

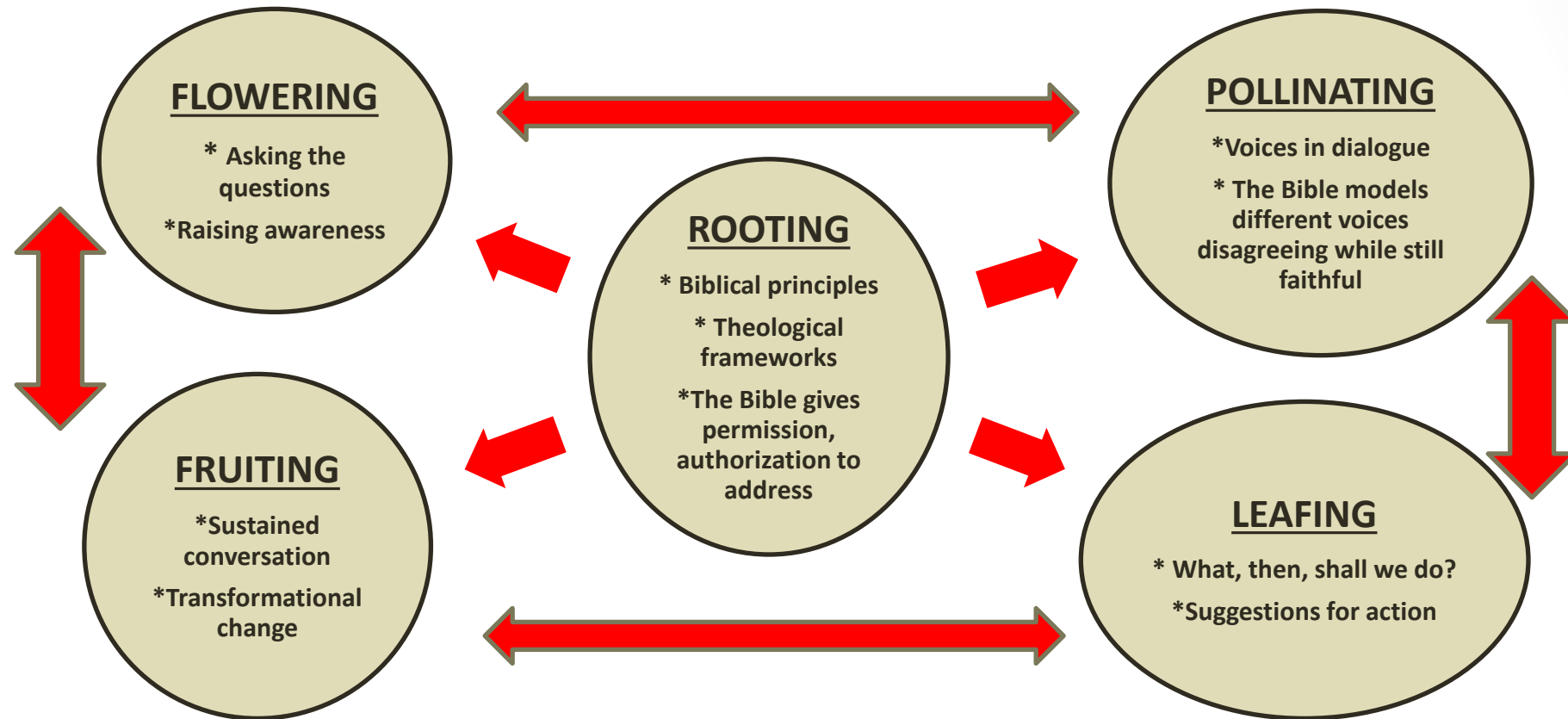
Reading Romans 12:14-21

Using a Dialogical Lens

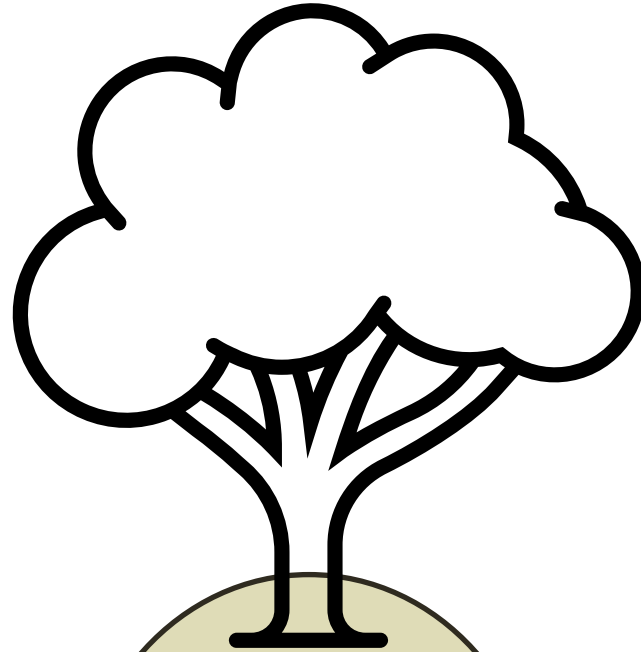
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FIVE PATHS TO PROPHETIC PREACHING



From: *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* by Leah D. Schade (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

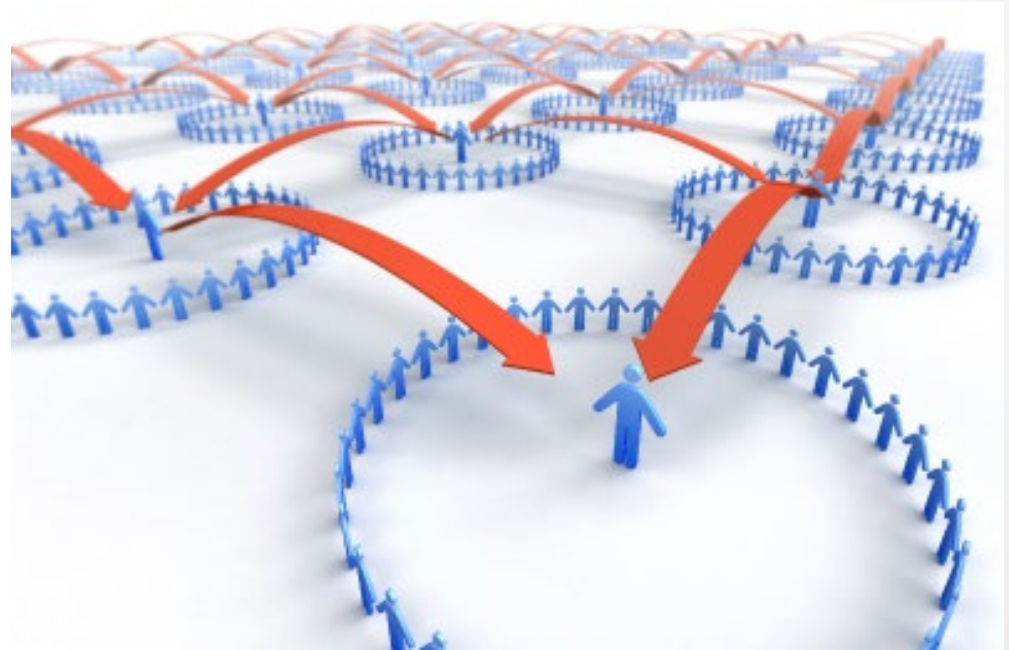


ROOTING

- * Biblical principles
- * Theological frameworks
- * The Bible gives permission, authorization to address

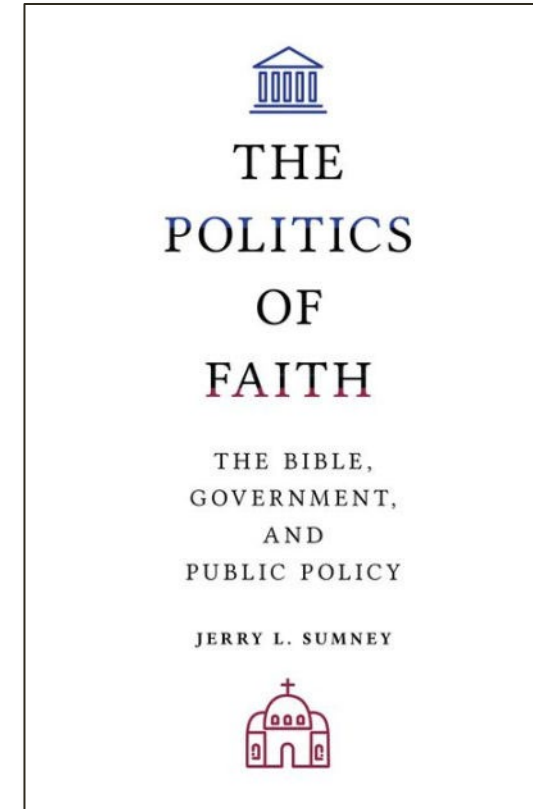
A “Rooting” Sermon

- **Makes the case for why it is not only acceptable, but necessary, for ministers to preach about contemporary justice issues and for churches to discuss them.**
- **This sermon helps congregations understand that dialogue about important – even controversial – issues is grounded in the witness of scripture.**



Where do we find community deliberation in the Bible?

- Moses appointing elders (after Jethro's sage advice) – Exodus Chapter 18
- Phineas and the Israelites deliberating and avoiding a war – Joshua Chapter 22
- Ezra-Nehemiah rebuilding the temple, restoring community and worship after returning from exile
- The Acts of the Apostles – difficulties, debates, discernment and decisions about the early church
- Recommended reading: *The Politics of Faith* by Jerry L. Sumney



Interpreting Scripture and Preaching Through a “Dialogical Lens”



1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

- **In broad terms, describe how this passage of the Bible is an instance of conversation, dialogue, or some other kind of interchange.**
- **Who is the (presumed) author, and who was the intended audience?**
- **What were the social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?**
- **What other books or authors in the Bible are implicitly in conversation with this text or author?**
- **If the story is a narrative, who are the characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?**

2. Determine what's at stake.

- **What is the presenting issue?**
- **What are the fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters?**
 - **What are they afraid of losing?**
 - **What or who is threatening to them?**
- **What are the overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?**

3. Identify the values.

- **The deeper ideals and principles that underlie a character's actions or writer's intentions.**
- **What is important to them? What do they cherish and hold dear?**
- **What is their "best self" that could emerge?**

3. Identify the values.

- Find the overlap – and the gaps.
- What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share? In other words, where are points of commonality among or between them?
- At the same time, where are there vast differences? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

- **What is God doing in the midst of this interchange?**
- **Is God's action explicit, implicit, or apparently absent?**
- **How is the larger community wrestling with or expressing their faith in God?**

5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

- What is this exchange, dialogue, or conversation teaching us about what it means to be church in the midst of contentious public issues?**
- What can we learn about being faithful people who engage the conflicts and sin of the world, while maintaining the commitment to grace, hope, and love?**
- What can we determine about who God is, what God does, and what God intends for us based on this interchange and dialogue in the passage?**

6. Suggest possible next steps.

- **What are next steps we might take based on what this biblical passage models for us?**
- **Are we sensing God's invitation to engage public concerns?**
- **Are we being invited into dialogue with each other, with this passage, and with God about specific justice issues?**

6. Suggest possible next steps.

- Are we learning what *not to do* based on what we see in this text?
- Are there common values we share that can be the basis for our response to a societal matter?
- What kind of church shall we be, knowing what the Bible models for us, and knowing what challenges our community is facing?

This initial “rooting” sermon makes the case that we are permitted, authorized, encouraged, and even urged to preach about public issues because Scripture has already opened the conversation for us – we need only to step into it.



Let's try it!

Applying the Dialogical Lens to a scriptural passage

- 1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.**
- 2. Determine what is at stake.**
- 3. Identify the values.**
- 4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.**
- 5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.**
- 6. Suggest possible next steps.**

Romans 12:14-21

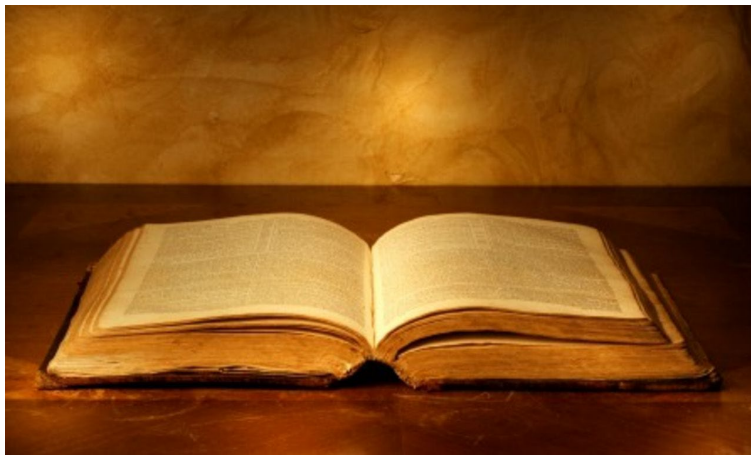
14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

- a. Presumed author, and intended audience?
- b. Social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?
- c. Other books or authors in the Bible implicitly in conversation with this text or author?



- a. Paul wrote the letter to the church in Rome circa 57-58 CE.
- b. Original audience was Gentile believers living with various degrees of persecution within the Roman Empire. Paul's appeal for the Gentile believers to support the Jerusalem church was to help ease tensions.
- c. Paul quotes Deut. 32:35 in v. 19 ("Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."). And he quotes Proverbs 25:21-22 in v. 20 ('if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.'). Thus appealing to Hebrew scriptures.

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

d. Characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?



Direct:

- Paul

Indirect:

- The Roman Church

In the background:

- Roman Emperor and gov't, military, temple system

2. Determine what's at stake

- A. Presenting issue? What does each of them want?
- B. Fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters? What are they afraid of losing?
What or who is threatening to them?
- C. Overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?



“When Paul speaks of faith, he does not mean that a person simply holds to a particular set of beliefs. Faith for Paul is an orientation of life. It includes what people believe, but also encompasses their attitudes and behaviors toward others. For Paul, if a person does not live as they should, that is good evidence that he or she does not have faith—at least not what he calls faith. What you believe and how you live are inextricably linked for Paul.” (Jerry Sumney, *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 8)

Thus, imperatives for Christian living are about: INTEGRITY!

3. Identify the values

B. What is their “best self” that could emerge?

C. Where do values overlap, points of commonality?

What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share?

The Roman church could live into its faith and values as Christians, supporting each other and other churches in the face of economic and social oppression.

There are two things they can all agree on:

- 1) Jesus is the Son of God.
- 2) The religious establishment (as a tool of an oppressive government) is not their friend.

So what does that mean?

For our church . . .

For our faith . . .

For the way we see the relationship between the church and society?

3. Identify the values

D. Where are there gaps? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?

The values of Paul and the Roman Church will never align with the Roman mythology and empire because they serve different purposes.

* There are two different “kingdoms” – Caesar’s and God’s. This is a primary conflict in Paul’s Letter to the Romans.



4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

A. What is God doing in the midst of this interchange?

B. Is God's action explicit, implicit, or apparently absent?

Jesus: Though not directly mentioned in this passage, his teaching is woven throughout. This section is reminiscent of the Beatitudes.

God: Paul calls for peace among them instead of engaging in vengeance – which is the purview only of God.

Thus, there is no place for violence in Christian ethics.



4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

C. How is the larger community wrestling with or expressing their faith in God?

This passage contains a vital ethical question for the Roman church: how should we treat each other and those who persecute us in light of Jesus's death and resurrection?

What would it look like to:

- “Bless those who persecute you”?
- “Live peaceably with all”?
- Provide sustenance to those who declare that you are the enemy?



5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

Your responses:

A. What is this exchange, dialogue, or conversation teaching us about what it means to be church in the midst of contentious public issues?

- How far do you take social issues to communicate with other people without turning them off?
- How do we find common ground?
- God intends for us to live peaceably with all – practice humility, non-violence
- Connection to Jesus, mutual support, prayer, financial support



5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

B. What can we learn about being faithful people who engage the conflicts and sin of the world, while maintaining the commitment to grace, hope, and love?

- All about community – be the light to shine in the darkness
- Faith should inform our politics, not the other way around
- Faith without works is dead



6. Suggest possible next steps

A. Next steps we might take based on what this biblical passage models for us?

B. Public concerns God is inviting us to engage? Are we being invited into dialogue with each other, with this passage, and with God about specific justice issues?

- Gun violence – not just pray, but take action, thoughts and prayers are not enough; we need policies
- Need to treat more than the symptoms, but the root causes; fear that leads to the violence
- As Christians, we must learn to disagree agreeably and have conversation with people we don't agree with, and come to some kind of conclusion; leave anger and accusations behind; realize the personhood of each one

How might we (the church) function as a place that invites dialogue about these issues?

6. Suggest possible next steps

C. Are we learning what *not* to do based on what we see in this text?

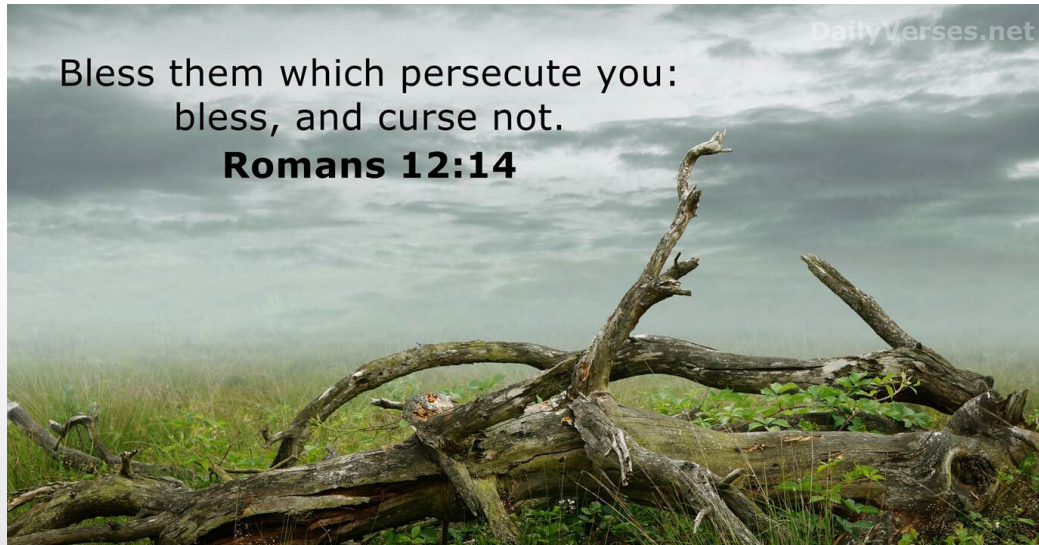
D. Common values we share that can be the basis for our response to a societal matter?

- If we've come together for 4 days, what would a resolution from the ICCC look like that would embrace from the teachings we've learned while we're here. Can the church make a statement with one voice.
- Be not overcome with evil – overcome evil with good; look at ourselves and how we respond and then react and go forward
- Don't react immediately; give yourself a minute, let your mind reflect, find the good points and respond

Bless them which persecute you:
bless, and curse not.

Romans 12:14

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Next session:

Applying the Dialogical Lens to upcoming passage

Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; ⁴for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.