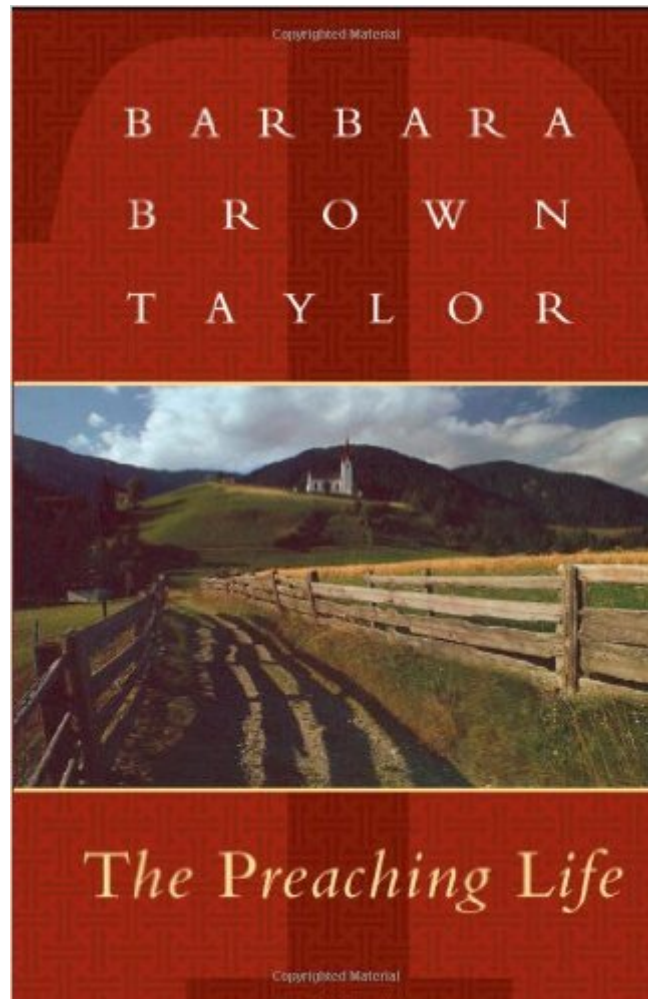


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# The Preaching Life (Dan Josselyn Memorial Publication (Paperback))



## Synopsis

In her bestselling preaching autobiography Barbara Brown Taylor writes of how she came to be a preacher of the gospel as a priest in the Episcopal Church. In this warm and poignant collection, Barbara Brown Taylor's humor and wisdom delve into the meaning of Christian symbols and history—both her own, growing up in the Mid-West and Georgia, and the Church's, from its earliest beginnings in the Near East. Seamlessly, Taylor weaves together reflections on her vocation with the long-standing struggles of the Church to hear, respond, and remain faithful to its mission of holy love. She moves effortlessly from reflection to homily, concluding the volume with thirteen sermons illustrative of the answered call. This rich meeting of memoir, theology, and sermon stands at the center of Taylor's work, bringing into one book the origins and the vision of her remarkable preaching life. But her voice is not sentimental. Instead, Taylor explores Christian meanings and histories in order to hear and speak, in the present, for God. "God has given us good news in human form and has given us the grace to proclaim it," she writes, "but part of our terrible freedom is the freedom to lose our voices, to forget where we were going and why. While that knowledge does not yet strike me as prophetic, it does keep me from taking both my ministry and the ministry of the whole church for granted." This book on the calling to preach is itself a call to reawaken to the activating presence of God. "Because I am a preacher, it is through a preacher's eyes that I see. . . , but because I am a baptized Christian too, it is from that perspective I write. Either way, my job remains the same: to proclaim the good news of God in Christ and to celebrate the sacraments of God's presence in the world. Those two jobs are described as clearly in the baptismal vows as they are in the ordination vows, which give all Christians a common vocation."

—from Chapter One

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There is little that can be said about Barbara Brown Taylor's *The Preaching Life* that has not already been said in the 10 years since its publication, except, perhaps, to quote Luke 24:11 as the official church response to her work: ". . . these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." Like Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James the Younger, and Joanna (and many others) Barbara Brown Taylor's Christian witness hits home. She has been to the cross: "As best I can figure, the Christian era ended during my lifetime." (5). She knows death prefigures life: ". . . it is not a bad thing to lose the lies we have mistaken for truth." (8) And like those first witnesses of the Resurrection, she isn't afraid to speak her hope: ". . . fear of the unknown takes on an element of wonder as the disillusioned turn away from the God who was supposed to be in order to seek the God who is." (9). Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "To believe your own thought, to believe what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men (sic) - that is genius." This is also the genius of Taylor's book: an autobiographical tale, even an old-school confession of how one articulate person was called by God even in the midst of a church in ruins and how she followed that call and lived into her calling as the years went by.

Barbara Brown Taylor offers a book here that is a wonderful and moving read. The book takes the form of two parts, each of which offers insight and spiritual direction to aspiring clergy, clergy, and laypeople alike. The first half of the book is a journey through the growth of the author's faith. She speaks of her quest for God that developed from childhood that led to a variety of churches and experiences through adolescence and young adulthood. This journey demonstrates the struggle we all have to come to know God, and the imperfect path which we all travel in order to arrive at a relationship with God. In the process, though, she illustrates tools and elements of the journey which are important to all the faithful. This "everyperson" quality of the book shows the average reader that a preacher is as human as those who sit in the pews on a Sunday morning. For the professional or those interested in preaching, it gives insight to the necessities involved in preparing a sermon on Sunday mornings, and the importance of our own faith stories in preparing us to live as preachers. The second half of the book is a collection of sermons from the author. These also have purpose

that can offer spiritual direction to readers no matter if they are in the pews or in the pulpit. For the people in the pews, they are an excellent source of understanding the scriptures that they are written on. The author often acknowledges the difficulty in relating to the words of the Bible in these sermons, but the plain-spoken way in which they are offered give them the ability to bring those words alive for the modern audience.

**Key themes of the book:** The key theme of the book is incorporating some of the essential aspects of the Christian life into the body, soul and spirit of the preacher. The book asks the preacher to reorient his or her life in such a way that he or she may see God in the seemingly insignificant. It challenges the preacher to see that sermon that is embedded in our daily lives, to abstract the message from the mundane and to liberate God from tradition and ritual. Taylor's answer to "what is preaching?" Taylor's description of preaching would be, complete immersion in the life of God for the purpose of sharing that life with the body of believers that we call, the church. The preaching moment does not belong to the preacher, but to God. The preacher must be aware of the way in which the sermon converses with the congregation. The preacher must always be concerned with the fact that his/her words are spoken on "God's behalf". The preacher serves as the conduit between God and God's people. He or she serves to seek intimacy with and revelation from God, and to share that experience with the church. While Taylor does talk about the act of studying the Bible, of choosing the right words, of understanding the sacraments... .. She comes back to the fact that preaching is ultimately God's event. The sermon is God's creation, and the preacher's role is simply to deliver it as best he or she can.

**3 aspects of the book that I found most helpful:** Three aspects of the book that jumped out at me were vocation, imagination and the Bible. There were other ideas that were powerfully presented, but these three were the most pronounced. One of the first topics that Taylor addressed in the book was the idea of vocation and call.

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