



Idlewild Sermons: from Idlewild Presbyterian Church

Stephen R. Montgomery

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The collegium of preachers to which Steve Montgomery and I belong now has its plate exceedingly full of expectation, demand, and responsibility. That plate is full because we now live in a culture of commoditization that is bent toward self-destruction and death, in which human persons and creaturely possibility are ruthlessly transposed into marketable goods. The force of that commoditization is immense in the ominous pursuit of security and domination. In the midst of that force, the preacher is expected to speak some good news that is at the same time honest and compelling. The demands on the preacher are made more difficult because the preacher lives in and must speak to a culture of expansive anxiety. As a result the preacher is aware of how quickly a congregant may take offense, and how promptly a divisive ideology can be provoked. Or more practically, preachers like Steve Montgomery preside over an institutional budget that cannot much tolerate an affront to potential giver. In the face of such palpable risks, the preacher has only limited means and resources, a book, some water, some bread and wine, and a long memory of witnesses who precede and live alongside us. This characterization of the preacher's daily work comes to mind as I have read and pondered Steve's sermons. His sermons make several things clear. Steve is fully in touch with the huge dangers and seductions that our society faces, dangers and seductions that are compounded by ready denial and a refusal to think critically. Steve, as a good pastor, has a deep sense of his congregants, of how they may be engaged, so that the truth he speaks is offered in graciousness and gentleness, spoken not to confront or to irritate, but to permit movement (that for most of us is quite slow work) to a new way in the world that is marked by glad gospel obedience. Walter Brueggemann

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