“The devil doesn’t care how great a success a preacher is in any other field, if he can just kill the prophet in him.” Vance Havner

“One of the primary reasons for this loss of edge and loss of way in the church has to do with the *cultural captivity of the gospel*. In this process individuals and groups seek to use the church to legitimate their own identity, power, and status rather than seeking to transform their identity, power, and status to the demands of the gospel.”

Barbara Harris

Preaching, according to most congregational profiles, is the most important thing a minister does. Yet, many clergy rarely consider what their preaching is actually doing in the life of the congregation. They may wonder if the message of the day has been well received, if they preached a good one or laid an egg, but not many of us spend adequate reflection time considering what we believe our sermons should be doing to help our congregations take their proper shape. Even fewer of us plot out ways our preaching may help our congregations take their proper shape. Our days become filled with the many other demands on the preacher’s time, so we find ourselves wearied by trying to meet the bottomless felt needs of our congregants. Preachers experience what Willimon and Hauerwas refer to as feeling “like they are being nibbled to death by ducks.” Preachers face burn-out without having done what is arguably their most important responsibility.

In this class, we are going to investigate two techniques for preaching about contemporary social issues. The first way is not to isolate the “issue” at all, but to show in our preaching that the various manifestations of living out our most basic theological claims include a particular way to understand this issue. The second way is to address an “issue” as an isolated topic of a sermon. Obviously these are not completely distinct techniques but rather a particular sermon may lean more towards one than the other. As a result of this class, you should discover (or strengthen) your theological grounding for preaching which leads to intentional social shaping of the faith community and you should be emboldened to speak more prophetically from the pulpit. You will be required to reflect on materials heard and read, to discuss ideas in class, to make a class presentation over a particular perspective, and to preach two sermons on social issues. Each assignment is aimed to give you experience in being bolder and more prophetic, to give you the opportunity to experiment with language and methods, so you will be comfortable talking about topics which are considered difficult and often even threatening.

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Since the class is small, each student will have additional responsibilities to be prepared for each class session and to present material for others. As such, there will be several weeks we will not meet as a class.

**Required texts:**

*Preaching Liberation*, by James Harris  
*The Bible in a World Context*, edited by Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz  
*Preaching Justice*, edited by Christine Smith  
*Christianity, Poverty and Wealth*, by Michael Taylor  
*Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, edited by Walter Wink  

There are additional articles and books on reserve for your reading pleasure. If costs of texts are a problem for you, please see me. In addition, I invite you to read at least a sermon each week, preferably one on a social issue. There are some collections on reserve.

In a small class, attendance is particularly important. We need each voice in discussions. On days when you preach, feel free to wear whatever garb is appropriate to your tradition. Don’t forget to turn in a copy of your manuscript. Please make sure your CTS box number is on all written work.

As a courtesy to class members, cell phones need to be turned off at the beginning of each class session.

**Graded Assignments:**

Reflection papers and collegial feedback  
Sermon showing issue related to theological claims  
Class presentation  
Sermon on homosexuality  

**25%**  

**Class Schedule**

January 20  
Introduction to preaching on Social Issues. Looking at 2 techniques. Considering various goals for preaching. Because we will want to preach to a congregation of more than 4 people, we will be discussing the possibility of gathering for seminary community worship on several Thursdays at 4:30 and/or inviting guests to add to the congregation on the Tuesdays of in-class preaching.

January 27  
Use of the Bible in preaching social issues. Lecture and discussion. For class: Have read Dietrich & Luz book. Turn in 4 page reflection paper, showing you have read the book and discussing their hermeneutic assistance in your own use of the Bible in preaching.
February 3  No class

February 10  Theological and biblical claims that impact ideas of wealth and poverty in sermons. Choosing scriptures to preach from.
For class: Have read Taylor. Turn in 3 page reflection paper, showing you have read the book and discussing the importance of preaching about wealth within our society.


February 24  No class

March 2  In-class preaching.
Choose presentation articles.
For class: Have manuscript copy to turn in.

March 9  Reading Week

March 16  Switching to specific topics/issues. Determining when it’s time.
Preparing the congregation.
For class: Have read Harris.

March 23  In-class presentations and discussion from Smith and Harris. Importance of doing your social issue research.
For class: Have read Smith. Prepare ½ hour presentation of your material, especially assisting our understanding of how this assists preaching social issues. Have a manuscript or outline of your presentation to turn in for comments.

March 30  Preaching on specific social issues. Looking at one issue. Understanding how controversial human sexuality (esp. homosexuality) can be (esp. in the church) and how eager your congregations are to hear you speak on it.
Class discussion on Wink articles.
For class: Have read Wink. Be prepared to discuss articles.

April 6  Easter Break

April 13  No class

April 20  In-class preaching.
For class: Have manuscript ready to turn in.

April 27  Wrap-up session. Thinking about preaching on other topics.