

# The Sermon As Symphony: Preaching The Literary Forms Of The New Testament

Forty years ago the one thing that could be said about sermons was they were biblical. Unfortunately, they were sometimes tedious too. Narrative preaching aimed to fix that, advocating for a dynamic experience of the text over against a static lecture. Preaching could be like the parables of Jesus, intriguing and compelling.

*The Story of Narrative Preaching* is the story of seven students who are enrolled in Professor Freeman's preaching course. Once a new trend, narrative preaching is now older than most of them. As Professor Freeman notes, two things went wrong with narrative styles: over time the church became biblically and theologically illiterate, and the promised stress on experience didn't always measure up to the weight of the gospel.

Readers are invited to sit in on the class, to reflect on the expositional nature of preaching and to experience the stories of some modern storytellers—Flannery O'Connor, Alice Walker, and others—to see what they might teach us about narratives of depth. In the end we discover what may be the most important word in preaching.

"Mike Graves, one of the most insightful and learned voices in the narrative world, begins this book with the story of his own coming to consciousness as a narrative preacher, and then tells the story of teaching a preaching class in which the class members engage literature, story and narrative preaching. . . . I did not want to put it down. This volume will be a welcome resource in preaching classes, clergy groups, and individual reading. You don't even have to be a preacher to be drawn into the story."

—RONALD J. ALLEN, Professor of Preaching and Gospels and Letters, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN

"Mike Graves's *The Story of Narrative Preaching* reclaims narrative preaching as an instrument for touching, not only people's emotions, but also their intellects. Its very form embodies Graves's central premise, that narrative is capable of both stirring creativity and offering crucial content. Shaped as an account of a seminary course in narrative preaching through the use of short stories, the book lives up to its title in its engaging, skillful interweaving of experience and exposition. . . . No book can be all things to all people, but this one comes close."

—ALYCE MCKENZIE, Le Van Professor of Preaching and Worship, Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, TX

"No one knows more about narrative preaching—its history, its inner workings, its possibilities—than does Mike Graves. In this fine book, like Ezekiel's wheel within a wheel, Graves employs narrative to explore creative narrative preaching. The result is a double blessing—a very engaging read and a most informative preaching text."

—THOMAS G. LONG, Bandy Professor of Preaching, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

"What a strange way to talk about narrative preaching—by actually creating a story (and with twenty scenes!). It's about Dr. A. M. Freeman and the seven students enrolled in his seminary class on narrative preaching. Professor Freeman believes in utilizing short stories in, around and beside biblical texts—and at the end even lists over one hundred 'preachable' short stories. I wonder where Freeman learned all this. Must have had a very creative teacher."

—EUGENE LOWRY, McElvaney Professor of Preaching emeritus, Saint Paul School of Theology, Leawood, KS

**Mike Graves** is William K. McElvaney Professor of Preaching and Worship at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, and Regional Minister of Preaching for the Greater KC Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Among other titles, he is the author of *The Sermon as Symphony: Preaching the Literary Forms of the New Testament* and *The Fully Alive Preacher: Recovering from Homiletical Burnout*.

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