Excerpt from Introduction for Ministry Matters (700 words)
How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon
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The sum total of a balanced view of the American character and identity, the rituals and benefits of freedom for a few, the quest to perfect our Union, and the white supremacy refusal of equality is that the moral imagination of America in the second decade of the twenty-first century is dominated by the idolatrous and diabolical imagination. Again, what has and always will hinder the moral imagination of America is white supremacy that reserves the rights and benefits of America only to a few. The election of Donald Trump—who trumpets cynicism; white nationalism; patriarchy; ridicule of immigrants, women, and disabled persons; a Muslim ban; and the support of Trump from the KK and alt-right racist groups—is indicative of the pervasiveness of the idolatrous and diabolical imagination. Let me be crystal clear: racism, misogyny, cynicism, xenophobia, patriarchy, and anti-immigrant blame discourse always surges from the heart of the diabolical imagination.

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Earlier in the chapter I shared how Burke suggested that the spirit of religion has long sustained moral imagination and moral imagination must be expressed afresh in each age. This means that if moral imagination in America is primarily centered on the idolatrous and diabolical imagination, we must correspondingly conclude that there is a lack of moral imagination in the religion of America, and most particularly in the contemporary American church. T.S. Eliot, in reference to morality and spirituality suggests:

*The number of people in possession of any criteria for discriminating between good and evil is very small…the number of the half-alive hungry for any form of spiritual experience, or for what offers itself as spiritual experience, high or low, good or bad is considerable. My own generation has not served them well…. Woe to the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing. (Kirk, “The Moral Imagination.”)*

Eliot’s statement is true today, and therefore, is an indictment of the majority of the American Christian church. His admission that his generation has not served the people well could be spoken of the majority, but not all, of the contemporary church in the second decade of the twenty-first century. People operating in the idolatrous and diabolical imagination have a difficult time discerning good from evil and are hungry for any form of spiritual experience, high or low, good or bad. Where is the moral imagination of the church? If religion sustains moral imagination, and there is little moral imagination, how is the church functioning? What is the church doing? My belief is that the majority of the church has not served the people well.

Therefore, the purpose of this book is to clearly delineate how moral imagination can be fostered in the church through preaching. In the context of preaching, I define moral imagination as

*the ability of the preacher, intuitive or otherwise, in the midst of the chaotic experiences of human life and existence, to grasp and share God’s abiding wisdom and ethical truth in order to benefit the individual and common humanity.*

Moral imagination of the true Christian faith advocates against racism, misogyny, patriarchy, homophobia, discrimination, cynicism, scapegoating, blame, and so on, and visions all human beings created in the image of God, and as such, warrants the ritual and benefits of freedom for all. It is simply not possible for adherents of the Christian faith to support systems and individuals that advocate that only a few lives matter. When the church advocates and supports individuals and systems that articulate and function in such a manner, the church has abdicated its leadership in moral imagination, and then the culture and society can only slip into the human default position of idolatrous and diabolical imagination.

Preachers would do well to look at key expressions of moral imagination. To speak to the moral imagination of twenty-first-century America, there are lessons that can be learned from the chaotic 1950s and ‘60s, a time of some of the most important expressions of moral imagination in American history. There are moments and periods in American history where, because of moral imagination, there is significant movement to freedom, where the movement to make the reality that all lives matter visible and tangible in culture and society moves us closer to perfecting the Union.

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