Arguably within the history of the Wesleyan movement, no other art of ministry has enjoyed the central role that preaching has. From the fields of Britain to the American frontier, preaching has been a primary means of evangelism, education and formation of disciples in the Wesleyan Way.

Today, preaching still enjoys a central place in United Methodist worship and ministry; of course, even in saying this, we are confronted by the fact that there is no normative way to preach as a United Methodist pastor. Some United Methodist clergy are “lectionary preachers,” using the 3-year calendar of readings as the basis for their preaching. Others are “series preachers,” choosing topics and themes as they deem appropriate for the life of the congregation. Still others preach Sunday-by-Sunday on texts that they choose.

Styles vary, too. Some United Methodist preachers are calm and contemplative in delivery; others are fiery and booming. Some are scholars of Scripture, mining the text closely; others are theologians, giving voice to the themes of a text and the tradition. Some are pastoral, seeking to care and console. Some are prophetic, seeking to unsettle and challenge. Some are evangelical, seeking to convict and convert. Some are all of these.

While there is no single way to preach as a United Methodist pastor, there are ways of evaluating the work of preaching. For example, does a sermon honor the Scripture, or was the text a forgotten preface to random reflection? Was there preparatory work and was it sufficient? Does a sermon speak a truthful word about the church and the world? Does it convey the Good News of God-for-us-in-Jesus? Does it announce a word that demands a response? Is it delivered in ways that are engaging, in ways that the word can be heard and understood? Are there signs that the Spirit was at work in the sermon and in the life of the preacher?

In this class, we will reflect together on preaching as a central act of your ministry. We will talk about preparing to preach, the preaching act itself, and what follows from it. We will assess our present practices and welcome change. We will listen to each other, learn from each offering, and grow together in our capacity as preachers of the Good News.

Required Reading

Together, we will read a variety of brief articles and essays about preaching, public speaking, and theology. These texts will serve as background for our conversations together. We will also be reading (and watching) sermons from throughout the history of the Church and from contemporary pulpits. Some will be models of what is possible in preaching; some will be cautionary tales of what is possible in preaching. All have been selected because they are instructive.
COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Pre-session Assignments

1. Students are to submit a video (either by DVD or by sending a link to an online video) of a recent sermon. They are also to submit whatever manuscript, notes, or outline that they carried with them into the pulpit for that sermon. **Please submit the video and notes by June 1, 2015.**

2. They are to watch the following four videos online:
   c. The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, “Crazy Christians,” from The Episcopal Church’s General Convention, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abJMKeyCWoQ

3. As they watch these four videos, they are asked to:
   a. Outline each presentation, charting the main “moves” made by the speaker;
   b. Make brief notes of what “worked” and what didn’t “work” for you in the presentation (here it might be helpful to think about both content and delivery).

4. Students are asked to purchase and read the following in preparation for class:
   a. Sermon Anthologies (324 and Advanced: choose 1 to purchase and read 10 sermons)
      iii. *This Incomplete One: Words Occasioned by the Death of a Young Person* (ISBN-10: 0802822274)
   b. Theory of Preaching (324: choose 1 to read; Advanced: choose 2 to read)
      ii. *Gathering up the Fragments* (ISBN-10: 0788026054)

5. **Advanced students** are asked to write a 1000-1500 word paper comparing and contrasting the understanding of preaching expressed by the authors of the books that they choose in 4.b. above. This paper is due by email by June 15, 2015 by 5 p.m. to nek@duke.edu.

In-session Assignments for all Students

1. Students are to keep a daily “discovery journal,” documenting key insights and learnings from each day’s class session. Daily entries should be no longer than 250 typed words but do not have to be in paragraph form. The final journal should be emailed both to Christine and Nathan by Friday, August 8, 2014, at 5 p.m.

2. While in residence at Duke, students will be working on the creation of a single sermon. There will be multiple dimensions of this assignment throughout the two week residency, ranging from scriptural exegesis to vocal exegesis to drafting introductory and concluding paragraphs to finishing a full manuscript. The sermon will be delivered in small groups in the second week.

3. **Students participating in this class as an advanced course in preaching will have additional assignments made available by March 15.**
PROPOSED COURSE OUTLINE

Listen

Monday 7/20
- Overview of course
- Overlapping listening: to others, to your congregation, to the church year, to the culture, to the text, for the story
- Listening to others: How to evaluate others, guidelines for feedback, review preaching seen ahead of class, what makes a sermon “work”, and how to know if it does?
- Listening to your congregation; preaching the occasion, the reality in the room vs theoretical “audience”;
- Listening to the church year
- Listening to the culture
- Listening for the story: Storytelling in the Pulpit
- Assignment: Prepare a 3 to 5 minute story (not a sermon) from a fresh perspective on your assigned text. Tell the story from a particular character’s point of view. This doesn’t need be a named character, could be a bystander, an imagined servant, one of the Pharisees, etc. Try to find a fresh view into some small portion of the text, incorporating that character’s experience.

Tuesday 7/21
- Listening to each other (3-5 minute storytelling in class)
- Small group scripture reading exercises, text, subtext, and emotion.

Look

Wednesday 7/22
- Listening to the text: The Public Proclamation of Scripture
- Last hour: Workshop exegesis or Meet with Christine/Nathan for individual review (3)
- Assignment: Read your scripture aloud 4 times, using the guideline to prompt imagination and freedom in reading.

Thursday 7/23
- Looking into a text: discovery and exegesis
- Moves in a sermon

Friday 7/24
- Looking for flow: the preparation and design process
- Habits of preparation
- Look out: on not getting ahead of or bending the text (Where is the text headed? Follow the text, not bending it to say what you want.)
- Conclusions and applications
- Sermon analysis of video to review conclusion/application
- Last hour: Workshop conclusion or Meet with Christine/Nathan for individual review

Develop

Monday 7/27
- Opening sentences and introductions: Finding the “hook”
- Individual workshop time to write opening sentence
- Choice and use of illustrations, appropriateness, length, placement
The Practice of Preaching

Course of Study, Summer 2015

- Last hour: Workshop an illustration or Meet with Christine/Nathan for individual review

Tuesday 7/28
- Language and Imagination, Cutting the Chaff
- Individual workshop language exercise
- Reconvene to share and discuss opening sentences

Deliver

Wednesday 7/29
- Presentations in small groups
- Workshop sermonette or Meet with Christine/Nathan for individual review

Thursday 7/30
- Break to small groups: Scripture tableaux and embodiment exercise (30 minutes)
- Reconvene for performance with feedback
- Preaching the Occasion

Performance Assessment for 324 Students

25% Prework assignments
25% Discovery journal
25% Sermon
25% In-class participation

Any late papers will be penalized as much as one full letter grade for each day the paper is late. No paper submitted after the due date will be eligible for the grade “A.” If a paper is not turned in at all, a “0” will be assigned (making it difficult to pass the course).

Grades will be assigned A – F on a plus/minus scale.

Performance Assessment for Advanced Students

30% Prework assignments
20% Discovery journal
20% Sermon
20% Mentoring assignment
10% In-class participation

Integrity

Students are asked to abide by the Course of Study policy regarding academic and personal integrity:

*All students are expected to do their own work. Friends and spouses may help with spelling and punctuation and may proofread papers, but should not participate in the research and writing of the papers. Plagiarism, the use of someone else’s work without giving appropriate recognition, is a highly serious matter of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism and other instances of academic dishonesty will be dealt with harshly and may result in the failure of the class involved. It is at the discretion of the Course of Study Director whether to report academic dishonesty to the student’s District Superintendent, the Board of Ordained Ministry, and the Bishop.*
Inclusive Language

Students are asked to abide by the Course of Study policy regarding inclusive language:

Using inclusive language that expands and enriches our understanding of God includes the practice, when writing and speaking of persons or God, of using precise language and explicit pronouns; referring to collective and abstract nouns without gender; and avoiding the exclusive use of either masculine or feminine pronouns for God.