

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

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10th June 2011

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

Acknowledgements

It is with sincere gratitude that I wish to thank Andrew Dutney and Peter Lockwood. I imposed on friendship in asking you to supervise this work, and in return you gave me space to explore, affirmation and support.

Michael White's creativity inspired so many of us, but far more than that, he gave the gift of friendship generously.

I grew up listening to my father's sermons, and through him came to know a gracious God. Many other gifted pastors and colleagues have been a blessing to me, and people from whom I have learned much. I think particularly of John Sabel, Rick Mickelson, Rick Strelan, Peter Close, Bob Kempe, Tim Muller and James Winderlich. The encouragement of the students and faculty of Wartburg Theological Seminary, including my preaching professor Jim Nieman, and Barbara Lundblad and the women of the Auburn College Preaching Academy 2003, has contributed much to the shaping of my pastoral identity. Members of the North American Academy of Homiletics and Societas Homiletica have been generous in their sharing. Thank you, to all of you.

There are so many companions who have shared segments of my journey. Among them I'd like to name

Tony—thanks for collegiality and time to talk.

Allie, Margaret, Helen, Helene, Hanna—without the community of women theologians of the LCA, who, like me, do not know their place, the road would be very lonely.

A particular thanks to my loving, extended family, who trod the fine line between interest in my work and harassing me to finish, despite all the shared things that were put on hold while I needed "just two more weeks."

Thank you, Leigh, for your love, for the confidence you have in my Call, and for taking up the baton when I had no more energy.

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.

And thanks to our gracious and loving God, who through the gift of our grandchildren re-awakened in me a sense of awe.

