



The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy

Kirk Byron Jones

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What if preachers were as contagiously joyful in their preaching as Louis Armstrong was in his playing and singing? As rich in their sermonic renderings as Sarah Vaughan was in her musical vocals? As honest about heartache as Billie Holiday was every time she sang about the blues of life? As alluringly clear as the angelic voice of Ella Fitzgerald? As tenaciously uninhibited in the action of creating as Duke Ellington?

Of

course, this is too much to ask of people, even those called by God. However, it is not too much to ask this question: Can preaching be enhanced through the metaphor of jazz? Can an understanding of the inner dynamics of jazz--its particular forms, rules, and styles--inform one's practice of preaching as well? Can jazz's simultaneous structure and spontaneity help preachers better understand their own art? The answer to these questions, says Jones, is an unqualified yes. He explains how one can dramatically improve one's preaching through understanding and applying key elements of the musical art form known as jazz. No musical background is necessary; all examples are well explained and tied in with preaching.

The key elements include innovation (what one commentator refers to as "the experimental disposition of jazz"), improvisation, rhythm, call and response, honesty about heartaches, and delight. After discussing the reality and role of each of these elements in jazz, and how they can be important for preaching as well, each chapter concludes with five exercises for applying the jazz element to preaching preparation and performance.

Drawing on a deep love of jazz and enlivening the discussion with insights drawn from the realities of African American preaching, Jones introduces readers to rich and rewarding possibilities for constructing and delivering the sermon.

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