lesson 3 – You Can’t Say That!

Lesson 3 – Purpose

Here, we will learn how to lean into speaking a challenging or disruptive word, even when it may push against norms and serve as a call to action. As we have learned to establish trust, we must also learn to drive that trust to grow and be set free.

Lesson 3 – Learning Objective

Participants will begin to reframe what is “appropriate” to be spoken of in their contexts. They will be able to identify taboo topics in their communities and will be able to approach such issues with precision, tact, and biblical and cultural support.

Lesson 4 – Prophets, Apostles, Priests

Lesson 4 – Purpose

The way we speak up may need to look different depending on our contexts and gifts. Prophetic speaking calls out injustice directly and proposes a redefined world in its place. Apostolic preaching invites inner transformation and a reordering of our disciplines to form us more rightly unto Jesus’ way. Priestly preaching draws the hurting and marginalized into safety and worship; it soothes and invites. And all three require risk to draw closer to each other and face our problems.

Lesson 4 – Learning Objective

Participants will be able to identify the differences between apostolic, prophetic, and priestly speaking. They will be able to determine how they fit into these categories based on their particular role. They demonstrate this understanding by picking a specific challenge or issue and articulating the three ways of handling/speaking about it in their context.

ZOOM Gathering 2

- Sharing: What are difficult/uncomfortable topics that you have identified for your community?
- Discussion: Review *Preaching to Those Walking Away* reading and discuss its implications for our contexts

Lesson 5 – What is Your Voice?

Lesson 5 – Purpose

We must understand our unique voice and its power to witness the world through our speaking up. Here we will process our stories and look at places where we were encouraged to find our voice and other times when we were shut down. How do our stories of exploring our voice impact our willingness to speak disruptive, faithful words in your community?

Lesson 5 – Learning Objective

Participants will begin to identify ways their particular life story has shaped the use of their voice. They will write a brief account of their calling and articulate how they have used their voices to share “good news” and how they have been taught to stifle their voices.

Lesson 6 – Preaching that Gets into Trouble

Lesson 6 – Purpose

We all have an idea or inspiration from the Spirit of God that if we choose to speak up about it, we might also have to run away and live in the wilderness.

Lesson 6 – Learning Objective

Participants will work with the taboo topic they identified in Lesson 3 and write a longer exposition based on one of the speaking categories from Lesson 4 (prophetic, apostolic, or priestly). They will identify a provocative, faithful stance on the topic that invites greater freedom for oppressed or silenced people by confronting it directly. They will also identify best and worst-case scenarios for what might happen should they speak on this issue.

Lesson 6 – Assignment: 8-10 Page Response Paper (see guidelines above)

ZOOM Gathering 3

- Sharing: What are difficult/uncomfortable topics have you identified for your community?
- Discussion: Review *Preaching to Those Walking Away* reading and discuss its implications for our contexts

Lesson 7 – Preaching that Liberates

Lesson 7 – Purpose

Ultimately, we've been describing a kind of "speaking up" that sets people free and tells the powers that be the truth. We're talking about liberation preaching within liberation theology. God shows that God always comes alongside to restore the oppressed. What are we doing if our preaching is not at least focused on and attempting to set people free? Here, we embrace the call to step up and speak courageously.

Lesson 7 – Learning Objective

Participants will examine historical and modern examples of liberation theology.

Lesson 8 – You Have Permission

Lesson 8 – Purpose

In our final session, we will review the course and remind participants of their call to speak truth to the powers of the world. We will look at elements of "permission-giving": calling, ordination, context, and gifts. We will also explore modern examples of "reading the Bible and the newspaper," as described by German theologian Karl Barth.

Lesson 8 – Learning Objective

Participants will take ownership of their voices and their God-given ability to bear witness to God's liberating love in all spaces and contexts. They will demonstrate this by reflecting upon their lived experience (in Zoom Session 4) and opportunities they now see to speak more boldly in support of justice in the world.

Lesson 8 – Assignment

- 8-10 Page Response paper due.

ZOOM Gathering 4 – Closing

- Closing ritual: A blessing and affirmation of participants. Recognition of their particular context and a blessing upon stewarding that specific work faithfully.
- Discussion: How are you going to keep finding permission to speak up? How will you encourage others to do the same?

Overview & Guidelines

Welcome!

We are so grateful you have chosen to engage with this course and consider the role of your voice in speaking liberation in your context. We come at this material from various settings and points in our ministry and professional careers. Particular contexts require us to remain more silent, while others offer greater opportunities to engage our voices in powerful ways. Wherever you come from, we are glad you are taking this bold step forward to consider your voice and its role in advocating for the real issues of justice in our world.

How long will it take to complete the course?

This course consists of 8 lessons that we recommend you complete at a pace of about 1 per week. Depending on your schedule and how you seek to apply this content, you may want to go at a slightly different rate. Plan for approximately 30 minutes of taught content per lesson. Some lessons include readings or additional content requiring more time than others.

What if I'm taking the course with others?

The materials of this course may lend themselves to working with a group of colleagues or a leadership team. You may have a community of pastoral leaders who preach weekly who you would like to engage with and discuss this material. We recommend you make space for at least 1 hour of gathering to review the material and have time for discussion.

What should I consider in caring for myself throughout the course?

Make ample space for yourself to process your particular context and emotions as you work through this content. Offering kindness to yourself, your community, and your system is helpful. This coursework will be challenging and potentially uproot some of the particular ways you have been taught to use your voice. Consider these ideas as you set out:

We encourage you to make appropriate space in your week to review this content. Set an appointment with yourself (or with others you view the content with) to keep a predictable rhythm for integrating this content between lessons.

Keep a journal or notebook throughout this course. Use this to process stories that come to mind, instances where you have wrestled with the role of your voice, and opportunities you may have in the future to shift your posture as a speaker/leader.

Find the right pace. You may want to implement an idea or practice from the material in your daily context. Give yourself space to integrate what you have learned instead of immediately rushing to engage in the next challenge or meeting. Learning to use our voices and speak for liberation involves discernment, timing, and tact. Pay attention to your desire to speak up and look for opportunities where you already have the influence and trust to begin.

If you find that a concept, reading, or discussion raises emotions, note them. Write them down and seek to be curious about their source and application in your work. For example, we will discuss stories of people who raised their voices in the face of cultural or social constraints. Can you think of a time when you felt this same kind of challenge? How did you work with it? Who supported you or who silenced you? Consider how those challenges have shaped your speaking/leadership/presence.

Lesson 1 – Introduction -- Script

Hi. I want to talk about talking. Speak about speaking.

This course is designed to help you find the courage to speak more boldly about the liberating truth of God in your context. Some of us are preachers and pastors whose weekly rhythm is often punctuated by delivering some message to a group of people about the truths we find in the ancient wisdom of Christianity. Others of us are therapists, helpers, chaplains, and those who come alongside the hurting and offer a soothing word of hope even amidst the trauma and chaos of our lives. Or you are a leader in a non-profit setting, where you are charged with rallying support and mobilizing people to commit to a common goal or initiative. Whatever your station in life, we know it can be challenging to speak a bold word of truth in our contexts.

Through this content and coursework, you can gain a sense of purpose around why your voice matters and why the world needs it. Because, I'm guessing, you got into whatever line of work you do because you want to make a difference in people's lives. You want to teach, inform, inspire, and create spaces where people can flourish and grow. You want to point to the goodness of God in your place and help others see it, too. But often, one of our most potent gifts, our voice, is stifled and obstructed by many different structures and resistances that keep us quiet.

For the last 16 years, I have had the privilege of serving in local church ministry. I've supported college students in their coming of age and self-discovery during university education. I've walked alongside those experiencing illness and dying in hospital and hospice beds. I've stood in the pulpit to address congregations whose politics swing all across the spectrum, people who gather, despite

their differences, to find a word of hope from the Creator God. And one thread that has continued to emerge for me is the power of the voice. Our voices carry great weight, and they matter to the world.

I also am a vocalist with just enough classical music training to be dangerous. In undergrad, I studied vocal techniques that helped me sing with greater strength and nuance, expanding my vocal register and learning to allow my body to resonate with the power of sound. Here I discovered the immensity of the voice and what can stifle or hold it back. And like a singer who powerfully delivers a beautiful solo or participates in an ensemble like a choir, our voices can get stronger, and we can learn to trust them more deeply.

That is what this course will offer you.

A bit more about why this is so important, especially now.

We all know that in this current cultural moment when information technology continues to expand and offer tools that amplify so many voices, there is a desperate need for representatives of bold truth.

I began reflecting on this journey during the Summer of 2020. Following the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, we were all reeling from a new reality of distance and yet attempting to discover new ways to speak and relate with one another. This season also saw a dynamic shift in the conversation around racial justice in our country as we collectively witnessed the brutal murder of George Floyd, and the cries for justice sprang up louder than they had in many years.

I witnessed, in those weeks and months, a strange phenomenon. Because of the ubiquity of social media and its ability to amplify particular voices, we heard many of the cries for justice from Black, Indigenous, and people of color in new ways, becoming exposed to a whole movement for restitution and reparation. Especially for white folks like myself, who have the ease of often ignoring or at least disregarding much of this conversation, it was an eye-opening time in so many good ways.

But one of the things I began to notice and grow increasingly uncomfortable within that season was who I saw being silent. As BIPOC people and their white allies began to raise the call for justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the countless others impacted by police brutality, I started noticing a strikingly silent group: White faith leaders.

Indeed, exceptional leaders stepped up as allies to walk and talk and stand alongside the plight facing our nation. But on the whole, you could hear the crickets chirping in the sanctuaries of the white church.

Why was this? There are deep, structural, and racial reasons for why. First among them the institutionalized racism of our nation that has been embedded since its inception. But I wondered: what if white faith leaders aren't speaking up because they don't know how to? There are many excellent examples of bold, liberated witnesses occurring in the Black church, as well as in other historic and present contexts that already take into account the power of liberation theology in their teaching. Perhaps they have never been encouraged to speak a difficult word from the pulpit or faced backlash when moving in that direction. I wondered: Who needs to permit us to speak? Our seminaries, church members, a mentor, a new book on preaching?

What emerged from that reflection is twofold.

First, many do not speak up about the problems of injustice in our world because of the fear of rejection it creates in us. It stems from a fear of saying the wrong thing and potentially alienating congregational members, co-workers, or denominational leadership. While this fear is real, it is also costly to those whose needs are never addressed publicly.

Second, silence is often dictated by a lack of understanding of the issues we see in the world. This leads to an internalized sense of imposter syndrome. We don't want to say something provocative or courageous (or Scripturally supported, for that matter) because we do not want to be told we're wrong. Preachers, especially, thrive on being in a community space where they are seen as an expert on spiritual matters. And to maintain that facade of expertise, we tend to stay close to the center of the fairway and not veer off into the rough. In many ways, we do this because we doubt our ability to speak with authority about an issue of justice, especially something that we are likely complicit in perpetuating, like institutional racism or gender inequality.

The problem is that these issues with speaking up highlight a disorder in faithfully proclaiming the liberating love of God. Do we believe that our internal understandings and academic knowledge make us authorities on truth? Do we hide behind our credentials and seek the still waters of keeping it safe? And what is the perceived threat worth against what God has to speak to us?

Let's back up and address the reality of amplified voices in our current age. Social media platforms and information technology at our fingertips make it incredibly easy for anyone to develop a following and speak loudly about their passions. We see this work in incredible ways as we listen to podcasts, read tweets, or scroll Instagram posts from thought leaders who inspire and encourage us. We also see these platforms for their insidious nature, how they can quickly devolve into harmful spaces where hatred and power-seeking ring out loudly. Anyone can have a microphone; with it, we question who is justified in speaking.

Think, for a moment, about what voices you encounter throughout your days and which impact you. Who is your favorite inspirational person you follow on social media? Which newspaper columnist do you read to get the hot take or in-depth analysis of our world? Whose podcast will you devour every episode of?

Who we pay attention to is who we allow to form us, to shape our hearts and minds.

And the same can be said for you. Who listens to you? Where do you have influence or the opportunity to speak up and impact the world for the better?

Through this course, you will see how important your voice is and how the world needs it. We are each given ways to express our bodies and give glory to the Creator in how we do it. Our lives can be witnesses to goodness and grace. Or they can be silent, held back, and repressed. I want to help us each move closer to goodness and grace and leave behind our silence.

Another reality of this issue is how privilege and social standing impact our willingness to take risks with a bold, faithful witness. In many ways, this is a conversation for white people, for people in power. This is an incredibly urgent, regular part of daily life for those on the margins, those facing the intensity of conflict around what their bodies represent and what role they are supposed to play in society. There are no opportunities to sit on the sidelines as a silent observer. The world of racial injustice demands that BIPOC people justify themselves according to the standards of white supremacy.

I want to point the finger back at the white church, specifically white faith leaders, and implore them to stand boldly alongside our black and brown siblings. You see, that's one of the most challenging pieces I have been reflecting on: white faith leaders can claim to be about the freedom we all find in Christ, but when it comes to doing the work of actually setting each other free and advocating for that kind of a just world, we are quick to shy away.

Thankfully, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures have plenty of examples of what it looks like to find a bold, liberated voice. Throughout our sessions, we will look at several of these individuals and their stories to gather an imagination for how God calls us to use our voices. From the reluctant Moses to the prophetic Ezekiel to the powerful witness of martyrdom we find in the Apostle Stephen, many stories show us how God uses people with power, privilege, and proximity, all to speak the truth and liberate the world.

Today, I want to start with the story of Jesus in the synagogue, reading from the scroll of Isaiah. This story exemplifies the tension of what it costs to speak up and reinforces the power of what God can do when we choose to.

Luke 4 tells of Jesus entering the town of Nazareth following his temptation in the wilderness. This is his first moment of teaching that Luke recounts, Jesus' first sermon to the faithful religious folks of his day.

The text says:

"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus assumes the role of prophet and interpreter as he handles the powerful words of Jubilee from the prophet Isaiah. Not only does he attend to the possibility of this happening someday, as the people would have hoped for it, but he remarks that this abundant outpouring of justice is being fulfilled in their midst, in the here and now.

As preachers, we prepare our sermons weekly and try to find a nugget of truth to share with a community of people. Often, it can be very tempting to stick with a well-worn thread of truth and deliver it to our community to encourage but certainly not upend or disrupt them in any way. We hope that honey might drip from our words and soothe the pains of our congregation's souls.

And Jesus could certainly have done this, even with this liberating text. He could have continued the line of teaching where we await God's jubilee, God's justice rolling down for the oppressed and the hurting. It WILL happen, someday, and we long for this...he could have said. And that would be acceptable – the hope, the truth, the longing of our hearts.

But in Jesus, we witness the immediacy of the needs of the oppressed and the hurting. Tomorrow may never come for the poor widow with nothing to feed her children. Tomorrow may lead to even more hardship for those in captivity or wandering the world blindly. We cannot wait for tomorrow.

Instead, Jesus invites his listeners into the provocative possibility that the liberation Isaiah speaks of is possible right now, and it is happening!

When do we want the world to heal from the divisions of racism? When do we hope that God will intervene? Whose hands and feet are meant to do that work?

If not us, if not now, then perhaps never.

We may find ourselves wracked with guilt or feeling implicated for our silence and complicity in the wicked problems of our world. And those are real feelings. But that's not the point of what Jesus is doing here, nor is it the direction of this course. Instead, we want to move through such feelings to

recognize that we have a much more critical part to play and our voices have a much more significant role than we have let them hold.

Before you give up because of the immensity of dismantling structural inequalities in the United States, I want to dial it back to give us hope and perspective.

Who in your daily life is hurting? Who needs a word of encouragement and power to lift them? You have a voice in a body that bears the image of God. You can speak into that person's life and offer them this liberating truth of God's goodness.

What spaces in our life need to be disrupted? What do you see that needs to change to bring about a more equitable and just future? Your voice can cut into those spaces and tell of a new, better way.

We need a new imagination for what our voices are for.

I'll close with this today. Remember, we live in a time of great amplification, where anyone can find a microphone and use it to their ends, for good or for ill. And, as people who follow Jesus, we also believe that Christ's presence marks our voices; God's beloved son lives in them. They are not our own. They belong to God.

But when we refuse to speak or shy away from addressing the injustices of our world, we create space. We open up space quickly filled by a cacophony of voices – voices who WILL take advantage of the opportunity to speak and tell the world what they think. So the question is this: are we willing to cede the space for the liberating witness of Jesus Christ to lesser, more destructive narratives? Because when we remain silent, this is what we are doing. We are giving up our voices. Lord, have mercy. This is a painful reality.

I want to inspire you to take back that space and speak up. We need your faithful, liberated voice.

In the following sessions, we will discuss how to begin doing this.

We're going to talk about trust: how we build it with people in our community and spheres of influence, and how that trust can help us speak more boldly about the truths and injustices we see while maintaining and growing together in Christ.

We'll talk about some of the taboos of speaking up. The church has been a space that often highlights particular perspectives while stifling and repressing others. We'll look at what it means to risk and even die to our views of what is safe or comfortable to unearth a richer, deeper, more authentic perspective on bearing witness to God's work.

There are many ways to approach how we speak: we can be prophets, disciples, pastors, and comforters. We will look at how these roles interact with the liberating word of Jesus and find ways to establish our voices in the particular ways God has called us to use them.

We can only do this work if we acknowledge and spend time with our voices. How have you been stifled or shut down in the past? What have you said that brought discomfort or pain, even when it was telling the truth? We will discuss our doubts and discern how our stories shape our speaking.

In the second half of the course, we will look at some models for speaking up that get us into good trouble, trouble that will cost us but will also lead to liberation.

I hope you are encouraged and provoked to attend to your voice and its power through this course so that you remember how you are beloved and called by God to speak up. And how we must stand with those who hurt, as God stands first and foremost beside the oppressed. And in it, we each find our freedom as it is established in Christ.

And so, in whatever context you find yourself in, as a faith leader, spiritual director, or higher education employee, the call of this course is to encourage you to find your voice and use it for the good of the oppressed.

Activity: Listen to “The Daily” podcast and read Luke 4:16-30. Response paper: How does this modern example of troublesome preaching and Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue confront you? What stirs you as you consider these examples and how you might be called to speak up in your context?

Lesson 2 – Building Trust, Setting Expectations -- Script

What is speaking for? Why do we say things in front of a group and why do we listen? Why not just deliver it in a memo or a book? And what is so compelling about hearing a word spoken, whether in an auditorium, a sanctuary, or across a board meeting table? Why do we speak up?

Even before we can articulate why we speak or share a word in these and other settings, we know deep inside that words move us. When someone enters that vulnerable space of standing up before us and sharing their ideas, their heart, and what they have learned and feel conviction about, we are moved. Moved to action, maybe. Moved to anger, sometimes. Moved to explore a new reality or a fresh idea because using our voices is powerful.

We hear examples of the Divine Voice’s power to speak new things into being throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Especially in the wisdom and prophetic literature, we hear of the power of God’s voice. In the Psalms, we hear that the voice of the Lord breaks the trunks of mighty cedar trees. It is

like the wind that thunders and moves matter around this chaotic, beautiful existence. The voice of the Lord thunders like a mighty river, rushing into our lives to speak of justice and righteousness.

Breath propels the voice of God, the *ruah*, God's spirit. And breath abides in the lungs of God's people, of all creation, inhaling and exhaling as acts of worship and reliance upon God's mighty power.

From the ancient Hebrew perspective, it is understood that this breath signifies life in a newborn baby and death as we exhale our last. Breath is a fundamental element of our existence, the ground of our being where we begin to wither and choke without it. Our breath marks our life.

And it is with our breath that our voice speaks. We can type or write out words, play melodies, and sing along. We can have internal monologues (or dialogs) that help us to process ideas and make sense of the world. But spoken words and raised voices are our places of co-creation with God, speaking out our spirits into the world.

So why do we speak?

We speak to communicate, share ideas and gather support. We talk to inspire, teach and encourage. And we can also use our voice to spark a fire of division and pain. In the writings of the New Testament, we hear that the tongue, part of the apparatus that allows us to articulate and speak our words, can be like a match that lights a whole forest on fire, consuming and destroying all that lies in its path.

So, we must be cautious about what we speak.

And this is where many of us get stuck. We err on caution, diminishing our voices to ensure they align or agree with the normative attitudes and ideas around us. We lower our voices because we don't want to stick out, don't want to cause a fuss, or perhaps don't feel qualified to say anything.

Today, our lesson will focus on building trust and setting expectations. A significant part of this is participating in a community of people who have developed interpersonal trust. This trust allows us to bend and bear difficult things together without breaking relationships or feeling at odds with one another. But along with building community trust and expectation, we must learn to trust ourselves. We must do the work and tend to what goes on inside us as we speak up and learn to work with the wisdom we each hold inside.

Caedmon Story

There is an old Celtic story about a boy named Caedmon. Caedmon was no one remarkable, a simple boy without formal education and generally low standing amongst his people because of his age and position in life.

One day, the elders gathered to discuss important matters for their community. Those with years of wisdom were always given priority to speak, share their ideas, and be listened to for guidance. Young boys were meant to sit aside and pay attention, an understanding that they would learn from the words of their elders, but they did not yet have something to contribute. Caedmon was meant to be one of these onlookers, and because of this place in the community, he felt like an outsider.

The story tells of Caedmon returning home from one such meeting and falling into a deep sleep, renewing him over the night. In this sleep, Caedmon had a vivid dream filled with visions and poetic language that, upon waking, he began to recount and feel the burning in his bones that he must share.

That night, he returned to the council of elders, again taking his place as a listener and observer. But when the opportunity presented itself, Caedmon stood before the crowd and raised his voice. The elders and community gathered around him and were struck by the beauty and imagery of the poem he recited to them, the story of his dream. This piece of literature, known as Caedmon's Song, is one of the earliest Celtic writing we still have and serves as a remarkable insight into the minds of these ancient people. That the words of beauty sprung up from a young man's dream and raised voice is all the more remarkable.

How did Caedmon's community reckon with this minority voice speaking such truth? It was outside the bounds of their imaginations. But they had to embrace it because of the truth and beauty it spoke. Caedmon's call was heard and remembered.

Have you found yourself in a community where your voice was not considered a priority to listen to? Have you been in situations where there is a clear social order to who gets to say things and who needs to be quiet? Of course, you have – academics, public forums, and even households have spoken and unspoken rules about who is allowed to say things and who must listen.

I come from a tradition of faith that prizes the spoken, articulate word. We are a tradition of orators, teachers who precisely deliver the word from the Scriptures with insight and exposition, all attending to the particularities of how oral communication can impact the listener. But we are also a tradition that guards the right to speak very cautiously. There are gatekeepers all along the road to becoming a preacher or a speaker because we want to ensure their words are spoken with wisdom and precision.

I've had a lot of wrestling with this tradition as I've come up as a pastor. Earlier in my ministry career, there were times that I was told not to speak, not to get involved, or to take up space with my voice because that was not my place. I can only imagine this experience and how amplified it must be for women and people of color who do not have the automatic position I do as a white, cis-gendered male.

Preparing a system for disruption

If we are going to be a people who liberate with the power of our voices, then we also need to train our systems to understand how this communication vehicle will likely disrupt them and cause them to change.

I had a mentor in my early years of ministry who liked to say our goal in teaching was, in part, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted. When we gather to be taught under the authority and witness of Jesus Christ, we expect that there will be at least some degree of soothing and healing that will take place. Christ is the healer who binds up our wounds and draws us close, saying, “come to me, all you who are weary, and you will find rest for your souls.” But at the same time, in Matthew 10, Jesus says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” While we might long for Jesus’ message to be only about peace and harmony, it is evident throughout his ministry that he brings a fight with him, a disruptive, disorienting angle to his teaching that intends to unseat the powerful and mighty and cause us all to evaluate our lives.

To comfort the afflicted: On the side of healing, we see how a well-spoken word can bring a balm of ease to a weary, hurting soul. “Comfort, comfort my people” is our prayer. How many walking through the doors of our faith communities or into a therapy session are just longing for a word of empathy and support? We hunger for such things. And the church and other spaces of leadership are places where we have opportunities to bring great comfort.

But the other side of this is a deep reliance upon the power of the spoken word to call us into change. When I am afflicted, burdened, or distressed, I want to find a way to resolve this pain. It’s uncomfortable, and we don’t like to hold discomfort. But discomfort can call us forward to change. To put a finer point on it – discomfort is the fuel for growth and renewal in our lives and communities. Culturally, we are prone to look away from what disturbs us or is taboo. But we want to learn how to establish a sense of trust with folks that allows us to bear the burdens of disruption together in the hope that these things will change us.

There are two Scriptural examples I want to lean on here to reinforce this. First, I want to look more at how Jesus used disruption to open the eyes of his hearers and usher in a new way of thinking. And second, I want to look at how St. Peter overcame his reluctance to speak boldly of Jesus, moving beyond the fears of disruption to speaking courageously as the church’s new leader.

Jesus’ first sermon in the synagogue, found in Luke 4, grounds this discussion. Jesus, in his first public appearance in Galilee following the inauguration of his ministry, gets up to speak in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Being a courageous, liberated voice, he unrolls the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and begins to read from Isaiah 61. He has a message to bring with this very familiar text: The prophetic word regarding the year of the Lord’s favor, the jubilee. Now, before we move to his brief exposition of the text, which lights the fire of boldness under his hearers, let’s say a bit about Jesus’ chosen text and its ancient meaning.

The year of the Lord's favor, the Jubilee, is outlined in this passage but is simply hinting back to the ancient Levitical law that every 50th year (the 7th of 7 years), God's people were to engage in a radical redistribution of wealth and property to set the scales between the rich and the poor back into balance. Jubilee was celebrated by returning land to its rightful, original owners; forgiving outstanding debts; by releasing captives from their indebted bondage. In theory, it was meant to keep society ordered so that no one overcame others because of accumulating too much wealth – all had their fill, and all were to have enough.

The concept is lovely, in theory. But in practice, it never actually happened. The idea of jubilee is littered throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, but it is unclear if it (ever) took place. It was ideal for the Hebrew people, but it wasn't very easy to roll out. The rich do not want to relinquish their accumulated property. And the poor don't have programs to help them access goods when this time rolls around – how can this occur without some social collapse?

So...Jesus speaking boldly in the synagogue from this text is important: He's naming an aspiration for his people. And then he amps it up: He finishes the reading and teaches, "this text has now been fulfilled in your midst." He's like – hey, this aspiration, this communal hope you've got for our world – it's happening here, now, in my ministry.

We would expect people to rejoice at this great news. But we know that's not the case. Jesus gets the Caedmon treatment – "who is this guy, and what gives him the authority to say what he's saying?"

I'm reminded of the story from the musical *Hamilton*, where the hardly-known lawyer, Alexander Hamilton, gets up and talks for hours at the United States Constitutional Convention. The lyrics go, *"He talks for six hours; the convention is listless. A bright young man, but yo, who the 'F' is this?"* What gives him the authority to speak into a vision of a new nation and form of government?

In Jesus' case, "what gives him, this kid, the son of Joseph, the carpenter, the right to interpret the scriptures and call out the forces working for justice around him?" Isn't that someone else's job, someone with more position and authority? The powers that be do not appreciate a voice that calls them to open their eyes.

We see something opposite in St. Peter, at least in how he begins as a disciple of Jesus. In Matthew 16, where Jesus describes how he must go to Jerusalem to die, Peter wants to find alternatives that do not harm his rabbi and friend. He feels that it doesn't have to go this way, a bold statement in and of itself when you're talking to your mentor and teacher, all the more amplified by what the implications of Jesus' ministry are. And Jesus responds sharply, as he must: "Get behind me, evil one!" I'm sure Jesus understood Peter's desire to protect his leader. But Jesus cannot abide cowardice or fear in his mission – he has his face set like flint, looking ahead to what must happen. And in Peter, we see the effects of choosing not to be bold and not keep courage even when it might lead to affliction.

Peter gets a bad rap, and we must find something of redemption in his story as we consider liberating voices. Thankfully, we see this in the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter becomes a leading voice in the new movement called The Way. He teaches in the synagogues, sharing Jesus' teachings, and seeking to remake faithful life in Jerusalem and beyond in this new way Jesus has set before them. Peter gets up to speak early in the apostolic ministry of Jesus' followers and articulates a complete history of how we are led to the great disruption and world-remaking in Jesus. It is Peter, now, who looks back at the story of the people of God (like Jesus in Isaiah) and sees the trajectory of God's liberating power at work, calling people into a new way of living together.

In the examples of Jesus and Peter, we see a move towards boldness and courage in speaking up. We see instances where the comfortable are disrupted and asked to reorient their lives and how they think about the world. We'll see, as we go through this course, that they are part of a great tradition in the ancient Scriptures of people who heed the call of God to use their voices to set communities and systems free, to liberate individuals and whole people groups through the power of the voice which speaks for justice.

Returning to our present context, we see that the witness from the Scriptures calls us to find our voices for courageous speaking. I find myself with the gift of being a weekly preacher these days. The space where I am called to speak up is in a pulpit.

How do we learn to speak boldly from the places we are called to stand when so much tells us to be quiet, not to cause a stir?

Using my context as the example, I wonder how many sermons or witnesses in church environments we have heard have not ventured into a bolder territory but have instead attempted to convince and align with the crowd to make them feel good. How often have you listened to a sermon that left you feeling warm and fuzzy about your life? We appreciate these talks, for sure, because they reinforce what we believe and help us feel ok about our lives, especially when our lives are complicated, messy, and painful. There is undoubtedly appropriate space for a comforting word, especially when we are afflicted.

But the problem comes when our world is rattled with violence, war, corruption, and all kinds of chaos, and we never hear a word of rebuke, disruption, or liberation spoken against such things.

Barbara Brown Taylor speaks about some faith communities as peddlers of "full solar spirituality." The lights are on full power all the time. I like to think of it as "everything is awesome" faith. But, just like in the Lego movie, we realize that "everything's not awesome," and we need spaces where we hear and tell the truth about that reality.

An essential outcome of this lesson is this: we must set expectations with how we present ourselves and what kinds of things we say. We set expectations for what will be experienced when we lift our

voices. We help people become more ready to hear a disruptive word – not for shock value, but because we train into our communities the good news that it is through such disruptions that we grow and heal.

I know how easy it can be to choose to speak a word of comfort instead of a word of power. You want people to like you. You want to please the folks who give your institution time, talent, and financial resources. You don't want to alienate a visitor or say the wrong thing in front of a touchy participant. And so, we let go of courage and seek something more "mainline."

But when that is all our witness is, comfort and ease, how do we wrestle with the wicked problems that are going on around us?

Caedmon realized that he had to speak his poem to his people, regardless of whether it disrupted the proper order of their society.

Likewise, in Jesus, we see that he needed to speak the prophecy of Isaiah to awaken the hearts and minds of his listeners so they could see what was going on! And Peter, setting the story of Jesus in the context of the ancient traditions of the Hebrew people, was disrupting and opening eyes to a new way of being.

When we witness brutal murders of unarmed people of color or intense rising tides of climate change that disproportionately harm the poor – what will we say and do? In my context, it is not always acceptable or expected for the church to speak up about racism or climate justice. Regarding racial justice, we know that the white church has long used racism to divide and reinforce the power of white supremacy. There is a degree of white superiority that will get disrupted if we acknowledge the problems of racism in our country. Similarly, we want to believe God has called us to steward creation. But when we are called to look directly at the disasters around us, we get uncomfortable because it implicates those who contribute significantly to carbon emissions daily. When we cry for justice for the earth, we get irritated because it might mean we need to find another way to commute and consume less, making us sweat a little under the collar. We reply, "Thanks, but I'd rather just hear a comforting word."

The problem is, when we do not speak and do not draw the connections between the liberating power of the Scriptures, we let go of the opportunity to teach and set others free with it. When we witness the truths of racism in our country but never hear the church bear witness, we begin to believe that the witness of Christianity has nothing to say about (or disagrees with) the cause of fighting for racial justice.

Exercises and Discussion

We want to build trust and expectations in our communities, new norms where we lean into the pain and disruption of telling the truth because we acknowledge that this sets us free.

Think about some of the stakeholders in your community or context: these might be board members or core parishioners. They might be your staff team or a small group you participate in.

What do these people expect you to bring when you speak and lead? How are you known? Are you a motivator, a teacher, or a provocateur? How do people experience you?

Strategies for building community trust so we can say hard things:

- Develop a peer group that gives feedback about what you say. Did it resonate? Did it feel like you were true to the emotions you felt? Did it align or feel eschewed from the broader cultural conversation? Ask for feedback about how your words “land” with others. Plan ahead: Let people know where you think you’re going in the discussion (tell them what you’ll say to them). Or give an overview of what the course of teaching will follow.
- Set expectations: “we’re going to talk about the climate and our call to steward it well. This is difficult in a world where our environment struggles to be healthy. And it will demand us to look long and hard at some things. We’ll do this together.”
- Talk about your process: Share how you understand a complex topic. Example: I often get asked how I’ve come to my stance of being fully affirming and allied with the LGBTQIA+ community. I’m a straight, cis-gendered man. So how do I get there, theologically, socially, and practically? We also permit others to think differently when we tell our learning stories and how we have changed.

Lesson 3 – You Can’t Say That! - Script

Our traditions may have issues or theological constraints that make it more difficult to advocate for social justice issues. The challenge we face here is this: Jesus consistently advocates for the poor and the oppressed throughout his ministry. If our traditions limit us from approaching these topics, we face an issue with becoming a voice of difference within our people group.

I once worked with a church elder who took issue with the inclusion of advocacy for environmental justice in our church’s mission. It seemed, for him, that naming our work supporting green initiatives in our city and beyond was “too controversial” and needed to be curtailed or downplayed to not aggravate the silent majority (minority??) within our community. I felt challenged by this for a couple of critical reasons. First, it was already an articulated value of our community to be an “earth care” congregation and participate in programs that reduced our carbon footprints. Secondly, and more importantly, this obfuscation of engaging environmental justice runs directly against God’s call for humanity to steward and care for creation. While it may cause discomfort to discuss things, this discomfort should never encourage us to turn a blind eye to the injustices and hardships so many people experience because of environmental collapse.

And this story illustrates a greater reality: With its position and privilege in society, the church tends to gravitate towards a comfortable center to meet the needs and interests of the greatest number

of people. And, of course, it does! This is a method of self-preservation. We work within a framework that most of our communities will understand, “meeting people where they are at.” There is goodness in this, especially as we seek to invite a wide variety of people into the Good News of the church with our message.

But under the surface of this is a reality that it becomes easy to ignore issues that make us uncomfortable, thereby protecting the powerful and the status quo in exchange for consensus. There are named and unspoken rules regarding what is appropriate to speak of and what must be left unsaid.

Over the last few years, I have been drawn to this work by witnessing the intense struggle people of color undergo in our country. Black and brown people face disproportionate economic and social struggles compared to white folks in the United States. And white communities reinforce these issues through their disengagement and silence.

I remember describing my hopes for this course with a congregation member. This man happens to be a Native American of the Muskogee tribe. We discussed the realities of what it means to speak up for justice, the complications it can lead to, and the necessity for people in power to shine a light on injustices. He asked me one of the most provocative, direct questions I’d ever considered: *“Is there some kind of unwritten rule that the white church must be neutral?”*

His simple query pulled the bandage off the delicate wound that is the white church’s struggle to move from postures of privilege and silence to an active engagement with systemic issues of injustice. Specifically, as we turn towards conversations of racism in the United States, we can either engage with solidarity for the oppressed or remain silent and comfortable.

What are the untouchable topics in your community? Why?

Take a moment to reflect: Are there any issues that your institution or community is reluctant even to discuss, much less wrestle with publicly? There may be things that we have come to accept as unchangeable realities. Or we may perceive an issue to be outside our ministry’s scope or calling.

The early church wrestled with cultural inclusion and exclusion issues as they spread through the Mediterranean region beyond Jerusalem. What were they to do with food sacrificed to idols? How was circumcision to be maintained or understood in non-Jewish ethnic communities? Who belonged on the “inside,” and who had authority now that these burgeoning communities began to need structure and definition?

The story of Peter’s vision on the roof in Joppa comes immediately to mind as we consider engaging with things that are considered culturally inappropriate or taboo. Acts 10 says

Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Acts 10:9-16, NRSV

What comes to mind when considering what is clean and unclean today? Are there specific practices or cultural groups that we quickly lump into an unclean or at least unapproachable category?

We forget when we gloss through this passage that things like four-footed animals (likely many with cloven feet, of which consuming was forbidden by Old Testament law) or birds of the air or reptiles were off-limits for religious Jews. We take it for granted, especially in our modern world, that these foods, had Peter eaten them, would have made him unclean and unable to properly engage in worship without repentance. Times were changing for Peter and the apostles, certainly. But Peter's reluctance is understandable.

Peter must overcome this reluctance when he realizes God's voice is instructing him. In fact, at the moment, he misses out on the opportunity to partake...he waits too long. But this interaction prepares Peter to share a meal with the Roman centurion, Cornelius, who has come to visit him.

What do we consider forbidden? What is unclean to eat, maybe? And how about what is unclean to discuss or sanction in our churches, communities, and social spaces? What if we are calling unclean what God is inviting us to engage with, speak of, and participate in the healing and restoration of our words, actions, and lives?

Naming gun violence and standing in solidarity against mass shootings should always be a Christian issue. But can our communities handle this discussion? Do they actively engage it when the need arises (sadly, the need arises far too often in the United States)?

- The Apostle Paul
- Preaching Must Die! reading

Activity: list of taboo or untouchable topics. What does scripture say about these? Why are they off-limits? Where does your understanding of freedom intersect with them?

Lesson 4 – Prophets, Apostles, Priests

Lesson 5 – What is Your Voice?

Lesson 6 – Preaching that Gets into Trouble

Lesson 7 – Preaching that Liberates

Lesson 8 – You Have Permission

SCRIPT NOTES

“Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” – Karl Barth.

The Theological Declaration of Barmen – 1934

The Barmen Declaration includes six theses:

1. The source of revelation is only the Word of God – Jesus Christ. Any other possible sources (earthly powers, for example) will not be accepted.
2. Jesus Christ is the only Lord of all aspects of personal life. There should be no other authority.
3. The message and order of the church should not be influenced by the current political convictions.
4. The church should not be ruled by a leader ("Führer"). There is no hierarchy in the church (Mt 20, 25f).
5. The state should not fulfill the task of the church and vice versa. State and church are both limited to their own business.
6. Therefore, the Barmen Declaration rejects (i) the subordination of the Church to the state (8.22-3) and (ii) the subordination of the Word and Spirit to the Church.²

Look at political candidates being endorsed by evangelical churches. How is this ok, but talking about gun violence or racist policies, or homophobia is not?

² "Barmen Declaration," *Wikipedia*, last modified August 8, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barmen_Declaration

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Project Launch Plan

Project Description

I will create an online course for preachers and speakers who want to expand their sense of what it means to speak the bold and powerful word of the gospel. I will challenge them to evaluate how their current methods lead them into these spaces of pain in our world. I want to provocatively and lovingly disrupt our patterns to discover a model of bold speaking. This course will consist of 8 lessons of 20-25 minutes, accompanied by discovery questions and activities to encourage participants to step outside their current methods of engaging the Scriptures with today's work for justice. Each lesson will include personal stories from me and other preachers that give examples of courageous preaching. In addition, each class will be supplemented by readings and podcasts. We will gather for synchronous conversations over an 8-week window via Zoom to process how to implement a courageous preaching model in our contexts.

Audience

My primary audience for this course will be mid-career pastors and ministry leaders seeking additional/continuing education opportunities. This content also focuses on white church leaders who occupy positions where they have power or privilege and are wrestling with how to disrupt those dynamics to speak more boldly about the social justice issues their communities face. I am intentionally not creating an undergraduate or graduate course because I want this content to be accessible to individuals who do not have plans to continue degree work but want to strengthen their speaking skills and be encouraged to engage in more difficult topics in their teaching and leadership.

Development Plan

By offering this online course through an existing institution, The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology, I have the added support of their content delivery system. I will work with The Seattle School's Marketing and Center for Transforming Engagement departments to polish and advertise this course. Currently, The Seattle School has a small catalog of online course offerings to which this Liberated Voices course will be added in Fall 2023.

The following outlines the development pathway for finalizing the Project Portfolio work for Portland Seminary and preparing materials and filming for The Seattle School during Spring 2023.

By February 1, I will have the following completed

- Complete course syllabus and outline for eight 20-25 minute video lessons
- Lessons 1, 2, 3, and 8 scripts drafted and submitted for feedback

- Timeline for filming planned (see below)

February 15

Updates/edits as requested by Dr. Ekaputra Tupamahu completed
Remainder of Project Portfolio edited and resubmitted

April 1

Portland Seminary's requested edits completed
Project portfolio resubmitted
Microphone, lighting, and production test video completed for review by The Seattle School

May 1

Begin filming lessons under the advisement of The Seattle School
Schedule 4 days in May to complete filming. Location TBD (likely at St. James Presbyterian Church)

June 1

Submit lessons to the Marketing department at The Seattle School for final polish.
Begin marketing campaign planning with The Seattle School

September 1

Planned launch date for the online course *Liberated Voices*, Fall 2023

Development Process

A significant part of my evaluation of this course's benchmarks will occur through participant feedback during and following the course. I will work with The Seattle School's staff to ensure my evaluation process follows their standards and will further develop the course for repeated instruction in the future. I intend to expand this course with additional content for business professionals and, separately, for distribution in my denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Appendix A – Milestone 1

The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

I will research and write from a stance of curiosity, doubt, and active listening to voices of people who are empowered to “speak up” and those who are silenced by the white church’s ignorance and denial of their struggles for justice.

NPO Statement

First Statement:

Many white faith leaders remain silent about issues of racism in the American church and therefore ignore and diminish the struggle of BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) people.

Second Statement (post-Discovery Workshop):

Considering faith leaders charged with naming the way of Jesus, who spoke for justice for the oppressed, we’ve discerned that issues of historic trauma, white supremacy and oppressive power must be disrupted for a paradigm shift to occur (creating new wineskins) and reinvigorate integrity to the witness and teachings of Christ.

Final Statement (post-1x1 Interviews)

Considering faith leaders called to proclaim the way of Jesus, who spoke of God’s justice and made space for the oppressed to have a voice, we’ve discerned that leaders must disrupt devices of fear such as historic trauma, white supremacy, and oppressive power. If solved, it would mean faith communities could embrace fear and discomfort and discover a revitalization of the integrity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

NPO Scope and Constraints

This NPO must focus on issues of holding fear as a faith leader charged with speaking up, even when it is scary and risky. This project accepts the reality that it is calling people to change and embrace discomfort in ways that some faith communities will be unwilling to attempt. There will be a focus on racial justice issues in America as an example of a crucial issue that must be addressed at this cultural moment. It is vital that this work examines issues of heart-change through facing head

on deeply held beliefs around race and identity and the role of the church to speak into such issues with the desire for liberation.

NPO Context

The NPO is intended to focus on outcomes for empowering pastors and ministry leaders who have the opportunity to speak up for issues of justice in congregational ministry contexts. Many young pastors, especially, have an opportunity to speak up in new ways to face the issues of our time and chart a new course for the future of the Christian witness in America. It is the design of this research project to reinvigorate the witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in through encouraging a more courageous witness from ministry leaders around issues of racial justice and to discourage shying away from impotent, culturally safe articulations of this Good News. In order to address the impotence of many pastors' witness to issues of social and racial justice, this project will research issues of fear, threat of social dislocation, and pursue the challenge of moving beyond fear to boldness and courage.

Root Causes

The Discovery Workshop and One-On-One interviews discerned some shared root causes for issues of silence by faith leaders around issues of racism and social injustice. In many ways, they all distill down to fear. There is a fear of scarcity -- there is not enough of God's love to go around or our position is threatened by giving another person the space to speak. Fear is rooted in the worry that we potentially are wrong, that we've held on to the status quo in unhealthy ways, that our comfort might be disrupted if we say the wrong thing. Silence can be quite protective and the risk associated with speaking up about injustice is perhaps not worth it. As well, issues of the role of American capitalism, institutionalized racism, and manifest destiny seem to also boil down to our fear of losing control or needing to accept the other as a partner, rather than an object or commodity.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

- Campus minister, Millennial, Asian American male, (Bellingham)
- Congregation member, Boomer, activist, writer, White female (Bellingham)
- Educator/musician, Gen-X, Latinx/Indigenous male (Bellingham)
- Truck driver, Gen-X, father, Black male (Kent, WA)
- Photographer/designer, Boomer/Gen-X, friend, Black male (Bellingham)
- Artist, Millennial, church attender, White non-binary person (Bellingham)

One-On-One Interviews

Seminary president, Boomer, psychologist, Black male (Seattle, WA)

United Church of Christ pastor, Millennial, White queer male (Bellingham)

Presbyterian pastor, Millennial, Asian American female (Bellingham)

3-5 Key Biblical Texts

Exodus 4:11-12

Then the LORD said to [Moses], "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

Luke 4:16-19

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Acts 13:46-47

Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,
'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles,
so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

2 Timothy 1:6-9

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

Academic Resources

Study on the nature/psychology of fear

Reading works on “Prophetic Witness” (Walter Brueggemann, Soong-Chan Rah)

I would like to look into whether there are case studies of churches who took more bold approaches to naming justice issues and whether they saw an impact on congregational engagement/mission or if they saw departures of members who were frustrated/uncomfortable.

I would like to also explore the concept of “passing the mic” and how faith leaders work to empower other voices besides themselves to proclaim the Gospel in congregational contexts. I’m thinking of preaching, but also artists, musicians, theologians-in-residence.

I continue to be drawn to the conversation of Race in America as a focal point of this work. I am curious to explore how fear impacts the struggle for racial justice and how ALL churches can begin to speak more directly to this issue by finding an empowered sense of certainty in the power of the Gospel proclaimed authentically.

Appendix A.1 – Discovery Workshop Documentation

Discovery Workshop Description

The Discovery Workshop to identify my NPO was hosted on November 1, 2020, over Zoom. The workshop was attended by myself and 6 participants, who ranged in age, racial and gender identities, and stages of life. We conducted the entire workshop in about 4 hours, moving through the 4 discernment activities as outlined by the NPO Discovery Workshop Guidelines set forth by Portland Seminary. It was a lively conversation among the participants, who were all meeting each other for the first time in this setting. There was a high degree of collaborative energy and enthusiasm for discerning our topic.

Facilitating the process over Zoom established a positive atmosphere of trust and comfort for the participants. Each was working from their own homes, comfortable spaces where they felt more at ease sharing their perspectives and speaking up. There were some moments when I needed to draw out more feedback from one or two participants, as some of the members of the group tended to dominate the conversation, but for the most part, the entire time was collaborative and each participant listened actively. They also made space for me to process my reactions at the end of our time together, which I believe was rewarding to them to understand more deeply my heart for the work we are attempting to do together.

Discovery Statement

Considering faith leaders called to proclaim the way of Jesus, who spoke of God’s justice and made space for the oppressed to have a voice, we’ve discerned that leaders must disrupt devices of fear

such as historic trauma, white supremacy, and oppressive power. If solved, it would mean faith communities could embrace fear and discomfort and discover a revitalization of the integrity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Critical Insights From Discovery Workshop

I specifically invited each participant for their particular interest in the topic of addressing the need for the church to speak up more boldly on issues of racial justice. I was surprised to hear them explore the topic and have it open up into a much larger conversation about reinvigorating the witness of the Gospel of Jesus by encouraging faith leaders to speak more directly to the powerful, liberating words of Christ. While we focused on questions of historic trauma, white supremacy, and oppressive power, it became clear that an authentic witness to Christ not only addresses these issues, but speaks up boldly about the loving, liberating work of the Gospel in other areas of life as well. There was a sense of interconnectedness to the issues of systemic racism and the impotent witness of the church to many issues facing the world today.

One-On-One Interview Discoveries

With each 1x1 Interviewee, I outlined how I had arrived at the Discovery Statement on my own and with the support of the Discovery Workshop group. Hearing the background for this topic led each of the 1x1 interviewees to draw me deeper into the focus on what kinds of issues hold faith leaders back from speaking more boldly. The first interviewee focused on the issue of “threat” that the white evangelical church feels when it begins to name such issues as structural racism and then took our conversation in a historical direction, connecting in issues of manifest destiny and European exceptionalism. The second interviewee drew upon new language that connected the issues of systemic injustice with demonic presence and the powers and principalities of the world, which certainly overlaps with historic traumatic experiences like the doctrine of discovery and manifest destiny. The third interviewee brought in the discussion of making space for change and confronting people’s discomfort with holding complexities while maintaining relationships with ones who see the world differently than ourselves. The surprising and exciting integration of each of the three interviewees was how they all pointed me back to similar kinds of questions: How do you risk the fear/threat of being bold? And how can you push into that in order to speak the truth?

Synthesis

The Discovery Workshop left me with a sense of the call for faith leaders to unmask the Gospel of Jesus and its truth from behind the veil of white supremacy and historic oppression. These participants named a degree of pain at how the church has become so complicit with maintaining the status quo and protecting positions of white privilege while undermining the witness to Jesus’ message. From here, the 1x1 interviews took a much more personal approach. While they integrated with the Discovery Workshop on addressing issues of history and American politics, they also went into great depth in reflecting upon the need for individual faith leaders to become comfortable with things that would perhaps seem threatening or scary in order to get at the more

powerful truths of the Gospel. I connect this desire to be able to “hold fear” with the Discovery Workshop participant’s encouragement of faith leaders to “be bold.” Both groups connected with the issue of unnamed systemic racism, but each seemed to recognize the issue is much more insidious and bigger than one problem: it is a holistic issue of faith leaders compromising the integrity of the Gospel of Jesus and their prophetic witness to it by giving into fear and the powers of the world which attempt to silence such witness.

Next Steps

One of the 1x1 interviewees closed our time by challenging me with a question: what would scare you to speak up and say? This, along with the call from the Discovery Workshop group to challenge faith leaders with boldness, invites me to next steps of beginning to explore what it means to take risks as a writer, preacher, and leader. I see some next steps as “experiments in fear,” where I find simple ways to push my own comfort and discern what the limits are of boldness vs. fear as I attempt to be faithful to how I hear the Gospel needing to be shared. This links with the Discovery Workshop group’s encouragement to “not over think things” and consider both short term and long-term outcomes/opportunities that this research can present. Good examples of this might mean starting a blog or podcast to attempt some “episodic” experiments in fear, as well as laying out longer term plans for training our congregation to expect to be uncomfortable at times when I preach. I also want to spend some time exploring resources related to fear and deliverance from the powers of demons.

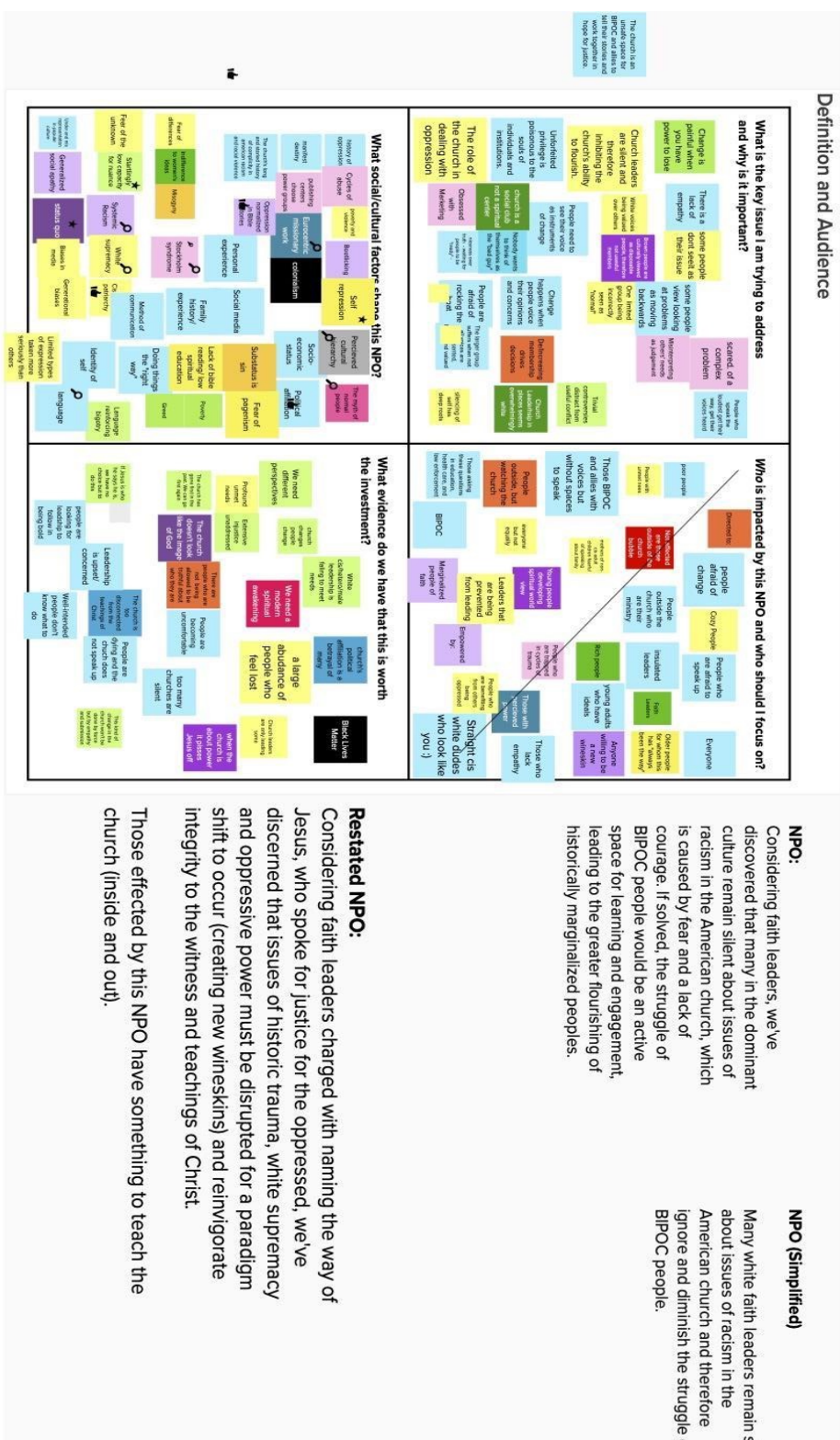


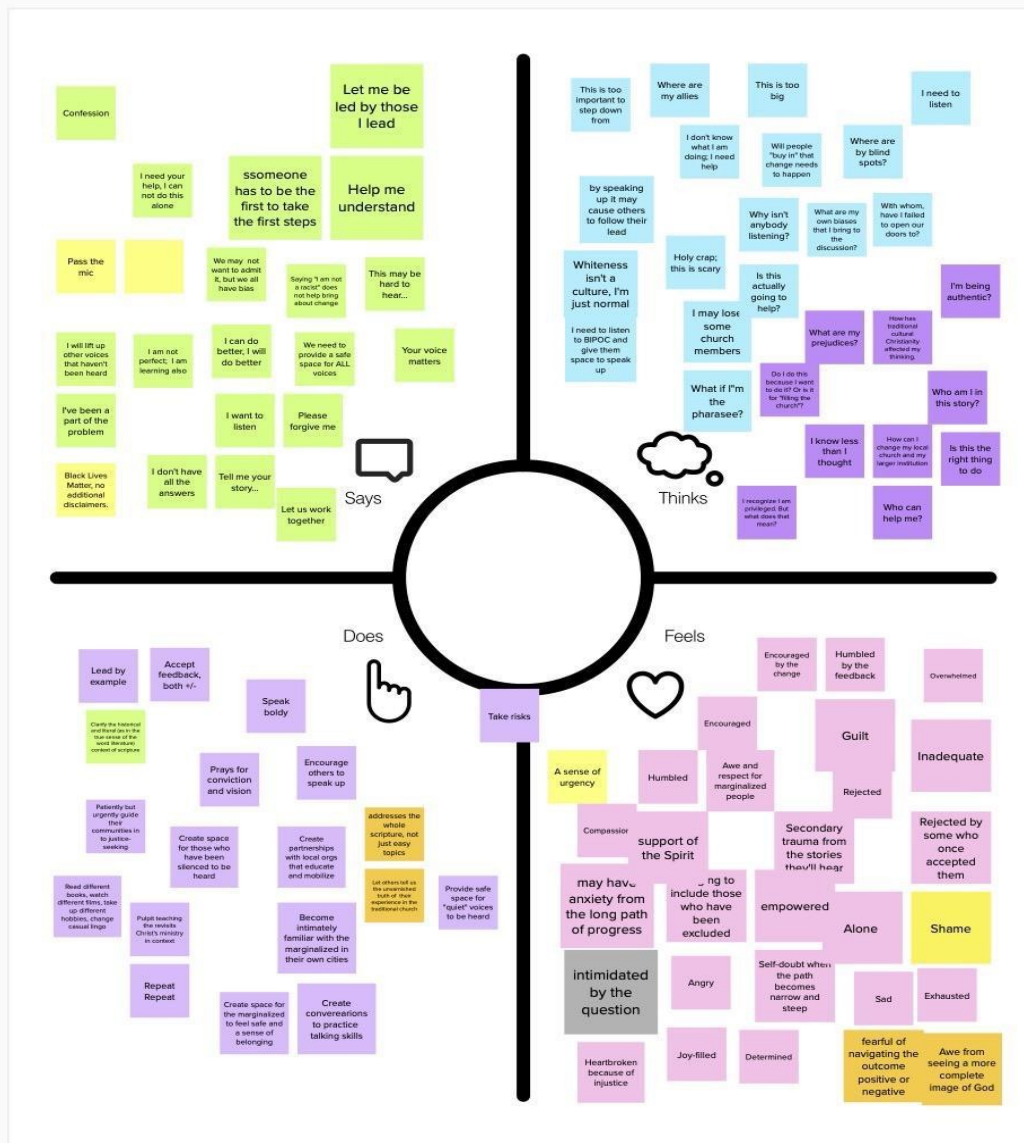
Figure 1- Definition and Audience

NPO Empathy Map

What will the audience say, think, do, or feel differently when the NPO is addressed?

1

Build empathy and keep your focus on the user by putting yourself in their shoes.



Considering faith leaders charged with naming the way of Jesus, who spoke for justice for the oppressed, we've discerned that issues of historic trauma, white supremacy and oppressive power must be disrupted for a paradigm shift to occur and reinvigorate integrity to the witness and teachings of Christ.

Figure 2 - NPO Empathy Map

Review the working NPD 1071 Activity One and discuss how a person might use a statement

Five steps to discover the root cause of a problem

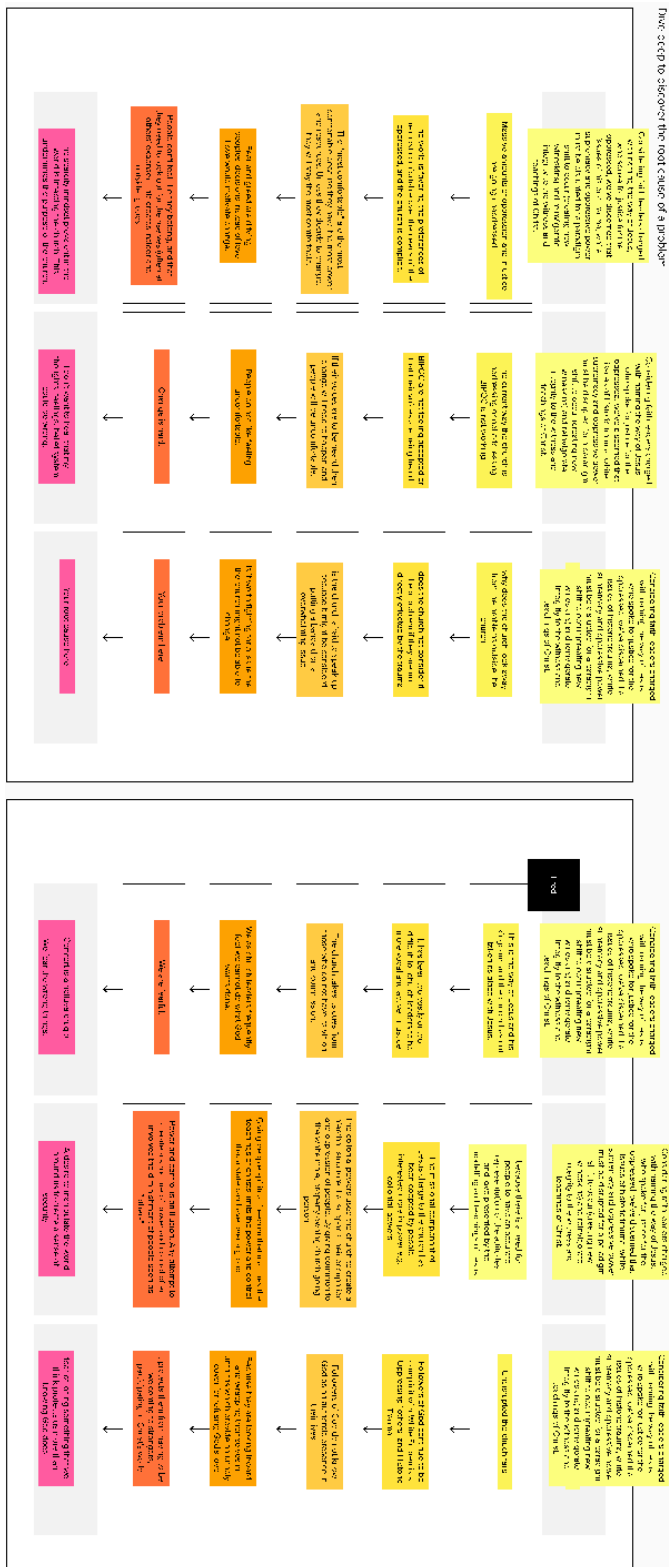


Figure 3 - 5 Whys Worksheet

NPO Statement - Putting It All Together Activity

Identify the key takeaways from each activity and record them here.

Audience/Definition

Dividing line between who it's for and who will be impacted/empowered by the project

Consensus that the church has lost trust with people over this issue

Power dynamics

A need for leadership, and leaders who can lead by example

Church leadership complicit with racist, sexist, homophobic society

White church people and some others unable to address difficult, societal issues

Empathy Map

Easy to come up with negative emotions; important to come up with feelings that inspire hope.

Anxiety appears to be a potential barrier for leaders.

There is a need for people to work together because the problem & change needed is a lot to take in.

The leader needs to empower the BIPOC to share their voices

It's worth it, worthwhile to align church with God's image

Five Whys

The cost of changing a belief system creates a large amount of friction (especially when a shared belief system that's "working" is already established)

Fear

Cost of the work

Mind-shift when we realize that we may have held "wrong" beliefs

Understanding development of Christian thought and the impacts of perspective

Comfort and security and variations of the such, appear to be root causes

fear of losing something that we think protects us more than knowing God does

Discuss any points of friction, clarification, or questions that arise.

What is the vision for a church that successfully addresses these issues.

Is the church wanting to do this to be Christ-like or due to social pressure or expectations?

What about the church leaders who don't want to change?

What even is the church?

Does the church have enough perspective on it's own philosophic history in terms to how it relates to culture at large?

Is the change from the heart, or is it just going along with a cultural norm?

Church has a history of splitting over differences and not talking things through - very hard to stay open in discussions.

Addressing issues of injustice to appeal to a new/cultural status quo vs. for reasons of conviction

Is the church willing to say we were wrong, we've been treating people wrong?

Restated NPO Statement:

Considering faith leaders charged with naming the way of Jesus, who spoke for justice for the oppressed, we've discerned that issues of historic trauma, white supremacy and oppressive power must be disrupted for a paradigm shift to occur (creating new wineskins) and reinvigorate integrity to the witness and teachings of Christ. Those affected by this NPO have something to teach the church (inside and out).

Who are the "faith leaders"?

What is the paradigm shift?

"Disrupted" how?

How can we elevate those affected into positions of leadership?

Wouldn't it be better letting new directions in these issues come from those affected?

Define "disrupt."

Answer who needs to be invigorated how.

Which witness and teaching?

Debrief and Next Steps

Keep your eyes on the road: As I continue researching this NPO, what should I be sure to examine?

The intersection of BIPOC with other marginalized identities

What taking action looks like on a short term basis, what it looks like on a long term plan?

Look over your shoulder: As I continue researching this NPO, what are potential blind spots that I best explore?

Understand your culture, accept what is worthy and reject what is not.

The importance to educate yourself, and the labor it requires of BIPOC people to educate.

Watch for downed trees in the road: As I continue researching this NPO, what are potential pitfalls that I best avoid?

Don't let it overwhelm you and don't overthink it.

Time and how long the fight has gone on

Avoid being the "spokesman" and work towards being the amplifier.

Progress, not "solving."

Any further input? Email stthomas20@georgefox.edu or call 360-303-0898

One-Page Post-Workshop Message To Stakeholders

Siblings in Christ,

I write to you with immense gratitude for your participation in my Doctor of Ministry Need, Problem, & Opportunity Discovery Workshop. Thank you so much for your generative, creative, thought-provoking presence in our discussion. Since our gathering, I have had a good deal of opportunity to reflect and consider your insights for research and study.

After our Discovery Workshop, I conducted three One-On-One interviews with other ministry colleagues to share your insights and hear their reaction to the drafted Discovery Statement we compiled. Each interviewee was grateful for the work you all did and directed me to a more in-depth study around issues of history, psychology, and practical ministry related to faith leaders' struggle to speak up against injustice. One significant link these three leaders forged for me was the invitation to enter more deeply into uncomfortable, scary places to unmask the powers of the world that oppress and silence the vital witness of the Gospel. How can you enter into fear to name the truth? Why is it so difficult for our congregations to hold fear or difference? Can we find mutuality by being in a healthy place with discomfort?

I want to offer you all the invitation to continue to provide me feedback and ideas as I continue in this work. I will plan to call each of you and discuss the project more when time allows, and I covet your prayers as I attempt to embrace my fear and discomfort in the process of seeking a more vibrant, authentic witness to the way of Jesus that sets us all free.

Grace and peace,

Seth

One-On-One Interview Documentation

Interview #1

These are prophetic questions. They get at something deeper as in "how do we stop doing this, structurally?"

How does the church get about the work of caring for the orphans and widows, individuals impacted by the system?

Social systems are set up to protect us from asking prophetic questions. They stabilize the status quo.

The white evangelical church often works for its own self-interest, thinly veiled/covered with the message of Christ. The new thing, the prophetic witness, might destroy what is already working just fine!

There are also issues here of white people's assumptions of manifest destiny:

- Christ vs. Islam
- Challenging the mental model of white supremacy
- Israel as the chosen people. Leads White Evangelicals to thinking they are chosen too.
- European Americans: special/spreading that chosen-ness to the world.

Under the cover of manifest destiny/chosen people mindset, there is permission to do a lot of things (cruel, systemic, racist things)

European Americans feel threatened and resist growth / protecting the status quo.
Exceptionalism mindset

Social Justice actions can call forth shame in the oppressor

- The oppressor then pushes/projects that shame onto brown people
- Now brown people are saying "take it back"

Progress continues, but it also hits its limits as it grows. Example: the Tulsa bombings in 1921 - Black Americans making progress with a thriving local economy. White people shut this down, violence to impose new limitations on Black progress.

Big shift occurs for European Americans: 9/11 - we didn't believe we could get hurt like this, "they" got to "us"

For the white church, meaning making has gotten distorted and self-serving: White church feels threatened, so they see the need to fight. "Make our cultural voice great again." White Evangelical culture is at risk, so they lash out in self-interest.

Movements like Black Lives Matter or so call "socialism" - these are threats to the white status quo and are not being heard as creative opportunities. White folks worry about displacement.

Added in to this all is a decay of economics and morals. Technology is replacing labor, so poor people are in trouble, feel threatened. Therefore, the outsiders, the ones who are supposedly taking jobs, are the problem. It is "they" who are doing this to "us".

Example: Barack Obama - threat to white success, didn't want him to succeed.

The issue is displaced blame, scapegoating.

Biblical Witness

Christ and liberation and the change of the age. Christ speaks to people under Roman oppression. Very easy to see ties to issues People of Color face as they are colonized by European Americans.

Jesus is violating cultural/religious norms:

- Can't trust the government
- Hierarchy keeps things in order

We must let Jesus be Jesus in his context – universalizing his message displaces its truth

Psychology of Perception

- Blindness because we cannot shift our frame of view
- We see what we want to believe
- Myths get you where you want to be
- What if we could change our frame?
- The challenge of change
- Who will we be?

Learning is painful, we wonder “are we going to be ok?”

We must meet the problems with something different. Anger and fear won't do it.

Need to craft messages that aren't weak in the face of fear and anger, not impotent.

The Cross: Love is active in life and death

- What will our sacrifice be?
- Will it be potent, generative love?
- That kind of witness will reinvigorate the gospel.

We must be “with” people, practicing in our context, engaging, with integrity

We must turn to what frightens, what threatens, and work through what we must become.

Engage our discomfort

What frightens us and how do we move beyond it?

Interview #2

Interview Notes:

Visceral reaction to the words “reinvigorate” and impotence as applied to the Gospel. Might want to look at different metaphors: reinvigorate – life // lacking vigor – the gospel needs vigor!

Dealing here with demonic presences: demons of patriarchy and racism. Demons collaborate in insidious ways.

Reinvigoration leads to life

Who is this project for? Speaking truth in love on hard to name things. Is this for Mainline Protestant White pastors? Then they are going to need a focus on why they struggle to name the truth. Why do they wrestle with upending the status quo?

If you cast your net too widely with this project, you will risk it becoming diluted or people will miss your point. Consider the scope of the work.

What is my angle on this question?

Black preachers are doing the job of naming racism.

White preachers are half-assing it. This is a hallmark of white supremacy.

White preachers want to stay in our own lane. Protect what is yours.

What is the difference between being held accountable for not saying something dumb/harmful/incorrect and participating in "cancel culture"? Can we hold each other accountable while not silencing opinions/ideas we do not like?

Racism is insidious and wants us to not talk about it. These are demons we are fighting!

And this is an invitation to trouble-making: Good trouble!

Class-based struggle: keep your head down and don't make waves. This will protect status/class for white preachers like yourself.

- Happens with issues of race, gender, money, power, etc.

Biblical connections:

Zechariah praying in the temple and he's told he'll have a son. He doesn't believe the message and so he's silenced. His mouth is reopened once he points to his wife, Elizabeth and says believe her, his name is John

- Zechariah is silenced because he doesn't handle the message entrusted with him
- Part of his voice being restored is him using it to lift up other voices.

Have you done the listening work required to speak up?

Demons collaborate: Mark and the demoniac - "we are legion." Demons collaborate with the powers of the world.

We must name this, name the demons. Look into our collective unconscious and name what must be named.

This project could be very useful:

- Family systems work

- Homiletics: What must be named? Said?

Moses and Pharoah - naming the Unnameable God

Demons even can name Christ.

Why is it hard for you to talk about race?

What is the book you (Seth) need to write? What is in your way?

What is the space that most scares you to speak up and speak into?

Owning who you are, your authenticity. It must show up in this work.

Class: can be broken and can be used. Same with race, gender, privilege.

Forcing people to say what they mean.

Where does our authority come from?

- What is the foundation?
- Naming this is so important.

Prophetic witness can stand up on its own.

By what authority do we speak?

Example: Fred Rogers before the US Senate.

- Absolutely using his authority to speak
- Prophetic speaking that makes opponents weep, feel, connect

Can the prophetic word call people home?

Balancing Prophetic Witness with pastoral love.

What is the scariest part of this for you? Listen to your body.

Interview #3

Interview Notes:

Struck with the idea of shifting church culture and wondering at why the church doesn't welcome this kind of work.

The Church "ought" to welcome this.

Why doesn't the church expect to be offended? Jesus loved well through confrontation.

- Why should the church be nice and comfortable?

Wondering at the role of preachers in “speaking for” vs making space for other voices.

Jesus does both: speaks for the oppressed and also sends them off to speak up for themselves/others

We need to help people use their voices, not speak for them.

Intrigued by concept of trauma (historic trauma)

- It’s hard to argue with trauma
- Perhaps this is a more useful inroad than terms like white supremacy or racism

White supremacy and oppressive power

- Top down power distorts

Discussion of monolithic racial terms “black” and “white”

- Is there a more nuanced issue at work in this question? Is naming whiteness/white supremacy helpful in reaching resolution or is it a distraction?

Whiteness is a singularity

What about the politics of the American Church?

This topic is definitely an issue. Is it the issue?

- We must look at other complexities
- Intersectionality: what is the underlying thing here?
- Othering

Important to look at FEAR as a topic.

Belonging: how do we belong, integrate without othering. The flipside is exclusion

Fear: when we feel belonging, we’re open to the other. When we hoard belonging, we direct fear at the other.

Jesus creates a way of belonging for the oppressed (and maybe even for the oppressor).

- Both/and of space making and speaking for
- Jesus makes a way (in speaking for)
- Jesus makes the high places low (making spaces)
- Jesus knows the needs of the oppressed to speak and does not overstep.

Question: why is it so scary to be uncomfortable, to be told we need change, to unmask injustice? Is it competing with God? Would we rather keep God safe in a bubble or is it ok to speak up and trust God is in it?

Timothy Keller – article on theologies of justice. Good can be found in many ways of approaching social justice.

Christians adamantly opposing social justice: why is it so scary?

- “It’s not my fault, I’m not racist. I didn’t choose to be white!”
- We must unearth our shared/mutual trauma.

Developing a capacity for curiosity: I will listen to the other and be received in them listening to me too.

What happened to mutual curiosity?

If we don’t learn how to partner with people whose opinions we deem problematic, we’re not going to get anywhere. We’re not communicating, we’re just shouting into our own echo chambers.

Mere Christianity and discussion of pride.

Mutual respect for the way people are wired (different) – can we engage curiosity

Virtue signaling: are we doing this work for ourselves? For others? To be seen?

Appendix B – Milestone 2

NPO Topic Expertise Essay

“The Voice of Liberation in the Biblical World”

God calls humanity, bearers of the *Imago Dei*, to stewardship of creation and the proclamation of the Good News to the ends of the earth. Throughout the biblical witness, God encounters humanity and empowers them to speak a message of liberation for the oppressed and the captives. This message is not always easy to hear, but ultimately is a message for all people and for the good of all creation. When the church, the witness of God’s people on earth, neglects its duty to speak up for the needs of the oppressed and marginalized, they undermine the integrity of that gospel witness. The witness of the Scriptures is clear – God’s people must speak up for the liberation of the oppressed.

Here I will explore four keystone Scriptures that bear witness to how God directs God’s people to speak up and bear witness to God’s faithfulness. As God breathes life into humanity’s lungs, so God also empowers them to speak up and take the witness of justice to the nations. Moses met God in the burning bush and, while initially resisting the call to speak for the people of Israel in captivity, was sent to speak to Pharaoh with words God provided. In the New Testament, Jesus announces his ministry by preaching the words of the prophet Isaiah, speaking of justice for those in bondage and freedom for the captive. Christ’s κήρυγμα (proclamation) stands upon the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and ushers in a new era of bearing witness through the word preached that is continued by the apostles and the traditions of the church. We see this in the expansion of that message in the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament letters.

When the Church speaks up for justice and liberation, it stands upon the foundation of the Scriptures as people empowered with a message of liberation to share. When the Church fails to name injustices and shies away from conflict, it cedes its voice to the spirit of fear. The intention of this study is to justify and encourage the liberation of White faith leaders’ voices to speak up for the cause of God’s justice in practical, timely ways, embracing their calling and honoring the struggle of the oppressed with a faithful proclamation of the good news.

Textual Discussions

Exodus 4:11-12

Moses meets YHWH at the burning bush and receives a surprising directive: "Go, tell Pharaoh to free the Israelites from their captivity."³ He proceeds to list all the reasons why he cannot. When faced with the problem of enslavement and the opportunity for liberation, Moses self-consciously focuses on his own shortcomings and ineloquence. God works through human impediments and resistance because God created the mouths of humans. Our mouth, tongue, and the work of the voice are crafted by the Creator. Moses would seek to push off his responsibility to go and speak to Pharaoh. God will "have none of this."⁴ God is seemingly not interested in hearing human explanations for why they cannot do the work of speaking for liberation.

Moses' reluctance and God's insistence mirror the resistance of Pharaoh to release the captive slaves (Exodus 5-13) and the groaning insistence of the Israelites in Exodus 2:23.⁵ Moses and Pharaoh may be more alike than we would care to admit at this point, and yet in his discovery of a voice to speak for justice for his people, Moses departs from the path of resistance to advocate for his groaning people.

Who provides the source of the spoken words: God or humans? Does God ultimately control the faculties of speech for people? If so, does God determine whether or not we speak truth and justice? It would seem so from the account of Moses' calling.⁶ And yet, we witness numerous places throughout the Scriptures where humanity must be reminded to speak, to act, to engage in justice.

Luke 4:16-19

The Mosaic tradition informs the prophets of the Old Testament,⁷ speaking up again and again for the righteousness of God to the people of Israel and the nations. From this tradition, we arrive at

³ Exodus 6:11, paraphrased.

⁴ Fretheim, Terence E. *Exodus*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann argues this moment of the Israelite's groaning and speaking up is a pivotal historical movement in their collective consciousness.

Brueggemann, Walter. 2018. *Interrupting Silence: God's Command to Speak Out*. First Edition. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press. 15.

⁶ Smith, James E. *The Pentateuch*. 2nd ed. Old Testament Survey Series. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1993.

⁷ The Hebrew prophets consistently refer back to the law of Moses (the Torah) in their critique of how Hebrew religious and political practices of their age undermine the intentions of God's design for the people.

Jesus unrolling the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue as he announces his own prophetic ministry in Luke 4.⁸ When we proclaim the Good News, does it come from a tradition or is it simply something of our own making? From where does the authority of this κήρυγμα come? Jesus' reading directly addresses the oppression of the Hebrew people under an imperial power, Rome. He draws from the Mosaic and prophetic traditions.⁹ Jesus' use of Isaiah 61 is particularly poignant, as "when understood literally, the passage says the Christ is God's servant who will bring to reality the longing and the hope of the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned. The Christ will also usher in the amnesty, the liberation, and the restoration associated with the proclamation of the year of jubilee."¹⁰ As with Moses' liberated voice, Jesus the Christ understands the imperative to speak up and points directly to the Jewish tradition to affirm it.

It is not about simply speaking up. It is about bringing "good news" when we do. Jesus utilizes the Isaiah text to proclaim the εὐαγγέλιον, the good news for the poor and those in captivity. Here we see that God's pronouncement of hope for people in need extends throughout the Scriptures, forward and backward through history. Εὐαγγέλιον is what the angels bring to the Bethlehem shepherds, proclaiming the arrival of the Christ.¹¹ Εὐαγγέλιον is what the Apostles share with the nations as the message of hope expands into the known world.¹² As well, there are echoes of the Old Testament prophets, who proclaimed the hope of εὐαγγέλιον in their messages. We can hear the prophet Nahum directing our eyes to the mountains for coming of the good news: "Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings εὐαγγέλιον, who proclaims peace!" (Nahum 1:15).¹³

As we wrestle with our present call to speak up for justice, we must also wrestle with whether this practice of proclaiming jubilee and liberation is simply a cultural practice for the Hebrew people, among whom Jesus is squarely situated. Or, perhaps, is there more to the call to speak up and proclaim freedom that breaks the bonds of one people group? What if the insistence that we speak up applies to and for all people, all creation, and in our collective life together as carriers of the good news to the nations?

⁸ Fred Craddock reminds us that Jesus' ministry is held in "the bosom of Judaism."

Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.

⁹ Brueggemann, Walter. 2001. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 84.

¹⁰ Craddock, *Interpretation: Luke*

¹¹ Luke 2:10, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989.

¹² Acts 8:25 (NRSV).

¹³ Nahum 1:15 (NRSV).

Acts 13:46-47

The Acts of the Apostles frame a pivotal Scriptural moment, where we witness the enactment of Jesus' Great Commission to carry the Good News to the ends of the earth. On their missionary journey through the Northern Mediterranean, Paul and Barnabas arrive in Antioch at Pisidia and tell the story of Israel and their messiah, Jesus. They find themselves at a point of contention with local Jews, who resist their message of Christ as Messiah. Here, we encounter resistance met with boldness. When resistance arises, do we succumb to it or does the message supersede it? For Paul and Barnabas, the message must keep spreading. Here, again, we hear the echo of the prophet Isaiah. The apostles quote from Isaiah 49:6, proclaiming a liberating message that will shine out from the tribes of Judah to all nations.¹⁴ Their message is at once lament and κήρυγμα: the message of the good news has been ignored and resisted by the Jews (lament), and the message goes, therefore, out to all nations of the Gentiles.

At this moment, we encounter the dual nature of God's liberation: it is all creation, and the particularities of theologies of liberation often apply in specific ways to specific communities. Within the first-century Jewish communities, the prophetic message of Isaiah and Moses serves as a reminder of their liberation from captivity and the promise of shalom which is yet to be realized.

When the concepts of liberation are adopted by the burgeoning Christian community, it is easy to understand the resistance that Jewish communities would have felt. At the core of this tension is the truth that liberation must be particular – it must be worked out on the ground in specific ways for the needs of particular communities. As we will see below, theologies of liberation are contextual (Latin American, Black, Queer) and yet share a common frame. God is on the side of the hurting and oppressed, and God's people are meant to work for liberation everywhere. In their faithful conviction, Paul and Barnabas continue sharing the good news of Jesus to specific communities.

2 Timothy 1:6-9

As the message of liberating εὐαγγέλιον moves to the nations, it also becomes more contextual and personal. We encounter Paul mentoring Timothy in his own process of speaking up and taking ownership of the calling God has placed upon him. In Timothy, we hear echoes of Moses' reluctance and God's admonishment to go and do as he is told. To engage in the κήρυγμα that God requires of those who speak is to put oneself at personal risk of ostracism, imprisonment, and even death. Paul understands this and reminds Timothy of that reality.¹⁵ To those who speak, they are given a spirit of δυνάμει (power) and not a spirit of δειλίας (cowardice). The integrity of the gospel witness is on the line.

¹⁴ Isaiah 49:6 (NRSV).

¹⁵ Oden, Thomas C. *First and Second Timothy and Titus*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: J. Knox Press, 1989.

The role of ordination is of theological significance in this passage. Paul writes to Timothy to remind him of his anointing and ordination, which is not simply a rite of recognition of Timothy's role by the church but as a "bestowing on the ordained of authority to preach the gospel."¹⁶ As we hear with Moses and Jesus, the anointing of the one who proclaims brings authority from God to speak. Here we are reminded of Jesus' admonishment of the Pharisees who requested the silence of the disciples as they entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:40). Those called by Christ must not stop speaking up, but if they do, "the stones would shout out."¹⁷

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

Stepping back from the granular study of Scripture, we see a clear trajectory of God's call for humanity to speak up and speak out for the cause of liberation. The work of liberation starts with individuals. First, it is in the liberation of their voices – Moses from his speech impediment, Timothy from letting his youth or context cause him to question his anointing. It seems that wherever there is a need for liberation to be spoken, there will also be resistance that causes the one with the message to question their adequacy and power. From the first encounter of YHWH by Moses to the contexts of the Apostles Paul and Timothy, we see there is an ongoing struggle within humanity to honor this calling. God, however, is persistent and faithful in reminding those who have been called to return to their task.

This interplay of resistance and reminder between humanity and God carries throughout the tradition of the church and into our present moment. Even with this biblical foundation and historic movements like liberation theology, which will be outlined below, those called by God to speak resist it and must be reminded. It is a great struggle for many faith leaders to speak up against racism, white supremacy, and oppressive power. This undermines the integrity of the Gospel witness. This is the spirit of δειλίας (cowardice) that Pauls warns Timothy against. This is the fear of threat that many pastoral leaders struggle with internally. And yet we see from the biblical texts that this fear and cowardice must be set aside in order to honor the task of proclaiming the good news.

For those who question their authority to speak, we find a biblical narrative that casts such caution aside. It is not our voice speaks, anyway. It is the voice of God, who has anointed these speakers to

¹⁶ Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor. 2013. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, 138.

¹⁷ Here we are reminded of Jesus' admonishment of the Pharisees who request the disciples' silence as they entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:40). Those called by Christ must not stop speaking up, but if they do, "the stones will shout out."

Craddock rephrases this for us: "In other words, some things simply must be said; the disciples are expressing what is ultimately and finally true; God will provide a witness though every mouth be stopped; opposition to Christian witness cannot succeed; and the truth will come out, it cannot long be silenced." Craddock, *Interpretation: Luke*

their task, and which speaks through them to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, freedom for the captives, and liberation for the oppressed.

Foundations of Liberation Theology

The biblical narrative provides a firm foundation for speaking up with the voice of God's justice. Yet, the church has still struggled through points in history to find that authentic voice and use it to benefit of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. There is, however, a thread of courageous voices in the Christian tradition that provide excellent models for how to speak for liberation and live into this calling. In this section, I will explore the history of the movement known as "liberation theology," with its origins in the mid-twentieth century and its descendant movements that bring us to the present moment. It is within this theological framework that we find justification for a liberated voice in the church.

As a note, throughout this essay, I will use terms like "liberation theology," "theologies of liberation," and "liberationist" more or less interchangeably. All of these speak of a subset of Christian theology which examines God's participation with the setting free of all those who are oppressed. A liberationist works for the freedom and flourishing of all people who are traditionally pushed to the marginalized, or, as Howard Thurman would say it, those who have "their backs against the wall."¹⁸ God stands on the side of the oppressed, first and foremost, and this is the central thrust of liberation theology.

A theology of liberation emphasizes theology as the response to the lived praxis of faith. First and foremost, matters of justice, mercy, and the freedom of Christ are engaged as they are lived out in the daily lives of the oppressed. It is from the vantage point of the oppressed, then, that theological reflection and synthesis occur. Key thinkers in Latin American liberation theology articulate this distinction in helpful ways. For Peruvian priest and theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, theological reflection comes as a critical response to lived faith, praxis. Gutierrez traces this liberating tradition back to St. Augustine, with his rich reflections on the role of the Christian community in relation to the state in *The City of God*.¹⁹ Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff puts it his own way: "Doxology precedes theology," meaning that the Christian praises and professes faith in the work of the Triune God and only then reflects upon the shape of God's identity in the world.²⁰ The church does not naively step out in action but rather hears the calling of the Triune God to engage in the broken

¹⁸ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 1.

¹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988), 6.

²⁰ "First we profess faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit in prayer and praise (doxology). Then we reflect on how the divine Three are one single God in perichoretic communion between themselves (theology)." Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 232.

world they witness. And from this engagement, the church reflects and speaks of God's faithfulness as they have seen it live out daily.

Social pressure or discomfort with engaging in political discussions may lead some Christians to pause as they consider speaking up. However, to withhold a prophetic and purposeful voice that has the potential to address the plight of the oppressed is to turn away from a biblically orthodox faith. If the follower of Christ ignores the biblical mandate to seek liberation of the oppressed, they also ignore the central thrust of the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself. James Cone makes this distinction stark in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, where he states, "Theology can never be neutral or fail to take sides on issues related to the plight of the oppressed."²¹ It is from oppressed communities that Christian theology arises. Cone makes the case that the gospel cannot rise from the dominant voices of society, who do not know oppression.²² Christ is found on the margins, in the ghetto, among the voiceless. The liberationist Christian tradition takes very seriously the implications that without a witness for the oppressed, there is little Christian about the witness.

Yet fear and perceived threat too frequently overshadow the Christian witness of those who benefit from their positions of social dominance and privilege. One way that the dominant culture holds back the oppressed and silences the liberated voice is to make the movement feel dishonest or disconnected from "true Christianity." Speaking up about injustices makes us uncomfortable and disrupts the powerful. Thurman argues, though, that when we work through fear and wrestle with the truth, hope and imagination emerge, even in the minds and hearts of the oppressor.²³ Do we serve Christ or do we serve fear? Because of their position along the margins, the oppressed have little capacity to let fear win. These are matters of life and death and therefore the cries of the oppressed rise up.

Black Liberation Theology

For the purposes of this study, I will begin a more focused look at the liberation theology tradition from the perspective of Black theologians. We will visit Latin American liberation theology following, but because the struggle of Black people in America is such an acute issue in the twenty-first century, it is important to trace the roots of liberationist thinking to its foundations in Black Theology and the American civil rights movement. Key leaders in the development of a Black theology of liberation in the United States include Howard Thurman, civil rights leader and a major

²¹ James H. Cone, James H, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2010), 4.

²² "The appearance of black theology on the American scene...is due primarily to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society." Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 5.

²³ "There must always be the confidence that the effect of truthfulness can be realized in the mind of the oppressor as well as the oppressed." Thurman, 60.

influence on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; theologian James Cone; and Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas. These three Christian voices speak directly to the hope of developing an imagination for Black liberation in America as a response to the Christian gospel. In each, we can hear foreshadowing of the contemporary conversation around Black liberation in America and markers of the more universal liberation theology movement.

Some have regarded social justice leader Howard Thurman's writing as a precursor to the liberation theology movement. Originally published in 1949, Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* became something of a textbook for American Civil Rights Movement leaders. In this seminal text, Thurman wrestled with the impotency of the Church in speaking into issues of racial discrimination. While there are many people who have spoken about the way of Jesus, Thurman noted that "few of these interpretations deal with what the teachings and life of Jesus have to say to those who stand, at a moment in human history, with their backs against the wall."²⁴ Rather, Christian witness has lacked a sense of clarity in what Thurman calls the "inward center," the place of deep connection with Christ, first, and second, the deep conviction that such connection calls for action on behalf of the oppressed. Thurman took a bold approach to encourage the Christian witness, cutting straight to the existential fear that comes from confronting the powers of racism and discrimination.²⁵ He goes on to argue for a hopeful imagination of the Christian church which embraces a way of "mutual worth and value" of all people rather than continuing to segregate into affinity communities on the basis of race and social position.²⁶ When the church is able to see that Jesus is for the ones whose backs are against the wall (and realize that this is particular to Black people in the United States but also a universal struggle for all oppressed people around the world), then the church can come together in a united witness of people who share in this struggle as one.

Perhaps most prominent in the literature of Black liberation theologians is scholar James Cone. Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* is regarded as a key articulation of a Black perspective on liberation. In the forward to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of the book, Peter J. Paris notes that Cone's theology of liberation developed largely independent of the writings of Latin American theologians.²⁷ A marker of the liberationist tradition, Cone's work arises out of the particular struggle of Black Americans, a voice for a particular people with their contextual struggle, yet universalized by the way of Jesus Christ. Cone remarks, "Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of

²⁴ Thurman, 1.

²⁵ "By inference [Jesus] says, 'You must abandon your fear of each other and fear only God. You must not indulge any deception and dishonesty, even to save your lives. Your words must be Yea-Nay; anything else is evil. Hatred is destructive to hated and hater alike. Love your enemy, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.'" Thurman, 25.

²⁶ Thurman, 88.

²⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xi.

an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ."²⁸ Cone starts where we began in our biblical study of liberation: with the story of Moses and the liberation of the Hebrew people from bondage in slavery. Not only do we trace Black theology to the enslaved people in Egypt, but we can see the next logical evolution of God's action in the liberation from this bondage and the hope of a new promised land for the people long oppressed.

Speaking up is about receiving and responding to revelation. According to Cone, Christian theology is Black theology as it is witnessed arising from an oppressed community. We can also say that Black theology argues for the blackness of the passionate, spoken, revealed word.²⁹ Revelation and the immanence of God are central to Cone's theology of liberation. If God is for the oppressed, then God is so by being with the oppressed, revealed in and to the oppressed in history.

An important facet of Black liberation theology is looking directly at the portrayals of Christ through history and finding a conception of a Black Christ. For many Black theologians, it is important to speak of the Black Christ in order to dismantle any perceptions that Christianity and Blackness are somehow incompatible.³⁰ Christ of White American Christianity has consistently been depicted as on the side of the oppressors, blessing slavery, Jim Crow, and "law and order."

A deficiency in the development of a theology of the Black Christ, noted by Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, is the depiction's failure to address the struggle of a huge part of the Black community: Black women. While Christ was being liberated from the "White Male Jesus" of slave owners and racist preachers, Christ who understood the particular struggle of Black mothers remained unaddressed. From this place of critical examination of the development of the Black Christ, Brown Douglas explores readings of Christ's embodiment in the "wholeness" of the black experience of oppression.³¹ As Christ is liberated from "White Male Jesus," it opens up what Brown Douglas calls a "multidimensional" analysis of Christ's identity and identification with the oppressed community. She argues that this Christ "is a sustainer, liberator, and prophet in the face of such evil as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism."³²

²⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

²⁹ "For black theology, revelation is not *just* a past event or a contemporary event in which it is difficult to recognize the activity of God. *Revelation is a black event*—it is what blacks are doing about their liberation." Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.

³⁰ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1994), 78.

³¹ Douglas' use of "wholeness" is important in that it not only calls for complete understandings of Christ for the Black community, but links the struggle for Black liberation with "other oppressed communities, especially people of color around the world." Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 102.

³² Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 109.

Latin American Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology is most often associated with the struggles of Latin American Christians during the later half of the twentieth century. The movement grew out of the Latin American Catholic Church's need to address growing oppression from the governments of Latin America. Following on the heels of the Vatican II Conference (1962-65), the church took a more pronounced stance of affirming doctrines that spoke to the plight of the oppressed and justified active resistance through this theological discourse. Liberation theology became, for the Latin American world, a practice of distinction from Western European voices and a practical outpouring of thought that attempted to address the struggle of the oppressed during an era of imperial political influence throughout the region. The movement took into account the contextual needs that faced the particular communities of Latin America, rising initially out of Brazil but quickly spreading to church leaders in El Salvador and Nicaragua, where demonstrations and protests sparked theological discourse alongside practical application (praxis) of the liberationist perspectives.

The theological framework of Liberation Theology owes much of its development to Latin American theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino. It is then in the praxis, the daily action and speaking up of priests and ministry leaders like Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador where we see the move from orthodoxy (right thinking) to orthopraxis (right action). While liberation theology is framed by academic writing and discourse, it is first and foremost a theology of embodiment and engagement. This is true with the Black liberationist tradition and is clearly a part of the activist work of Latin American Christians to stand for the oppressed among them.

True Christianity is marked by participation in liberation. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff pointedly asks "How are we to be Christians in a world of destitution and injustice?" and directly answers, "There can be only one answer: we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel for liberation."³³ This is the Christian church being the body of Christ – lived out, embodied, practicing their faith in action. Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino remarks that many Christian thinkers have attempted to wrestle with the historical Jesus and make embodying his way into something that is systematized, something somewhat more academic and less "on the ground." And yet, he argues, "The real university of Jesus shows up only in its concrete embodiment."³⁴ Making common cause with the poor, as Boff puts it, or living into concrete examples of the faith, as we find with Sobrino, is the space where liberation theology finds the faithful Christian.

Boff also explores liberation theology as a multi-pronged movement involving action in spheres of life that include professional, pastoral, and popular. Looking at the working of the church, the

³³ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1987), 7.

³⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1978), 9-10.

movement has ideas (professional), teachings (pastoral), and practices (popular). It moves from the thought-centered institutions (professional) into the daily workings of parish life (pastoral) and “on the ground” with social movements of the actual people in their everyday lives.³⁵ As we will discover within the present-day voices of liberation, the movement is built by people struggling through their daily lives and seeking justice nonetheless. Liberation theology is a lived theology, a way of living Christianly that gets its hands dirty that walks the road alongside the hurting and the weak. While there is certainly room for thoughtful theological reflection and instruction, the immediacy of dismantling injustice lends itself to “less talk, more action.”

Here we find the witness of Archbishop Oscar Romero helpful as we review his rise to leadership and the immediacy of his action on behalf of the people of El Salvador. During the late-1970s, as a part of disputes with the Salvadoran government over land use rights and the claim of the rich elites of the nation on the proceeds of the work of the poor, many protestors were silenced through kidnappings and murders, common methods of political intimidation in Latin American during the late-20th century. Romero understood the liberation of the oppressed as an immediate need, something tied to their livelihood and flourishing in the here and now. He also reflected that while liberation from the oppression of today was necessary, liberation in Christ also (and more importantly) meant liberation from the bondage of sin and death in this world.³⁶ For Romero, the link between a robust theology of hope and a practical theology of immediate liberation was intertwined.³⁷

The Universalized Voice of White American Theology

Before we move to contemporary issues of speaking up for justice, it is important to note that significant white voices in theological circles attempt to speak up for liberation themselves. The challenge, though, is that for many white, Western thinkers, the frame of their theological inquiry often takes on a universal voice, collecting concepts and practices into a sort of collective that speaks for all but does not actually address the particular, contextual issues facing one people group. It is all too common for white thinkers to universalize solutions and take for granted the privilege of this position that other marginalized or minority groups do not have.³⁸ It can be

³⁵ Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 11-13.

³⁶ Óscar A. Romero and James R. Brockman, *The Violence of Love* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 129-130.

³⁷ In Romero’s “Pastoral Message to the National Council of Churches” in New York (1979), he expertly lays out a robust theological articulation of the biblical call for liberation, navigating present and eternal temporal realities as a dual-approach to the liberation of humanity.

Óscar A. Romero, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Jon Sobrino, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1985), 173.

³⁸ James Cone argues that for White American theologians, their scope and interest in matters of God’s involvement in humanity are “limited to their social interests.”

surmised that the work of white theologians, therefore, is to “do the work” to see how theologies have specific, contextual impacts and are not simply universal statements about God without application to differing social, political, and racial contexts.

We can contrast the universalizing influence of white theologians with the particularity of Cone’s theology of liberation. Cone makes “blackness” the universalizing force, noting that all oppressed peoples can come under the umbrella of blackness to recognize a shared hope and common imagination for what is possible should true liberation occur. As I begin to dismantle the “one size fits all” white theologies that frame my view of the world, I can begin to find a connection with the oppressed by embracing blackness as the liberated voice, blackness as the model for justice, and blackness as the ideal.

I had a professor in seminary who simply described theology as humanity’s “least inadequate” attempt at putting language and thought around the ways of God’s work in the world. Sadly, it seems that much of white theology struggles to merely encounter and explore an alternatively adequate set of language for God, namely, theologies of the oppressed. To encounter and attend, listen and join, is to overrun and consume in the white frame. Or perhaps we are simply afraid, seeking instead toned-down theologies that do not unsettle or disrupt the status quo.³⁹ In the pursuit of orthodoxy, the white American church has ignored the push of liberation theology’s insistence on orthopraxis.

Perhaps an even further development of liberating theology from whiteness is to situate the whole Christian community as a community of the oppressed.⁴⁰

Liberation NOW! 21st Century Voices of Black Liberation in the United States

What influence does liberation theology have on contemporary struggles for racial justice in the United States? Here we will examine some of the prominent voices of Black thinkers who are attempting to speak up for their people during the rising racial reckoning occurring in the United

James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*. Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 42.

³⁹ Cone argues that American theology’s sin is a lack of passion: “When it has tried to speak for the poor, it has been so cool and calm in its analysis of human evil that it implicitly disclosed whose side it was on.”

Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 19.

⁴⁰ “If we agree that the gospel is the proclamation of God’s liberating activity, that the Christian community is an oppressed community that participates in that activity, and that theology is the discipline arising from within the Christian community as it seeks to develop adequate language for its relationship to God’s liberation, then black theology is Christian theology.”

Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 10.

States following the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020. As we examine these sources, we will notice echoes of the liberationist traditions of the twentieth century and a newly liberated collection of voices who are utilizing this theological framework to discern action for today's issues. Writers and activists lifting their voices at such a time as this connect with their forebears as they speak the words of liberation which we trace back to the biblical narrative and the work of the church through history. The tune may have changed, the words addressing newly inflamed issues, but the song remains the same.

By rediscovering our Church's history of being a people mandated to set captives free and liberate the oppressed, we will find a toolkit to empower leaders, preachers, and activists to speak up with the winds of Scripture and tradition at their backs. One of the saddest realities I have discovered in this study has been the sincere lack of knowledge of the liberationist tradition within the Church (specifically the white church). And this deficit poses an opportunity – if we discover where we have come from, perhaps we can see where we may go.

While it may be too soon to name these writers and thinkers as firmly situated in the liberation theology tradition, we can discover echoes of being a “voice for the voiceless” of the past in the calls for a “courageous Christianity” for today, as is encouraged by author and historian, Jemar Tisby. We can also discover a denouncement of “whitemalegod” from activist and public theologian Christena Cleveland, which harkens back to twentieth-century explorations of “the Black Christ” by Kelly Brown Douglas, forms of Howard Thurman's Christ who stands with those whose backs are against the wall, and James Cone's image of the lynching tree cross. The echoes of liberation are here – our task is to attend to them and offer them up as opportunities to stand upon a rich foundation.

Drawing the links between the foundations of liberation theology, as found in Cone, Brown Douglas, Gutierrez, Boff, and others discussed above helps us trace the conversation to its present articulation. For example, Christena Cleveland, in her book *Christ Our Black Mother Speaks*, paints a beautiful picture of the Black Christ in her fullest, Womanist glory in contrast with the sterile, racist projections of “whitemalegod” so commonly found in American theology. Cleveland runs with Brown Douglas' articulations of the Black Christ and presents the mothering way of Jesus as a very real, deeply connected way of understanding how Christ interacts with the current struggles for racial justice in the United States.⁴¹ She works within the framework of the Seven Last Words of Jesus to reflect upon the present struggle of Black Americans for justice, connecting to the tradition of Good Friday readings of Jesus' words from the cross.⁴²

⁴¹ Cleveland links herself directly with Kelly Brown Douglas' work, saying, “Patriarchy and witness need to be exorcised from biblical interpretation.”

Christena Cleveland, *Christ Our Black Mother Speaks* (Self-published, 2019), 81.

⁴² Cleveland, *Christ Our Black Mother Speaks*, 81.

Historian Jemar Tisby links himself with the liberationist tradition by recounting the history of the American church's complicity in racial discrimination. Tisby charts the trajectory of the church as consistently bowing to fear and the threat of whiteness being overcome by a more holistic common faith found in communities that bridge typical racial divides. At the center of his work, Tisby calls for a renewed "courageous Christianity," one that is willing to stand with the oppressed and do the work to dismantle what has systemically kept people divided. Fear, Tisby argues, is central to the issues at play in today's conflict: "I am convinced that a fear of other people – what they will say, think, and do if we stand against racism – holds the church back from more aggressive action to bring about justice."⁴³ In Tisby, we certainly hear echoes of Howard Thurman's call to put aside the fear of all other things besides God and to turn toward the courageous call of speaking up for the oppressed.

Ibram X. Kendi, director of the Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University, closes his book *How To Be An Anti-Racist* with a personal story of his family's multiple fights against cancer. Both he and his wife faced serious cancer diagnoses that threatened their security and stability. Kendi likens the sickness of American racism to cancer that must be healed from. He argues, "Racism has spread to nearly every part of the body politic, intersecting with bigotry of all kinds, justifying all kinds of inequities by victim blaming...In the United States, the metastatic cancer has been spreading, contracting, and threatening to kill the American body as it nearly did before its birth, as it nearly did during its Civil War."⁴⁴ The present work of liberation needs images like this one (cancer) to beckon us into the fight. To practice liberation, to practice the Christian faith is to seek the eradication of this cancer. Healing will involve invasive surgery, intense chemotherapy, and a completely new way of life to follow. You do not survive cancer unchanged. But it can be confronted, resisted, and the body liberated.

The work of today's American liberationists stands upon the traditions of these aforementioned liberation theologians and with the hopeful prophetic imagination of what is possible with Christ the liberator. In America, there are, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. articulated, two traditions: the tradition of American exceptionalism (national religion) and the black faith in the "God of history." Kelly Brown Douglas argues that Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech pointed directly at the divide between a nationalistic religion that turns a blind eye to present racist issues and courageous, liberating Christianity. After pointing out the divide, King then connects the disparate parts in his hope for the future. Brown Douglas remarks, "After describing his dream in more detail, King

Another artistic experience of the Seven Last Words of Christ is Joel Thompson's 2016 choral production, "Seven Last Words of the Unarmed," which in 7 movements recounts the last words of unarmed Black men, gunned down by American police officers.

⁴³ Jemar Tisby, *Color Of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2020), 214.

⁴⁴ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, First Edition, (New York: One World, 2019), 234.

utilizes the language of faith. At this point, King is alluding to both the faith of a black people and the faith of a nation."⁴⁵ The two traditions (the faith of a nation and the faith of a black people) do not need to be at odds with one another but can actually come together in the hope of a future where all people's lives are bound up with one another. This is a Black faith, a faith where the oppressed rise in solidarity and unity. King himself remarked to the white folks in the crowd at the Washington Mall that their future was bound to the black future. True liberation is that which liberates all people from oppression. I mourn that the white church has ignored its own need for liberation for too long: liberation from superiority, exceptionalism, and silent indifference. Do we not want to be free from this, too? Is our liberation not bound up in the freedom of all people? Freedom for one group cannot be seen as a threat to another. Liberation equates to freedom for all, as the Church begins to recognize itself not in the enslaving forces of evil that have so long plagued its American history but rather in our common identification as oppressed peoples together. Our freedom is bound up with one another.

Speaking Up: The Call to Prophetic Witness in the White Church

Sadly, within the White evangelical Protestant church, the hope of binding up our future with the articulated witness of liberation theology is dismissed and resisted through silence. To connect the metaphor of cancer which has spread across our nation, the White church may slowly be acknowledging the symptoms of the silent killer that lives in our collective body but has thus far resisted treatment. It is as if we believe that it would be better not to know the severity of the infection and enjoy the blissful ignorance of not paying attention. Cancer ignored does not go away. Instead, it seeps deeper into our bones.

Many leaders in the white church have struggled with statistical declines in their congregations and a ceding of their witness from the influence of the public sphere. Leaders are burned out and tired and uncertain why the witness of Christ has lost its power. The problem is that in order to do the healing work and come to the discussion and activism for racial justice, the white church must confront its own illness and do the difficult healing work of eradicating the tumors. The scales must fall from our eyes.

In the Summer of 2020, I participated in a rally at Bellingham, Washington's Maritime Heritage Park in the weeks following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Hundreds of people turned out to hear city leaders, Black, Latinx, and Lummi and Nooksack Tribal leaders speak up about the beauty of our diverse city and the need for solidarity as we resist racism in our country. It was a long rally, almost 3 hours. About halfway through, I was tired. I was tired of standing, tired of breathing through a PPE mask on a hot summer day, tired of the sadness we all felt as we mourned the loss of so many innocent lives due to COVID-19 and state-sanctioned murders of unarmed black and

⁴⁵ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2015), 215.

brown folks. I turned to my friend and said, "I'm tired. But you know what? I'm realizing I don't get to be tired right now. So many people who are here are tired too, and they've been at this so much longer than I have." I was struck – the treatment, recovery, and healing from the cancer of racism in the United States will be costly. It is going to take time. But for the white church, we cannot keep hiding from the difficult work. We have to enter into the healing and find ways to grow and recover. It is time for this work to happen before the cancer fully overtakes us.

It is my hope that with this work of illuminating the history and tradition of liberation theology, white pastors and religious leaders will begin to do the healing work to restore their witness to justice that the Scriptures mandate. It is the prophetic imagination, as Walter Brueggemann calls it, that links theological reflection with social-political realities⁴⁶ – in telling the prophetic truth, we find the intersection of what was once universalized religion as it meets the ground-level struggles for justice.⁴⁷ James Davison Hunter offers a scathing critique of the American evangelical church's attempts to influence politics in the United States while ultimately undoing any hopes of a prophetic witness by turning into milquetoast influence peddlers.⁴⁸ It is to this legacy that we must speak. It is to this legacy that Jemar Tisby points as he illuminates the white evangelical protestant church's history of complicity and compromises around issues of racial justice rather than speaking up with courage and boldness when it is required. This is the work set before us – to stop, listen, learn, and act in solidarity and commitment with those who experience oppression at the hands of our society. This cancer will require swift, focused, invasive action. And on the other side, on the side of healing and restoration, here is the place where we speak up and step forward together.

Synthesis: Biblical Themes, Historical Conversation, and the Liberation of the Church

The focus of this work has been to explore the history of liberation theology and its application to the present struggles of speaking up for racial justice in America. White pastors and ministry leaders, as a whole, are conspicuously silent around issues of justice which may put their communities into the uncomfortable tension of needing to perform surgery and heal from the cancer of racism. The liberation tradition is strong with marginalized voices who have overcome the

⁴⁶ With definite echoes of Leonardo Boff's "doxology precedes theology."

⁴⁷ "Theological cause without social political reality is only of interest to a professional religionist, and social political reality without theological cause need not concern us here. But it is being driven by the one to other that requires us to speak of and wonder about the call to the prophetic." Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ "Needless to say, the actual legacy of Christians in relation to the [mandate to restore all creation] is ambivalent, to say the least. Willful negligence of moral and spiritual obligations, the abuse of power, and corruption through self-aggrandizement result in the exploitation of other human beings and the destruction of the resources of the social and natural environment." James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

fear and burden of speaking about these issues, no matter the cost. Carving out space in the theological conversation comes with great risk for marginalized peoples, with history as our witness. Oscar Romero of El Salvador, aware of the threat to his position as archbishop, still spoke up for the displaced and disappeared of his nation. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, to speak of his dream for America, with and for his people. Both men met their death from bullets that were meant to silence their witnesses. But their prophetic witness remains strong, and it is from their vantage point as men who loved their neighbor, on the ground, at the level of the practical struggles of the people. The work of the White church is to join in with this struggle on the ground. While there is a clear lack of strong voices who willingly identify their own complicity in systemic racism, this also presents an opportunity. Who will be the ones who speak up? Who will address the White community and call us to repent and heal? We must do this for ourselves. This is our work to do and our toil to undertake.

As I have begun my work in exploring how to bear prophetic witness to liberation myself, I have found resistance and tension in literature and in practice. Some call it "white fragility." Others disagree with the viability of concepts like Critical Race Theory or white privilege. These points of resistance serve as defense mechanisms from the difficult investment of dismantling the structures of a racialized society that White people have (often passively) benefited from. And this tension presents a critical question to the White church: does our discomfort and perceived threat to power stand over and above the authority of the Christian witness we purport to proclaim from our pulpits and with our daily actions? Based on the literary tradition, it seems that liberation is a word many white faith leaders would prefer to ignore or relegate to a sphere of individual piety and freedom from sinful living.⁴⁹

The biblical witness leads the church outside itself to play a central part in the liberation of all creation from oppression. This is the work of the Mosaic tradition, liberating the Hebrew people from captivity in Egypt and Babylon and turning their hearts back to YHWH. It is the witness we find in Christ and the apostles who sought liberation from the oppression of Rome and explored

⁴⁹ While there is not space to expand upon these topics here, two examples come to mind. First, there are ties between Latin American and Black liberation theology to Communist and militant Black activism, respectively, that have distracted the White church from giving the concept much credence. Specifically regarding Latin American liberation, the influence of the Soviet Union in Latin American politics clouds the view of many American Christians from understanding liberation as anything other than flying a Che Guevara flag and encouraging "guerrilla warfare" and activism.

The second example is likely more familiar to white ministry leaders. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard argues that Christians soften Jesus' witness in the Sermon on the Mount into "gospels of sin management." The liberating work Jesus advocates for among the poor and disenfranchised of first century Palestine is reduced in the 20th century to "4 simple steps to a healthy faith" and what Kenda Creasy Dean later described in *Almost Christian* as "therapeutic moralistic deism." If the purpose of the gospel is to liberate us from our vices and sins alone, then what purpose do political and social tensions play into any Christian witness?

encouraging people of faith to set captives free. And while we have perhaps danced around the concept in the modern literature, it is a faithful way for Christians to participate in the work of freeing the oppressed and marginalized in our world today from the systems that continue to hold them down. White faith leaders must step into the conversation of liberation. While we may not have the authority and place to speak about the plight of black or brown folks in America from our own experience, we can stand beside them and in solidarity with them and bear witness to God's prophetic work of dismantling the structures that separate and isolate our communities from one another. Do we believe in the diversity and richness of God's people, as expressed in our differences and all that we share? Then we must speak up when we see our brothers and sisters hurting and dying in the streets. Our conviction for the truth of the gospel demands this. And I hold great hope for a church that learns to speak up, learns to stand with the hurting, and, ultimately, begins to look a lot more like Jesus and a lot less like "whitemalegod." May we take courageous steps into this work and discover the true liberation of Christ for ourselves as well.

Appendix C – Milestone 3

Design Workshop Report

NPO Statement

The white church must be lovingly disrupted from postures of silence and privilege to leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the biblical narrative.

NPO Scope And Constraints

This project will be directed at white church leaders and parishioners, using story-telling and practical resources to encourage the church to speak up regarding engagement with issues of racial justice. There is a scope question regarding the word “justice.” By using story-telling and focusing on praxis, this work will do its own liberating in how it encourages white leaders to disrupt their power and seek collective liberation by sharing a common cause with traditionally marginalized voices. There are additional concerns about the specificity of what kind of justice must be focused on and who will train and lead these white allies in the work.

NPO Context

Through conversations with the Design Workshop group and 1-1 interviews, along with my own processing, I have discerned that a resource for the white mainline church will be valuable in attempting to empower Christians to speak up faithfully for the work of justice. I will focus on providing encouragement to pastoral leaders, as well as insights for parishioners as to why the biblical narrative compels us to love our neighbor through standing in solidarity for the collective liberation of all oppressed peoples. This work will begin with highlighting my own story and journey into the affirmation of liberation theology and its central thrust that Jesus always sides with the poor, the disenfranchised, and the powerless. The work, therefore, is to disrupt those who remain silent while the biblical narrative implores followers of Christ to raise a voice against injustice. I will do this by providing written resources for white church leaders and their congregations that will disrupt and realign our perspectives on our shared humanity and common cause in being set free.

Root Causes

Speaking up against racism and privilege is a threat to existing power structures and disrupts the status quo. Fear of losing influence, the threat of disrupting stable systems, and sharing honestly

about our own struggles with relying on the existing power structures make taking a stand difficult, if not impossible.

It is our perception that many pastoral leaders are stuck and therefore debilitated regarding how to speak up and participate in the liberating work of Jesus because of the risk to their livelihood and the position it poses.

Through our workshops and my interviews, I found a common thread of needing to identify the specific people and passion that I am called to and how my passion can help nurture and support liberation for even white church communities. This makes the white church uncomfortable because it requires self-examination and change. In a sense, the question becomes “if not me, who will speak the truth among my people?”

Three Big Ideas

- Church curriculum with training and discussion on liberation theology and its modern applications.
- Seminary level course in homiletics that engages the learning preacher on how to speak truth to power and leverage position for justice.
- A personal blog focusing on my own stories of coming into awareness of the need for white leaders to leverage power to speak up for God’s justice.

Definition Of ‘Done’

A “done” prototype will provide a practical resource and reflection space that engages the difficult questions of how to speak up without isolating others, leveraging privilege by inviting deeper engagement.

3 Concept Pitches

Church curriculum on practices of liberation

- Audience: Intended for white, mainline churches as a training resource pastoral leaders can employ with their parishioners.
- NPO: White churches are generally unaware of the powerful, Gospel-centered work of liberation theology and its practical applications.
- Benefit: Churches will gain a greater understanding of Christ’s liberating work in the Gospels and see practical ways they can participate in the collective liberation of their communities.
- Approach: This would be piloted with my PC(USA) congregation and others who are interested in Northwest Coast Presbytery in Washington state.

- **Risks:** A curriculum with this focus will stir emotions and concerns regarding political and radical applications of the Scriptures.
- **Assumptions/hypothesis to test:** I assume that many church members and leaders are actually quite willing to be challenged and seek to learn ways to apply their faith.
- **Benchmarks of success:** Participants take living action steps in participating in liberating work for oppressed and marginalized peoples in their communities and the curriculum is passed on to other churches.
- **Other approaches:** Many church curriculums focus on content knowledge. This curriculum would integrate spiritual practices to engage the participant in an empowered and active way, encouraging a drawing close to those they see as “other” and sharing common cause with the oppressed.

Seminary-level homiletics course

- *Audience:* Master of Divinity students training for the pastoral preaching ministry.
- *NPO:* Preaching resources do not adequately address the prophetic role of the preacher and the importance of disruption in the process of spiritual formation.
- *Benefit:* Seminaries can confidently train their pastoral leaders to engage their ministries and teaching careers with integrity for the liberating and prophetic call of the biblical narrative.
- *Approach:* This course of study will engage traditional preaching resources alongside studies of liberation theology and examine the resources that champion a more disruptive, prophetic witness.
- *Risks:* Seminaries and their students may become uncomfortable with the disruptive role preaching must take as it illuminates the forces of power that are often located in the pulpit.
- *Assumptions/hypothesis to test:* We can train preaching leaders to speak prophetically while also encouraging them to draw closer to, rather than isolate themselves from, those who are most impacted by a white-washed and comfortable Gospel.
- *Benchmarks of success:* This study curriculum will be adopted by an accredited theological institution to train its master’s students in preaching.
- *Other approaches:* Seminary preaching courses often focus on the role of training public speakers while neglecting the gravity of preaching with integrity to the liberating and prophetic power of Jesus. Training preachers to craft convincing sermons that comfort parishioners misses the mark of how liberating and transformative the witness to Jesus Christ can be.

Blog focusing on liberation theology and its praxis

- *Audience:* Content will be directed at ministry professionals and critical parishioners who are open to considering how their faith practices can spark a liberating movement in the world. Church leaders and church members.
- *NPO:* Church members and leaders need a model for the personal process of engaging liberation theology and how it applies to the practical, lived reality of the church.
- *Benefit:* By telling my story, I can make the process of “doing the work” more transparent and expose a broader audience to the theological framework and strength of liberation theology as it applies to our present cultural moment.
- *Approach:* The blog would focus on story-telling and personal processes to unmask and demystify the learning process to dismantle white privilege and leverage power.
- *Risks:* It might fail because by putting personal stories and process out “in the wild,” it exposes the writer to cynical critique and threatens the stability of staying silent.
- *Assumptions/hypothesis to test:* By speaking up about my own process, I can witness the possibility that “doing the work” is accessible and other white church leaders can step in and contribute to dismantling their privilege as well.
- *Benchmarks of success:* I would measure success through blog analytics and engagement in conversation with readers. I would also seek to share my writing more broadly in publications, which is a measure of success in that it speaks to the need of this voice in the public conversation.
- *Other approaches:* A lot of great content is available that addresses the “why” behind systemic racism and injustice in the United States. What I see a lot less of are real stories of personal disruption and change that make the process of seeking liberation reasonable, practicable, and necessary.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

- Male, white, 60s, ministry mentor and educator who works with marginalized youth.
- Female, white, 30s, seminary program designer and group facilitator
- Female, white, 40s, Episcopal priest
- Male, white, 40s, higher education professional and church member
- Male, Asian American, 30s, college minister and ministry colleague

One-On-One Interviews

- Male, Latinx American, 40s, musician, author, and leadership coach
- Male, white, 50s, pastor and former ministry mentor
- Male, black, 30s, national author and ministry

Annotated Bibliography

Goldberg, Natalie. 2005. *Writing down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. 2nd ed. Boston: Shambhala.

I chose this book because a big part of this process is about learning to liberate my voice and unleash my inner writer. Goldberg approaches the writing process from the perspective of Zen Buddhism, bringing mindful awareness to how we engage our stories and speak from our heart's passion while stepping back from critical assessments and embracing the heart and self-knowledge. This book was initially introduced to me during seminary as a resource for unlocking and harnessing creativity.

Jennings, Willie James. 2020. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging. Theological Education between the Times*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company."

In the hope of addressing theological and homiletical training, Jennings' newest book is an opportunity to study a reflection on the necessary shifts in higher education away from white-centric training. Dismantling the power of white male leadership in seminary education allows for us to think creatively about ways to bring in other prophetic voices and enrich our institutions with a broader understanding of the fabric of God's witness in the world.

Livingston, Robert W. 2021. *The Conversation: How Seeking and Speaking the Truth about Racism Can Radically Transform Individuals and Organizations*. First edition. New York: Currency."

To develop resources for the church and other organizations, we need to understand the roles of bias and privilege that are entrenched in these settings. Livingston's book offers perspective on the problem of racial bias in our organizations and illuminates ways we can engage the difficult shift to enact real changes in our daily lives. I appreciate this resource for its history and its practical applications to the work of the church and other institutions.

Rollins, Peter. 2011. *Insurrection*. Nashville, Tenn: Howard Books.

Peter Rollins' work has been a consistent source of disruption and hope during my ministry career. This volume approaches the dismantling process in our sacred practices and beliefs in order to offer a different and transformative perspective for how the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be lived out. Rollins specifically addresses the projective identification many parishioners apply to their pastors, needing them to believe for them so that they don't have to wrestle as deeply with the harrowing power of the Gospel. The work of deconstruction can lead us to a richer understanding of what faith in practice really looks like and how we might all participate in the liberation of the Gospel for the good of the world.

Wheatley, Margaret J. 2017. *Who Do We Choose to Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*. First edition. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Wheatley's resource approaches the significant cultural and social disruptions that we face as humanity and offers a perspective on leading through such changes. Rather than settling for ambivalence or apathy regarding the major changes our society is undergoing, Wheatley uses the image of gathering our strength as warriors that live and lead from our hearts. This book is about the humanity of leadership, the pain of doing what we know to be right, and the transformative power of grounded leadership in the face of global turmoil. I see this as a resource that undergirds the willingness to risk and speak when it is often easier to stay silent and acquiesce to our struggles.

Appendix C.1 – Design Workshop

Design Workshop Description

The Design Workshop for my NPO was conducted on Zoom on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, from 6-9pm PST. Workshop stakeholders were the following:

Male, white, ministry mentor and educator who works with marginalized youth.

Female, white, seminary program designer and group facilitator

Female, white, Episcopalian priest

Male, white, higher education professional and church member

Male, Asian American, college minister and ministry colleague

Design Workshop Likert Scale assessment:

4 - I "agree" that it was a successful gathering.

Agenda and activities outline:

Greetings

Purpose of our time – Most Viable Prototype is the end goal

6:10

The story so far...

- Why am I doing this?
- What stories have prompted this feeling of needing to push against silence?
- Liberation theology and silence in the church

6:30pm

Individual writing time - 10-15

Based on what we know,

One on Ones – 10 to 15 (not enough time, forces good ideas to stick out)

In the one on one, take time to review your brainstorming thoughts.

What links with one another, how does one contribute to or make more interesting another concept/train of thought?

What are common themes you share?

How would you begin to interact with these issues?

What must be said, done, practiced?

What do you find most intriguing about your partner's ideas?

Report Back to Group

7:00pm - Break

Return to 1-1 groups - Build list of potential ideas

What needs to stay, what needs to go, what's missing?

Report Back to Group

Debrief and Finalize top 2-3 options for Most Viable Prototype

Note Inviting Participants to Workshop

Greetings friends,

Thank you for being willing to support me in my Doctor of Ministry Design Workshop. We are scheduled for next Tuesday, December 7, at 6-9pm PST. You can find a link to my personal Zoom meeting room below, where we will gather.

A bit about what you're helping me with:

I am working to design a prototype of some sort of deliverable for my D. Min Project Portfolio. Last year, I drafted a Need/Problem/Opportunity statement with another group of folks, which helped guide the research and writing of a position paper related to liberation theology and the role of the church in speaking up for justice. (I've attached this paper for your reading, if you would like the background).

Here is the succinct Need/Problem/Opportunity statement, which gives focus to this broader work: "Faith leaders must be disrupted from postures of silence and privilege to discover and leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

On Tuesday, we will workshop some concepts that I'm exploring as possible prototypes to "build" (write, create) in the 2022 Spring Term (January - May). Here are a few ideas that are percolating. I hope we can emerge with 2-3 options for me to choose from after our gathering and once I've conducted a few 1-on-1 interviews with other practitioners.

- Preaching (Homiletics) course for Seminary education

- Blog focused on ways the Scriptures speak up for justice
- Podcast of some sort
- Curriculum for churches (spiritual formation / discipleship) that builds familiarity with justice-oriented Christianity.

"I want to change the way people in the church expect from the sermon." This is a paraphrased quote that I shared with my D. Min group this fall. A lot of this project has stemmed from my frustrations that folks don't expect the witness of the church to be disruptive to power and privilege. I think this boils down to a mis-understanding of what the "word proclaimed" is meant to be/do.

For Tuesday, come with open hearts, willingness to listen and share ideas. I will serve as the convener/moderator, but will lean on your collective wisdom to guide the direction of our time. I will come with some activities for us to work through and I will make sure we use our time efficiently. I trust and respect you all and look forward to your engagement on these topics. Should be fun! Any questions? Let me know!

Thank you so much,

Seth

Design Workshop Documentation

Following an individual writing session to brainstorm ideas in response to my NPO, I broke out participants into 1-1 partners, with myself meeting with one of the six participants. The following is feedback from those 1-1 sessions:

Group 1:

Homiletics/preaching course

Cohort/group model for existing faith leaders

Whatever it is that you do, we want it to be effective, not just ideas, compelling without being blame-driven. Invitational.

Move towards people with this problem, instead of being reactionary.

Freedom is something good for all to move towards.

Clarify your terms: white church vs. broader church? Transformation vs. witness?

Preaching/teaching - what's the distinction?

Group 2:

Be aware of scope and the "goldilocks problem." Project could become too big and undefinable.

Is this meant to inform, teach, or provide solutions?

Narrow your focus to more specific than "justice."

Is it the church, the white church, the mainline white church, Presbyterian church?

Name the audience

Awareness of the realities of power – power is socially located and can be leverage. Powers vs. constraints.

Use your story to position – how do I find these issues?

How can I make an impact given who I am?

Why does silence exist? Safety, belonging, threat to “who I am?”

Why have I been silent? Tell us that story.

If you’re looking at solutions, you need to identify your theory of change. How do we move?

Silent → talking Unjust → Just

What does change look like for the individual pastor?

Clarity of your what/why and what resources you need.

Follow what you find passion in – our passion is how we relate to others.

Problem is narrowing passion: what must get dropped, what needs to stay?

People are making strides – how can you contribute to this larger conversation as it develops?

Notes emailed from participant in Group 2:

Goldilocks and the 3 bears

Purpose/problem – what do you want to accomplish? – know about or call to action (both?)?

Value – why does this matter? What difference will this make? how do you transfer it from your thing to our thing? I know it matters to you, why should it matter to me/us?

Manageable goal – what is a doable size or piece of this greater thing for this context? Valuable part – enough but not too much

Clarity of goal – how will you know what you are doing? How will others understand the thing you are doing?

Resources – What do you need to accomplish this?

End game – how will you know you have accomplished your goal?

Group #3

Concern with language and specificity

This project is for the predominantly white, mainline church. Non-white churches do not have this problem of not speaking about issues of justice and liberation.

How are you sourcing the voices that influence this project? Are you listening to non-white voices?

How are you gathering them?

There must be honesty in this work, even if it indicts other pastors/ministry leaders.

We are rarely able to see harm unless you’ve had someone else show you.

How do people have their minds made up?

People actually want to be challenged (I question if this is true.)

If change happens without reconciliation with the other during the process, it is incomplete.

Following these reports from groups, we had a broader conversation about linking up some of the ideas that had been presented so far. Notes below:

Is this for PC(USA) pastors and their congregations? Then say so.
 People talk about “wanting to do the work” but what *is* the work?
 People don’t know what to do so they keep asking their BIPOC friends.
 We need a guide through this process, handlebars for taking next steps.
 A curriculum? Curated and open.
 Help people take a step.

Next, we went back into our breakout groups to begin to piece together practical ways to start implementing some of these ideas. I had primed the group with some considerations and they took those to run with. Below are the notes of their reports back to the group:

Group #1

Cohort with pastors, workshoping and engaging these conversations.
 Elements to discern the audience: is this for...

- Equipping pastors, freeing them, empowering them?
- Changing how the congregation perceives teaching?

Whatever you do, build in incremental bits of celebration!

Dream: that churches gain a new imagination and see things differently

Curriculum could build tools that guide us to ask questions, tell stories

Tie in with Scriptural narratives

Where and how will change be catalyzed?

Can you offer safety on this journey?

Group #2

Clarify your ideas, audience, and impact. The following is a matrix of such things related to the 5 ideas that were presented:

TABLE 1 - IDEAS, AUDIENCE, AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS

<i>Ideas/options</i>	<i>audience</i>	<i>impact</i>
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<i>Preaching (homiletics) course for seminary education</i>	Pastors & students	Influence - connections, broad bleed
<i>Blog focused on ways the scriptures speak up for justice</i>	audience?	Identified group or connections, broad bleed potential
<i>Podcast of some sort</i>	audience?	Identified group or connections, broad bleed potential
<i>Curriculum for churches (spiritual formation / discipleship) that builds familiarity with justice-oriented Christianity</i>	Local church(es)	Local/congregational impact, some bleed
<i>"I want to change what people in the church expect from the sermon."</i>	Local church(es)	Local/congregational impact, some bleed

Group #3

We're talking about pockets of cultural change

Disruption

Lots of ways to help change happen

Let the audience define the medium

Where is your passion and energy?

What is the worst case scenario here? What is the worst that would happen if you started sharing your ideas?

Am I learning something in this? Share it.

Speak from story. This disarms and humanizes, leverages the energy of the tension.

Peter Rollins and the projective identification church members put upon pastors.

Acknowledge that racism is real, make it real. If we can be honest, people can be given a space to mature. Honesty pushes us.

One-Page Post-Workshop Message To Stakeholders

Friends,

Thank you again for your participation in my D. Min Design Workshop. Our time together was rich with ideas and I left inspired to continue on in this work. I hope that I can invite you into it in further ways down the road.

Following our meeting, I have spent some time reworking my Need/Problem/Opportunity statement to reflect our conversation, as well as some of the feedback I have begun to gather from my 1-1 interviews. Currently, my NPO is: *The white church must be lovingly disrupted from postures of silence and privilege to leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the biblical narrative.*

We looked at a number of possible ideas for how to put some of these ideas out into the world. We discussed seminary courses, curricula for churches, pastoral preaching groups, publishing articles, and setting up a blog for story-telling and sharing in the process of “doing the work.” From our conversations, I have narrowed down my potential Most Viable Prototypes as 1) A church curriculum focusing on liberation theology and its practical application today; 2) a seminary level homiletics course that integrates liberation theology; and 3) a personal blog where I tell stories of my own integration of liberation theology with practices that lead me to being compelled to speak up regarding issues of injustice that face our world.

I welcome any additional ideas and feedback you have to offer and look forward to continuing this conversation with you. Again, thank you and may Christ’s liberating word break forth in you as we approach the celebration of His birth.

Peace,

Seth

One-On-One Interviews Documentation

Interview #1 Notes:

Laid out 5 big idea options for the Most Viable Prototype.
Conversation of “collective liberation”

Write out an account of post-church interactions and mailed feedback regarding “being too political from the pulpit” when I have preached about racism or justice issues.

Should you narrow your focus? Only to ground it in the human context. A high-level scope is ok if it gets grounded in your embodied, human experience. What is happening in human bodies matters. We need to hear human stories and see this as a site where the incarnation takes place.

Who is this for? Well, love the people *you* are called to love. This is also Incarnation.
Focus on sustainably training people to embody liberation

Question: How do I lead? This will address the how-to of your NPO.
People are too busy for more ideas.” There is plenty of “content” out there. Show me how you are

living this out, how you are doing the work.

How can you make a tool that helps you (and others) become a better leader?

Healed, forward-thinking: this voice is important to contribute

To make real progress in this work, you have to move white men. Get their attention and lead them, move them. A ton of resources and leverage will follow.

Do what you do from the place you are called to be - "be here now" - this is vital and unique

Mike Frost asks the question: "to whom are you called and who will go with you?"

Think of the faces and the names of the people you want to reach. Let this be about and for them.

Your audience is the engine for emotions.

Would you consider doing some interviews with the people you serve around how they engage your NPO?

Interview #2 Notes:

Relayed 5 prototype ideas that were encouraged by the Design Workshop group.

No negative ideas in there...just a matter of what is most helpful.

Nobody needs another lectionary resource that they end up putting on the shelf next to their other dusty commentaries. You don't want to create another resource people will ignore.

Is this going to just further entrench people in their established ideas?

We get set in our habits

We need a resource that will help us get over our fear and our resistance to change.

Usability and accessibility to embrace our fears

Something that helps when people are feeling immobilized.

Focus on courage, compassion, candor, and clarity in the dialogs around race.

Create something that will invite me into your story

Need to cultivate grace-filled congregations. Fearing less and more graceful.

There is no shortage of content out there - we need praxis. (practices).

Can you be a conversation partner for folks that leads to internal changes? Congregational changes?

De-shame the conversation

Shame locks us into lack of forward progress

Grace gets us moving

Convict, gently

Personal invitation - we each have something we can contribute to working on this problem. No beating up. Seeking mutuality and acceptance.

We all have something to offer (and learn).

Do I want to try to make the locus of change for the individual leader or for a group/congregation?

Maybe inducing change on an individual level can help make system change happens (i.e. a homiletics course for individual preachers that then impacts how they speak to their congregations).

Interview #3 Notes:

As of December 13, 2021, I am waiting to confirm a time for my third interview candidate. I would like to gather his input on this topic, as he is a nationally published author focusing on leveraging privilege for justice.

Appendix D – Milestone 4

Design Research Report

Prototype Summary And Findings

Prototype 1 Description:

Storytelling Blog and Social Media Presence about Preaching Process

I began developing a blogging presence (prototype post included in the appendix, as well as outline for future ideas), but quickly realized that an online presence like this would be much better suited as a complementary piece to help promote my other prototype. During conversations with Dr. Tupamahu earlier this term, I recognized that creating public content like a blog may “water down” the strength of my ability to offer a course for cost or publish any of the material later. Therefore, I see the blogging platform as a way to get the word out about other offerings and tease content that can be further developed in a course or in book format.

NPO Statement:

The white church has demonstrated postures of silence and privilege which need to be lovingly disrupted to leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the biblical narrative.

Research Question:

Does telling stories of the preaching process and disruptive encounters it can create offer white church leaders an opportunity to engage in conversation and reflection about their own ability to speak up in their contexts in relation to social justice issues like racism?

Assessment Benchmark(s):

Does sharing stories spark conversation and curiosity? Yes.

What kinds of reactions do stories generate and what do you hope they can offer? I have discerned that when I tell my stories to others, it helps build trust and understanding for where I am coming from. I hope they can disarm our resistance to hearing a courageous word from the Scriptures, read and proclaimed in the context of contemporary social issues.

Participant description

I distributed drafts of my writing to a group of pastoral colleagues, peers in ministry, and leaders in my life to get their feedback on the concept of a story-telling blog. The feedback I received is that

these participants enjoy my writing and would like to hear more from me. But I also recognize that shouting out into the void of social media may not be the most effective way for me to connect with and encourage ministry leaders. Instead, I feel drawn to creating focused content that can be available to those who are seeking it (ie: a continuing education, online course).

Summary of learning

What worked?

The process of developing a basic blog, using Substack, and creating an Instagram account, was simple and straightforward. I can continue to develop upon these as I work on the content of my online course.

What could be improved?

This work needs to be much more focused and specific than a diffuse “story blog” about me. While there is value in this concept, it has the potential to water down the focused message of my project: the white church must be lovingly disrupted from postures of silence and privilege...to speak a bold word of liberation that we find at the heart of the gospel.

What matters to the participants?

Participants responded to my outline and draft writings with curiosity and encouragement that I share my stories. But the sense was also “how do we do this?” There was a desire for tools and processes to help move from the posture of silence to a more courageous, open stance as pastors and preachers. Participants want tools and learning opportunities which help them interact with their communities to help build trust and understanding. This can then lead to more freedom in speaking up.

What was your important discovery?

The key discovery with this prototype is that it feels much more like a supplemental tool, rather than the “main thing.” I feel there is an opportunity to share my stories in context of the online course as examples of when I felt the need to be more bold in my preaching. And then to use the blog as a space to promote the course and ask some of the difficult questions regarding why our congregations might not expect this kind of teaching from their pastors. I can also see a blog format, along with social media presence, as a way to generate curiosity about learning more. I see many online creatives utilizing their social media and blogging presence to help advertise and spark conversation about their core topics. This is effective in creating community and generating conversation, but is generally in service of something else.

Prototype 2 Description: Online Preaching/Speaking Course

An online course titled *The Liberated Voice*, proposed to the Center for Transforming Engagement at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology as a potential offering for their online courses. I intend to create an online course for preachers and speakers who want to expand their abilities to speak the bold and powerful word of the gospel. I want to challenge them to evaluate how their

current methods lead them into these spaces of pain in our world. If they do not yet, then I want to provocatively, lovingly disrupt our patterns to discover a more liberated form of preaching. I want preachers to be freer, too. Not cavalier or unhinged. But mature, thoughtful, and bold in turning our congregations and communities toward the way of Jesus and his justice.

NPO Statement:

The white church has demonstrated postures of silence and privilege which need to be lovingly disrupted to leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the biblical narrative.

Research Question:

How can seminary training prepare white pastoral leaders to preach boldly into contexts of systemic oppression by utilizing the tools of liberation theology? And, in light of my research and conversations this year, I would add the following questions: What are alternative means to distribute content to church leaders who are not interested in taking another formal seminary class and perhaps do not have the time? What are ways to lovingly disrupt our preaching formation that are more easily accessible, shareable, and collaborative?

Assessment Benchmark(s):

I want to know...

Would you take a continuing education course that helped you be more bold with your preaching/speaking? Response: Yes. There was unified hope that my project would help the church and pastors develop a greater capacity to use their voices from their position of leadership to address issues like racial justice in their contexts.

Do you feel there is a deficit in seminary and pastoral training regarding how to “say hard things?” Another unified response to this question: *Absolutely*. It is clear that while seminary homiletics training does support a baseline of learning around “how” to preach, it does not adequately address the complexities of preaching a liberating word in contexts where this might make people uncomfortable or disrupted from their standard understanding of how the Scriptures interact with their daily lives.

What are some of the potential benefits and pitfalls you see in offering such a course? An online course offers a wide range of access for pastoral leaders across denominations and locations. I know that there may be some pitfalls with licensing a course under a particular institution (The Seattle School), as I will release ownership of the content we create and therefore have less ability to share it. However, I do not see this as a prohibitive issue. Rather, I see the benefit of having an existing institution, with its own design and evaluation process, to help guide me in focusing my work. The payoff is in having structure to work in. If an online course is helpful, then I know I can always create another and potentially market it myself.

Participant description:

During the process of this term and summer, I determined that the best way to reach out for feedback about the idea of this course was to conduct 1-on-1 conversations with clergy and academic colleagues.

Participant 1: Evangelical Covenant pastor, interviewed regarding his work on discipleship and the role of disruption in awakening the white church.

Participant 2: Program director for the Center for Transforming Engagement at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. Conversation with her multiple times this year regarding the formation of an online offering for their program.

Participant 3: Former pastor of Mennonite Brethren church who was recently asked to step down because of his public stance on inclusion of LGBTQ folks in the church. Conversation about what the risks are for speaking up and how to navigate them.

Summary of learning

What worked?

Creating a prototype of an online course helped me realize the benefits of such an offering in that it is easier to distribute and access than a traditional graduate-level course would be.

What could be improved?

This upcoming term, while I design the course, I want to interview a couple of colleagues who have created online courses independently. I imagine that I can get good feedback on what they have learned in offering their materials online, both with institutional support and without. Also, while I have experience in being interviewed on camera and speaking from a script, I would like to enlist support from others with more experience regarding how I can make sure my teaching is effective. My wife is an accomplished educator and is willing to offer me some coaching on how to structure the learning process of this course so that it considers teaching adult learners. I am by no means an expert on how to teach, so I want coaching on how my delivery works in encouraging participants to apply this work.

What matters to the participants?

I was struck by my interaction with Participant 1 and this encouragement he offered: There are too few leaders willing to enter this conversation about racial justice or other important social issues. He believes (and I agree) that we need many more leaders to enter these conversations, each from their own gifts and historical perspective, to contribute to a culture shift in how pastoral leaders engage the world.

What was your important discovery?

I initially set out to develop a graduate level course in homiletics. But during my outlining and prototyping work, I realized that developing a course that would meet seminary accreditation requirements and fit into a much larger curriculum would be outside the scope of what I am equipped to do. As well, traditional higher education courses are often more difficult for a wide

range of students to attend and access, for financial, denominational, and time-related issues. Instead, offering something asynchronous to busy pastoral leaders will allow them to learn at their own pace and do the personal reflection necessary to grow as preachers. Each of the leaders I have spoken to about this concept come from different contexts with different needs. Offering an online course will allow them to adapt their learning to those particular contexts, rather than offering a one-size-fits-all approach.

Background Research Essay On The Emerging Solution

This term I have deepened my studies on the work of preaching and its part in advocating for the liberation of oppressed people in the United States. I have found myself drawn to exploring the preaching act because it is such an important part of my Presbyterian tradition, and yet remains what I perceive as an underdeveloped part of the church's present action in the world. Preaching is the main part of so much of our worship and yet, it is often barred from being a vehicle for disruption and critical evaluation of how we are being formed as disciples of Jesus. Therefore, I have directed my energy in integrating my previous learnings from liberation theologians with preaching practitioners. My NPO focuses on the need to lovingly disrupt the white church from its silence about racial injustice and during my research and prototyping brainstorming this term, I have come to see the opportunity to encourage preachers and teachers in learning how to change their congregations' and their own understanding of what preaching can do to transform the church and the world.

The white church...

In *Rediscovering the White Church*, David W. Swanson makes plain the struggle for white leaders to engage and take a public stand on racial injustice. He argues that when leaders do speak up, "they are met with resistance. Their commitment to the gospels might be questioned. Or they will be urged to stop confusing politics with faith." He goes on to note that this resistance is rooted in the white church's historic complicity with white supremacy and a racialized society and that those who seek to disrupt such a landscape should "prepare soberly for the spiritual battle ahead."⁵⁰ It is here that we, the white church, can enter into true solidarity with those who are oppressed, a value at the heart of liberation theology.

An emerging realization for me in this process is that the issue of courageous, liberated preaching is not simply a problem for the white church. Black preaching expert, Frank A. Thomas' book *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* is a universal call to bold preaching, not just within the black tradition, but for the church as a whole. In his preface, he argues that "many clergypersons choose to be silent, realizing that 'politics' is polarizing, and the best thing is not to offend anyone by saying or doing anything that remotely could be conceived of as 'controversial.'"⁵¹ While the problem is widespread, the white church can learn much from the black church about what it means to speak

⁵⁰ David Winston Swanson, *Rediscovering the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), 63.

⁵¹ Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), xxiii.

up and put the needs of the oppressed ahead of any sense of political decorum or correctness. All things are political and formational, and therefore, must be brought under the authority of Christ.

At the heart of liberation theology is the truth that God stands on the side of the oppressed. Regardless of whether white or black preachers struggle to name injustice, God stands with the ones who are facing the injustice. God's partiality is for the hurting and the poor, which, in the United States, is overwhelmingly people of color who have been historically held down because of white supremacy. Deeply embedded in my own white faith tradition is the theological understanding that God is active in the world. But just because God is active, does not mean that God is neutral.⁵² Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez make this distinction very clear. They state, "the fact that God is active also means that God is *not* neutral. This is the point which many find most disconcerting in liberation theology. They would prefer to speak of a God who deals with all in the same manner...But liberation theologians tell us that God did not deal equally with Pharaoh and with the children of Israel. God's justice is equalizing, because it is unequal."⁵³

Postures of silence and privilege...

Frank A. Thomas questions the church, especially the white church: "Where is the moral imagination of the church? If religion sustains moral imagination, and there is little moral imagination, how is the church functioning? What is the church doing? It is my belief that the majority of the church has not served the people well."⁵⁴ At the heart of these questions is the conviction that we must transform, we must "do better," if we are to faithfully preach Christ's liberating message.

One of the most helpful resources I discovered in my research process this year has been N. Graham Standish's book, *Preaching to Those Walking Away*. Standish's book argues that traditional methods of preaching (manuscript writing, lengthy delivery, academic style and language) lead to a connection deficit for many people, especially of younger generations. Instead, he encourages a style of preaching that focuses on the spiritual encounters we have as we experience the text - how does it resonate with your experience of the divine and how does it connect with your spiritual journey? Rather than delivery of accurate content, the question for preachers becomes "how do I help translate this text into a real-life encounter with Jesus." I found myself reminded of the adage I was taught in my homiletics coursework in seminary - "you can't take people somewhere you haven't gone yourself." Standish argues for a kind of preaching that brings people into the spiritual experience and uses this as the ground for transformation.

⁵² I shared a bit about my portfolio project with an indigenous member of our congregation and his pointed response was this: "Is there some unwritten rule that the church is supposed to be neutral?" This question continues to drive and inspire me.

⁵³ Justo L. González and Catherine Gunsalus González, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed*, Abingdon preacher's library (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 22-23.

⁵⁴ Thomas *Dangerous Sermon*, xxix.

I believe one of the most pertinent pieces of this “spiritual preaching” concept, as it relates to my NPO, is in how it encourages the movement out of “postures of silence and privilege.” One of my greatest struggles through all of this project work has been the sense of needing to do it the right way or not at all. I have felt stuck and held back by perfectionism and I know this is common among many white pastoral leaders. We question, first, whether we are even allowed to enter conversations regarding racial justice, as we are the historic oppressors in the United States. If we can overcome this hurdle, then there is the question of how to make sure what we say is accurate, well-reasoned, and robust enough to stand up to criticism. While these are certainly important aspects of the preaching task, the pursuit of perfectionism ultimately leads to a posture of silence. I cannot say it right all the time, so I should just not say anything at all. However, with a posture of spiritual preaching which relies on our inner experience and how it resonates with the text, we are allowed to speak not from a place of expertise, but of wonder and learning. It is immensely refreshing being able to preach from a posture of inchoate, humble discovery, learning that the Spirit of God can give us empathy and heart connection with our fellow human beings as we stand alongside them in their struggles.

The contemporary literature also points out deficits in traditional preaching training and practice. There are certainly lots of resources about how to preach properly, orderly, and with well-studied biblical backing. What is missing is the fire and provocation that have to come with the kerygmatic act. And I have found in many discussions about my project idea that people are hungry for a more bold witness from the church.

Leverage the call for liberation...

Important to this topic of leveraging the call for liberation at the heart of the scriptures is the interplay of both the prophetic and apostolic traditions. First, there is a rich tradition within the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures of leaders speaking boldly and prophetically to the powers of their time. We immediately think of the prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and others, who were called by God to, at times, stand outside of their tradition and speak directly to its problems and missteps in following God. Abraham Joseph Heschel describes the Hebrew prophets as those “attuned to a cry imperceptible to others,” acknowledging that the power structures of the world are often deaf to and silent about the needs of communities outside their own.⁵⁵ The role of the prophet is to listen to those cries, to attend to the message of God which rises to a higher octave, and then speak back the prophetic word of truth to those who need to hear it.⁵⁶ As I reflect on my NPO, I see the need for tools which move white pastoral leaders to postures of listening and engagement with the plight of the other, which can lead to compassionate collaboration and voicing of injustice.

⁵⁵ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction*. 1, 20. [ed.], Harper torchbooks 1421 (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 7.

⁵⁶ Heschel, 9.

N. Graham Standish, on the other hand, examines the role of apostolic preaching in how we are to engage the difficult work of speaking up for justice. Standish argues that while the prophetic preacher has a place in biblical and contemporary contexts, they are often not the most effective partner in helping our congregations and communities do the necessary transformative inner work. Prophetic speaking is disruptive and we need it. Standish reminds us, though, that “prophetic preaching requires a great level of maturity on the part of the listener, who needs to hear what the prophet is saying, agree, and then change (their) behavior.”⁵⁷ I certainly agree in the value of fostering spiritual maturity in our congregations. However, Standish goes on to examine the witness of the early church apostles in the book of Acts. He says, “the apostles were honest in their preaching, but the goal was to *transform through love* rather than *change through criticism*.”⁵⁸ If we consider the barrage of news and activism surrounding the racial justice movement in the United States, it seems very wise to take a posture of apostling people along the journey, rather than contributing to the steady hum that can often lead us to feel guilty and therefore stuck and stifled from the participation in such liberation movements. We can help form our congregations, through preaching, to shift towards postures of liberation. Prophetic preaching will get people’s attention. Apostolic preaching will form healthier communities and action in the world.

Frank A. Thomas takes Walter Brueggemann’s concept of the prophetic imagination and argues for a style of preaching and engagement with justice that is more aligned with the apostolic preaching theory, what he describes as developing a “moral imagination.” He defines moral imagination as “the ability of the preacher...in the midst of the chaotic experiences of life and existence, to grasp and share God’s abiding wisdom and ethical truth in order to benefit the individual and common humanity.”⁵⁹ If the people tasked with bringing the message of Jesus to communities of faith are able to develop a greater “moral imagination” for how God is calling us to these difficult spaces of our world, our communities will witness, be formed by this, and live this out in the world.

Loving disruption...

Early in my research for this project, I was recommended a resource by Karen A. McClintock called *Shame-Less Lives, Grace-Full Congregations*. I have to admit that I was very skeptical about the book, because I felt it could be yet another resource for the white church to read and try to shirk away from the disruptive work that must be done to reorient ourselves towards engaging with racial justice issues. I wondered, “isn’t there a place for some healthy shame?” Don’t we need to feel uncomfortable so that we change? McClintock notes, “Some theorists suggest that shame is necessary in a just and reasonable society and it keeps us all from running amok. I argue that the

⁵⁷ Standish, *Preaching to Those Walking Away*, 47.

⁵⁸ Standish, 48.

⁵⁹ Thomas, *Dangerous Sermon*, 3.

only good reason to experience the effect of shame is that the feeling motivates us to explore it and eliminate it. Shaming ourselves and others serves no good purpose.”⁶⁰ If we connect this idea with prophetic preaching, we discern that making people feel bad about themselves is never really the point. The point is much more about discipling people back to a rightly ordered life with God, a life which bears the fruit of justice for all people. And, to connect this with Standish’s work, we find that the path for transforming our communities is to lead them through movements of disruption and growth, done in a way that generates more life, rather than stimulating frustration and regret that is often associated with shame.

Because of the move to a more apostolic model of preaching that transforms, I see the benefits once again of utilizing a continuing education tool like an online course to help build trust and understanding within the community of mostly white pastors that I find myself most often connected with. I resonate with the prophetic tradition and its ability to unveil and dismantle the power structures of privilege and silence, and yet, once the dust settles, we need something more to proceed and grow and transform for the work still yet to be done. Again, this draws us back to the idea of *lovingly disrupting* preachers: disrupt, yes, but do it in a way that helps us all see that we are called to something much deeper, much more engaged, than simply heaping shame on people for not showing up in times of struggle.

Personal reflection

I close this essay with some personal reflection on this stage of the process. This has certainly been the most discouraging part of my doctoral journey thus far. I have felt unable to articulate my sense of purpose in this work, especially as I have dealt with my own sense of shame for lacking an understanding of the contemporary issues of racial justice in my own country and feeling the lament of so many missed opportunities to support others in times of need. I have looked at the tradition of liberation theology with a deep fondness and love, but also with a stark realization that in many ways, I am the oppressor and outsider in this arena. I have questioned whether I even belong engaging in these topics.

In many ways, I feel that I have been processing in my mind, body, and spirit my own disruption from a posture of silence and privilege. I have recognized how good I have it, how privileged I am to be able to stand at this distance and ask these questions. I also notice that I feel like an outsider with my white pastoral colleagues, as most of what I am trying to articulate implicates them in “not doing enough” or being silent when they must speak. I lament this, but I also feel it is a part of my own transformation that is occurring through this work.

⁶⁰ Karen A. McClintock, *Shame-Less Lives, Grace-Full Congregations* (Herndon, VA 20171: Alban Institute, 2012), 19.

My hope is that I can make a small contribution to the work of dismantling racism in my community, a small bit of help to a behemoth of a problem. Instead of shaming or lambasting white leaders, I want to turn towards them and encourage us all to find our voices. We are never going to be able to speak for people of color or their struggle (nor should we). But we can speak to one another, to our communities, and call each other to a way of greater engagement, more freedom, and a more genuine alignment to our callings as preachers and leaders.

I believe there is much more good for the craft of preaching to do in transforming our communities and orienting us towards Christ's work for justice in the world. I believe that when we encourage preachers and help their communities develop new imaginations for what our collective work is, we can actually impact and make changes in society. Preaching has lost its foundation and our communities are not being disciplined as they could be. And so I close this reflection with the ardent hope that by learning, myself, to be courageous with my voice, I can encourage others to do the same. It is meant to be painful work - it is this way because we have much catching up to do and much that must be let go of in the process. But out of this valley of discouragement, I believe there rises a fire of passion and boldness, in me, and I hope, in those who I may support and encourage along the way.

MVP (Most Viable Prototype)

I intend to create an online course for preachers and speakers who want to expand their sense of what it means to speak the bold and powerful word of the gospel. I want to challenge them to evaluate how their current methods lead them into these spaces of pain in our world. If they don't, then I want to provocatively, lovingly disrupt our patterns to discover a more liberated form of preaching. I want preachers to be more free, too. Not cavalier, not unhinged. But mature, thoughtful, and bold in turning our congregations and communities toward the way of Jesus and his justice.

This course will consist of 6-8 lessons of 20-25 minutes in length, accompanied by discovery questions and activities to encourage pastors to step outside their current methods of engaging the Scriptures with today's work for justice. Each lesson will include personal stories from me and other preachers that give examples of what courageous preaching looks like (perhaps even including recorded sermon content). The discovery questions and activities will help people who speak evaluate their process, look for opportunities to build trust with their communities, and engage their own stories about when they discovered their voice's power and how they understand God's calling to lovingly engage our voices for the work of graceful liberation.

Finally, in order to keep the focus of this course, I will pursue distribution of the content through The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology's online course framework. This will help me know how to structure the course and make it an effective supplemental offering within the institution's design process.

Prototype 1: Story blog

Blog post: "I need to say something"

Drafted for <http://raisedvoices.substack.com>

Hi. I'm Seth. I'm currently pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry from Portland Seminary. And I've got a question that I've been rolling around in my head for the last couple of years: *Why is it so difficult for white pastoral and faith leaders to stand up and speak about the racial injustices which occur in our nation?*

But, in reality, that question has gotten a lot bigger. Let me back up...

In the days following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, I watched curiously and heartbrokenly as leaders (did/did not) respond and...lead. Some were quick to blame the systems, the individuals, and the history which led to this (among so many other) unnecessary deaths. And as I watched, I noticed something...there really seemed to be only a few voices of faith leaders entering into the conversation.

Wait! I don't mean ALL faith leaders. I mean white faith leaders - leaders like me. White men who have education and the calling to proclaim God's word of justice, but who kept on keeping on.

Thankfully, the COVID-19 pandemic captured our attention and relieved us of the responsibility of contributing our voices to this unjust situation; a situation that plagues our nation.

But then, things just kept happening. The pandemic got worse and people began to spread misinformation. Still silence. Breonna Taylor was murdered. Public servants used the Bible as a foil for political gain. Our country had an insurrection! We were all trying to manage how to lead in an incredibly difficult time, so it was understandable that many of us might look away to more pressing, local, contextual matters.

Something stirred in me that spring. It was an old question I'd held for years about what it means to speak the truth, to name injustice, and to draw people into the narrative of Jesus Christ as a liberator. I started looking back. Looking back to all the times that it felt like it was too much to speak up about in injustices we saw. The rising tide of climate change. The ongoing bigotry directed at the LGBTQ community. Persistent gun violence that targets our most innocent members of society.

In that stirring, the question grew. I started to wonder why it seemed like so many white churches and, I assume, their teachers and preachers seemed to not have an awareness for the stories of liberation that fill the Scriptures and have inspired collective, prophetic activism throughout our Christian heritage, up to the present.

As I explored this question (*why is it so hard for white pastors to speak up?*), I began to realize that in order to speak up, we have to find a connection point. Instead of using the Scriptures as an escape to which we turn to in order to look away from the wicked problems we face, we had to turn towards the problems, knowing that God's way is one of liberation and, in hope, leads to our collective freedom. (It is for freedom Christ set us free, right?)

What if the Scriptures and the way we proclaim them needs to be disrupted and realigned? What if we need to change our church's expectation of what they will hear when their ordained minister steps up to the pulpit? What if we led people with provocative, challenging words from the Word, upending the comfort of our hearts to find a deeper well of justice for all people?

I'd like to challenge us to do just this: to disrupt faith leaders, especially white guys like myself, to do the courageous, bold thing, and bring these pressing issues into conversation with and proclamation from the Christian Scriptures. And to bring our communities along with us.

This is my space to process all the hurdles and opportunities along the road to learning how to speak up. It's not easy. It involves learning how to be humble and admit what we don't know. It means confessing what we've done to perpetuate systemic injustice through our silence or even deliberate denial of its existence. And it looks like holding us all to a higher standard, for such a time as this.

Because, if we won't speak up now, if we won't participate and seek reconciliation and freedom for the oppressed now – when will we?

Additional Post Ideas:

- A White man's history of Liberation Theology
- The change up - moving from a "fastball" to a "curveball" in preaching
- The image we share - Our shared bearing of the image of God
- Karl Barth's "The Bible and the newspaper" – how do we connect contemporary events to Scripture?
- "Too political" - everything is political. How do we attempt to walk the line of faithfulness while not alienating parishioners?
- "But it's not my fight" - dealing with white guilt, silence, and deflection
- "Preaching to the choir" - Opportunities for deeper conversation and growth with our congregation's comfortable and familiar members.
- The sin of silence
- "But nobody taught me how to do this!" - addressing deficits in pastoral training and how to move forward.

Prototype 2: Online Course Offering -- Initial Form for online course proposal, The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology.

Working Course Title: The Liberated Voice - Finding Our Voices and Speaking Up

Purpose Statement:

This course seeks to empower preachers and speakers in ministry settings to be courageous and bold in how they bear witness to the suffering of the world and the power of the liberating love of Jesus Christ. Those tasked with preaching from the Christian Scriptures must recover a bold, liberating stance in their proclamation. This work will be disruptive, provocative, and healing to the public witness of the church by challenging stances of privilege and silence.

Who is the intended audience for this course? Consider stage of life/career, demographics, and psychographics. Complete the sentence "People who... (have a problem / felt need)." (Example: Late-career pastors who are uncertain how to create a generative retirement.)

For my doctoral portfolio project, I've designed the following statement of purpose to address the need for ministry leaders to find their voices and speak up for issues of social justice: "The white church has demonstrated postures of silence and privilege which need to be lovingly disrupted to leverage the call for liberation at the heart of the biblical narrative."

This course would be intended to aid in that "loving disruption" for pastoral ministry leaders in predominantly white, mainline church contexts. I have identified a significant deficit in homiletical and public speaking training around how we "say hard things" and wish to craft a course that encourages courageous engagement (bearing witness) to the struggles of our time.

I also hope that this course could focus on mid-career pastors and speakers, in the hope that it would be an offering taken for continuing education and encouragement to revitalize and inspire their preaching techniques.

Who will be the primary instructor(s) for this course? What are their qualifications - personal experience, career, and/or academic?

I would like to be the primary instructor. I hold an M. Div from The Seattle School and currently serve as an ordained Minister of Word & Sacrament for a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation in Bellingham, WA. I am currently pursuing my D. Min in Leadership & Spiritual Formation through Portland Seminary and wish to use this course creation as a part of my cumulative portfolio.

Are there other guest speakers or conversation partners you are wanting to include? If so, please list those here, or N/A if not.

Not sure, but very open to support

Proposed Course Description:

How do you speak up about issues of justice and social upheaval in an authentic, bold way? Rather than a course on “how to lose friends and alienate parishioners,” this learning opportunity focuses on leveraging the privilege and power of the spoken word to strengthen communities in their common cause of loving their neighbors in a divisive world. The Liberated Voice is an online course that seeks to disrupt and encourage ministry leaders to speak boldly in their contexts.

3 Learning Outcomes:

Participants will gain a robust understanding of biblical precedents for speaking up for liberation (Moses, Jesus, Peter, Stephen, Paul, etc.)

Participants will work to discover their own unique voice and learn to bring this to their particular context.

Participants will develop skills for establishing trust and report with their communities which then grants them permission to preach and speak about difficult topics.

How does this integrate with values of Formation, Integration, & Sustainability:

This offering is intended to help preachers and speakers deepen their practices of writing and speaking, forming them along the journey of lifelong ministry and service. It seeks to integrate traditional preaching techniques with contextual relationship-building. And it intends to encourage, while lovingly disrupting, preachers and speakers so they become more resilient and nimble in their ability to speak truth amidst times of social upheaval and shift.

How does this course connect with The Seattle School's mission:

Participants in this course will develop a grounded sense of their own voice and its power to influence and support the work of the church. This work will involve the full engagement with our own stories of struggle to speak up, the cultural pressures involved with saying a difficult word, and both biblical and contemporary examples of the disruptive, loving witness to liberation.

Why choose an asynchronous format with some discussion opportunities:

I believe a series of lectures and exercises that can be done at one's own pace will help pastors and ministry leaders take their time to work through the content and put into practice the learnings in their particular context. I would like to offer a space for support and conversation, as a Zoom meeting and/or utilizing an online group tool, such as Facebook Groups or Discord (or others?) to host conversations and offer mutual support in the work of learning to find our voice and speak up.

Publicity ideas for course

During this upcoming term, my D. Min Project work will focus intensively on a publicity plan and launch rollout sequence. I plan to develop a blog presence where I will write supplemental/teaser

content about the course, as well as include additional learnings on liberation theology and contemporary issues which demand active engagement with as a preaching/teacher.

I also know that I will have the ability to leverage the D. Min community at Portland Seminary and they may wish to partner in the distribution and publication of the course once it is completed. Additionally, I would hope to offer this course to be publicized by my local presbytery, Northwest Coast Presbytery, where pastors and ministry leaders have already expressed some interest in what I'm developing. This could easily springboard into broader PC(USA) attention.

I am also pretty active on Instagram (572 followers). I have a mailing list (mailchimp) that I utilized for two writing projects about 6 years ago that I'm also sure I could restart.

Suggested readings to work from or assign?

Gilliard, Dominique DuBois. *Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021. (biblical examples of liberation speaking)

Myers, Jacob D. *Preaching Must Die! Troubling Homiletical Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017. (mindset/philosophical take on re-envisioning preaching)

Standish, N. Graham. *Preaching To Those Walking Away*. S.L.: Fortress Press, U S, 2022. (practical concepts of "apostolic preaching")

González, Justo L., and Catherine Gunsalus González. *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed*. Abingdon preacher's library. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980. (historical example of liberation theology applied to preaching/speaking)

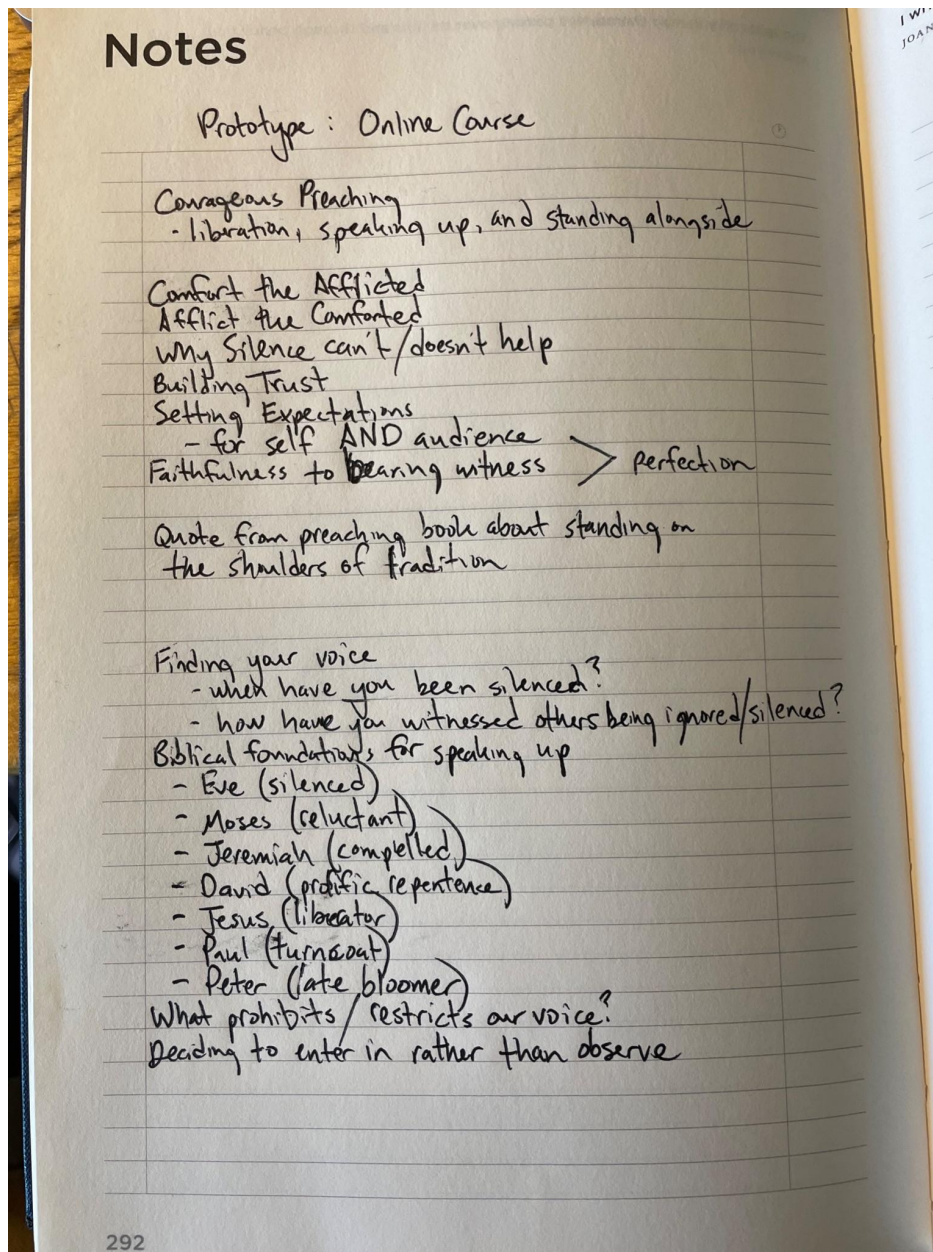


Figure 4 - Brainstorming Course Prototype

Additional Scriptural Examples:

Joshua - be strong and courageous. But we need to figure out how to talk about Joshua's conquest and the genocide of the people occupying the Promised Land before we can utilize his story as an example of bravery and courageous liberation.

Stephen - Perhaps a better example of boldness in the face of social pressures. He outlines the whole story of the people of God (Acts 7) and places his bold witness in the context of Jesus' liberating love. He is stoned by the powers that be, an example of how preaching/speaking can provoke strong reactions.

The Book of Acts – Along with Stephen, there are a number of good examples in the book of Acts of when God's people stand up to speak for liberation from the oppression of their society, religion, government. Acts might be a good case study text to lean on for focused teaching about speaking a difficult word, as we see the struggle of the burgeoning church in this period and their courage to keep the message of the gospel going following Jesus' ascension.

Appendix E – Project Appendix Documentation

Notes from key The Seattle School conversations:

Molly Caldera – TSS Instructional Designer – Zoom

A suggestion of Podcast from the NY Times's "The Daily" suggests that pastors are being pushed out of congregations because of Trump/MAGA influence.

Learning is uncomfortable – consider the allegory of the cave (Plato?)

The idea is not to reject the discomfort but lean into it to engage adult learners

Consider the role of trust in this course content, both for participants to build trust in me (the instructor) and how they can build trust within their communities.

Arc of Course

Think of it like storytelling. What's the central metaphor to use as a through-line?

- this will help in engaging people with asynchronous content

Gestalt theory – whole - part - whole

- We have alternative, but hopefully aligned experiences

Consider how to address what participant is experiencing in this course and why they chose to sign up for it. What's their motivation?

Where are they when they begin, and where would you like them to be when they finish?

Question: What is the estimated time for completion? Keep in the 8-10 hour range?

I should practice what I want participants to do.

Consider what people know already. What can you take for granted at the outset?

- They know how to preach (not a training course in preaching, though it can supplement)
- They have a context that requires them to use their voices.

Consider interviewing people

- Take on a particular subject
- Look for examples in applying my concepts

Usage rights

Lesson objectives

How will students self-assess: How will I know people are getting what I want them to get?

How will they change?

Take the time you need to integrate each learning objective before moving on.

- Take it into the world to reflect and share (making this learning immediately applicable)
- Encourage participants to take next steps, keep the learning active

Idea: Activity Matrix

How can we contextualize issues that we are seeking to address?

- Pastoral - Popular/Easy
- Global - Difficult

Example: It's an easy conversation for us to discuss global human rights (general, approachable).
It's a difficult conversation to address internalized racism in individuals (or ourselves).

Kristen Houston – Associate Dean of Academic Administration – Zoom

The Seattle School institution has a high level of trust in me. They will give me the parameters for filming this course, but most of this can be done by myself at home.

Looking at the learning modules framework that is used for the Resilient Leaders Project.

Filming assistance: Andrew, Austin, and Trevor (Seattle School marketing staff)

- Kristen putting me in touch with them to review guidelines / best practices
- Home or church microphone, lighting, and camera will be sufficient

The ideal for these courses is that they are easier and faster to produce and get to market. My course will fit nicely with upcoming offerings in 2023 related to "discourse" and institution-wide conversations.

Share content with Kristen, Misty Anne (Dean of Teaching and Learning), and Kate (Director of Center for Transforming Engagement for feedback

Materials

- Working with Cheryl Goodwin (Seattle School librarian)
- EBSCO articles/chapters for learners

Still planning for a Fall 2023 launch, with filming in Spring/Summer.

Keep writing, and share for feedback!

Andrew Lumasia – TSS Marketing Department – Zoom

Marketing department call – set up [Riverside.fm](https://www.riverside.fm) account for recording purposes.

Discussion of purchasing a boom mic for recording. A lapel will work as a backup. I could use my existing Sennheiser pack and Countryman headset.

Look into a Teleprompter App for the iPad

As you go through the writing and recording process, note if there are particular quotes in the texts that would work for promotional quotes and social media advertising.

Technical Support (Copied content from The Seattle School)

If at any point during the course you experience technical difficulties such as video playback issues, see below for an explanation of common situations and easy solutions. If you are still unable to resolve your concern after reviewing these troubleshooting tips, there is a contact email address at the bottom of this page to reach us directly for additional support.

Restarting Your Computer or Device

“Turn it off and on again” is often tech support’s favorite advice. Laptops, computers, and essentially any kind of electronic device should be restarted frequently to perform well and remain healthy. You need to rest, and your machine does too!

Basic Web Browser and Computer Requirements

Sometimes, web browsers can be out of date or buggy. If you're experiencing issues in viewing your course, try another browser to see if the problem persists. For the best user experience, we recommend one of these popular web browsers:

[Google Chrome](#)

[Mozilla Firefox](#)

[Safari](#)

If you are using an older browser, please try upgrading or switching to see if that improves your experience.

Updating Your Browser

Out-of-date web browsers can cause issues with video playback and other settings within an online course. Sometimes browsers will update on their own, but other times you’ll need to do it manually.

If you're experiencing problems, we recommend checking which browser you're currently using and whether it's up to date by visiting whatsmybrowser.org. We always recommend that students in our courses use updated versions of Chrome or Firefox for the best user experience.

Updating Chrome

Google Chrome makes it easy to identify if your browser needs to be updated by changing the color of the menu in your browser. A green menu means an update has been available for 2 days, orange suggests it's been available for 4 days, and red means 7 days. Update Chrome by selecting the menu and clicking Update Google Chrome. If you don't see this button, you're on the latest version. For more information on updating Chrome, continue [here](#).

Updating Firefox

By default, Firefox is set to update automatically. However, you can also do it manually by selecting the menu > About Firefox > Restart Firefox to Update. For more information on updating Firefox, continue [here](#).

My Video Isn't Loading At All

The majority of the time video issues are browser-specific; for example, it may be that you have a plugin installed that is blocking the videos. Try using a different browser or an incognito window instead.

If you're still having issues after trying the above, then please send a support request with the following information:

Which videos you're having a problem with - is it all videos in the course or specific ones? Please provide details.

Which browsers have you tried - please try at least two browsers (Chrome, Internet Explorer, Safari, Firefox, etc) before messaging us. If you still can't get the videos to play, then please let us know which two browsers you've tried (name and version). Not sure which browser you're using? Head to whatbrowser.org to find out!

What kind of device you are using - Computer/Laptop, iPhone, iPad, or Android phone/tablet?

My Video Is Playing Poorly

Our video player defaults to using HTML5 technology, which works best on up-to-date web browsers (Chrome and Firefox are ideal, but Internet Explorer and Safari are good alternatives). If you are viewing the course in an older version of your browser, we recommend updating it to the latest version.

My Video Is Loading Slowly

Sometimes a slow internet connection can cause problems in loading your online course videos. We recommend testing your internet connection's speed by visiting www.speedtest.net. With one click of the Begin Test button, the site will show you your connection's:

Ping speed: the speed of your connection's response time after you send out a request. The faster the ping, the more responsive your connection is.

Download speed: how fast data can move from the server to you. Usually, you'll be able to download much faster than upload.

Upload speed: how fast you can send data to others -- e.g. sending files via email, putting photos on social media, or video-chatting.

A slow internet connection can cause problems, especially when it comes to downloading course content like videos. If your internet connection is to blame, consider restarting your modem, upgrading your internet plan (if at home), or physically going somewhere with a better connection.

Uninstalling Third-Party Browser Extensions

While third-party extensions can be extremely useful during web browsing, some have been known to cause problems in online course websites. Below are a few ways to test whether or not a browser extension is causing an issue with your online course viewing experience.

Testing the Web Page in Another Browser

Before anything, use another browser (Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, etc) to test the web page experiencing problems. Ideally, use one that does not have any third-party extensions installed.

If the issue is still occurring in the other browser, an extension is probably not the cause. However, if the issue is not occurring, an installed extension in your other browser may be to blame.

Disabling or Removing Extension(s)

Once you know that an extension is responsible for the problems, you can test a particular extension by disabling it and re-loading the page. If disabling the extension stops the issue, you can pinpoint it as the culprit, and either remove it or keep it disabled while viewing your online course.

The difference between disabling and uninstalling browser extensions is that disabling an extension will turn it off without removing it, whereas deleting or uninstalling it will remove it entirely.

Follow the links to learn more about managing extensions in [Chrome](#) and [Mozilla](#).

Extensions That Have Caused Past Problems

Below are a few popular browser extensions that have caused issues in the past for some online course students.

- **Adblock**
- **Security extensions (like HTTPS Everywhere)**
- **Grammarly**
- **Diigo**

TIP: Research online to find out if there are any known conflicts/issues with extensions you have installed in your web browser. If you have a lot of extensions, this can save you time rather than testing them all one by one.

Still Need Assistance?

Please contact us directly at transforming@theseattleschool.edu

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