

For better or worse, books of brief, “model” lectionary sermons are becoming more and more popular. For those who preach the lectionary week after week, and who are committed to preaching 12-14 minute sermons, this kind of resource can be a real help. This seems to be the audience Jensen has in mind for this book of sermons.

My reading of these sermons found them to be very inconsistent in quality. Jensen’s simple, face-value interpretation of each biblical text is sometimes refreshing and insightful. Often, however, I found myself wishing that he would let the redactional and formal qualities of the text speak more loudly. He tends to skim the surface of the text and preach the obvious. He also has a tendency to take an idea on the surface of the text and force it to match an idea he wants to preach.

An ordained Lutheran (former ALC clergyman) and radio preacher for Lutheran Vespers, Jensen is an evangelist at heart. Throughout these sermons he returns to the recurring theme (perhaps adapted from another Lutheran, Gustaf Aulen) of Christ the victor over the pervasive power of sin, evil, and death. The significance of the atoning work of Christ is almost invariably focused upon the need in each individual for salvation and a sense of personal eschatology.

Jensen has a knack for imaginatively recreating the biblical narrative in his preaching. At times, however, this becomes a time-consuming retelling of the text. At other times this habit leads Jensen into eisegetical psychologizing (“You can be sure that Peter was really tickled by his own confession” . . . or . . . “Peter must have thought to himself ‘You are the Messiah, I can hardly wait to see all the marvelous things you are going to do for me.’”).

Jensen has a penchant for cliché, (“Practice makes perfect,” “The disciples, if they had their wits about them . . .,” “He was always putting his foot in his mouth,” etc.). He uses very few images, metaphors, or similes. He does use many narrative illustrations, most of which are well written, integral to his message, and easily adaptable.

Although Jensen uses the Lutheran Lectionary, he provides handy references to the Roman Catholic Lectionary and the Common Lectionary. This is helpful for those from other lectionary-using denominations who want to make use of his material.

Read as a whole, these sermons provide a theologically consistent if sometimes homiletically meagre treatment of the Lenten lections for Cycle B. The sermons are short in length and could be read easily at a single sitting (that is, if you are not too distracted by the numerous typos and editorial errors). If you are willing to look carefully and critically, this book could provide several “sparks” to keep the preaching fires of Lent and Easter burning. JSM