GOD’S STORY IS MY STORY: 
THE APPLICATION OF A NARRATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY 
TO PREACHING 

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Dedicated

With thanks,

To my father, who asked me to preach at his funeral, and my mother, who affirmed that request;

To Leigh, who held my hand, Freya, who shared my tears, and Skye, who sang the words when I was unable to.
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Abstract

This dissertation applies the orienting principles and key processes of narrative practice to the preaching of sermons and the teaching of preaching. Narrative practice is a practical application of a narrative epistemology. A narrative epistemology suggests that we make meaning in our lives by constructing a multi-storied narrative that relates our experiences in a somewhat linear fashion. The personal narrative is negotiated with our community and society, and has real impacts on our identity and life. Through therapeutic conversations the narrative practitioner assists people to recognise the hopeful, preferred and previously unrecognized storylines which open up the possibility of a changed relationship to the issue about which they are seeking assistance. The therapeutic process can be conceptualised as the collaborative reauthoring of the personal narrative.

From the parallels found in narrative practice, this dissertation proposes that the transformational capacity of the sermon may be its contribution to the reauthoring of the personal narrative to embrace its intersection with God’s story.

The specific processes of narrative practice which are explored for their application to preaching include that of scaffolding for meaning, the use of metaphor and image, and “deconstructive” techniques. The position of the preacher is considered, as are the role of the congregation and the liturgical context of sermons. Suggestions are made regarding an approach to teaching preaching from a social-constructivist perspective.

The dissertation concludes that a narrative epistemology provides a vehicle for linking together much that is known about effective preaching, and may therefore be a useful concept to reflect upon when approaching the preaching task, and a useful framework for the teaching of preaching.
I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature ................................................. Date ........................................
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I am continually amazed at the strength and sensitivity of our daughters, Freya and Skye: you make the world a better place. Thank you for the myriad ways you give me support.

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