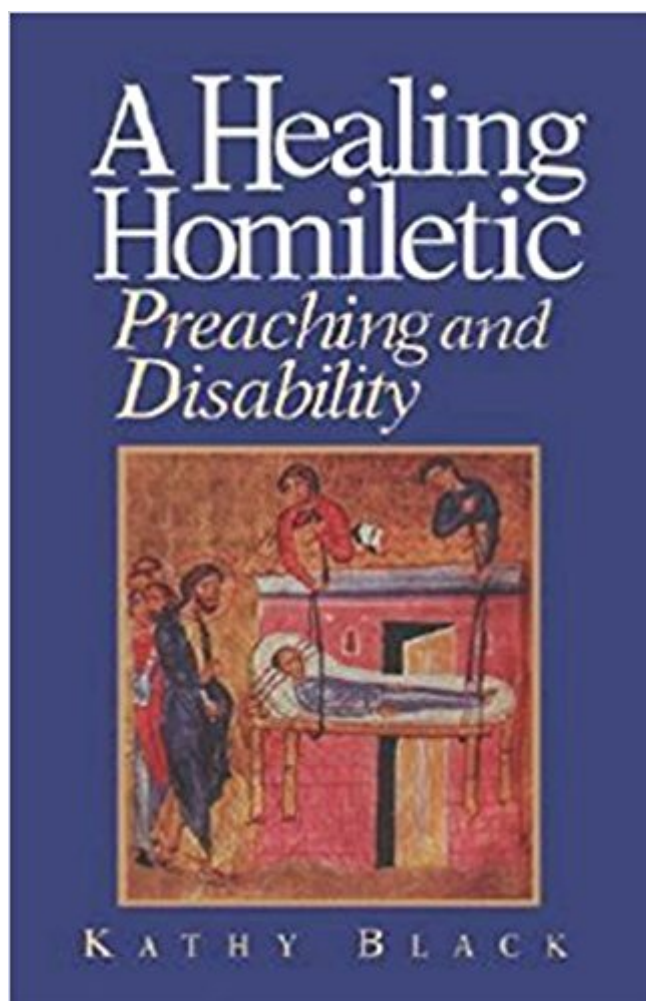


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# A Healing Homiletic: Preaching And Disability



## Synopsis

In *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*, Kathy Black offers a unique and effective approach for preaching about disabilities. By going to the heart of the gospel and drawing on the healing narratives or miracle stories, Black shows how preaching affects the inclusion or exclusion of forty-three million persons with disabilities from our faith communities. *A Healing Homiletic* provides a new method of preaching about healing, based on Scripture, for understanding the needs of the disability community.

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## Customer Reviews

In *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*, Kathy Black offers a unique and effective approach for preaching about disabilities. By going to the heart of the gospel and drawing on the healing narratives or miracle stories, Black shows how preaching affects the inclusion or exclusion of forty-three million persons with disabilities from our faith communities. *A Healing Homiletic* provides a new method of preaching about healing, based on Scripture, for understanding the needs of the disability community.

(2001) Kathy Black is Professor of Homiletics & Liturgics, the School of Theology at Claremont, and an ordained United Methodist minister. She has extensive experience in various fields of disability: she worked as chaplain at Gallaudet University (an outstanding college for the hearing impaired); she pastored two churches for deaf persons; and she taught Deaf Ministry classes and Ministry

With Persons With Disabilities at Wesley Theological Seminary, Pacific School of Religion, and the School of Theology at Claremont.

"A Healing Homiletic" makes some great points, such as showing differences between the words "cure" and "healing," which may be useful for mainline preachers. The book empathizes with people with disabilities and, in the lectionary passages that are explored for every general type of disability, people with disabilities and their concerns, as Black understand them, are taken into account. The difficulties of the Bible's ableism are demonstrated aptly, but they are not bridged. So, in the end, the preacher in one learns how to preach "healing," which is communal and inclusive, but the theologian in one does not gain a fresh take on the bible, which remains largely ableist and unredeemed by Black's work. This is an appreciated and important contribution to preaching, but it leaves much to be desired.

Very balanced, none judgmental summary of Christian (and some Jewish) beliefs about disabilities and healing (vs. cures). Can be a bit tedious because she has entire chapter about one particular story of Jesus's healing and the different aspects of the story and what the metaphors seem to say. Questions the common interpretation of these metaphors. Definitely a thoughtful book.

As a "handicapped" individual, I found this book to be extremely useful in my quest to heal myself from "sermon abuse." The alternative explanations and background information were very helpful and enlightening. I highly suggest one pairs reading this book with a reading of *The Disabled God* by Nancy Eiesland. I highly recommend both books.'

good

I have not read it yet. I plan to read it for class very soon, and my professors have not suggested a bad book yet.

Kathy Black, a United Methodist minister on faculty at Claremont School of Theology, has had experience working with peoples with disabilities in both school and pastoral settings. According to Black, there are over 43 million persons with disabilities in the United States (and many more further afield in the world) who are affected by the interpretations and preaching of miracle and healing stories. How are these people addressed, as part of the congregations? How are the stories that

talk about Jesus' healings to be taken by those who are blind or deaf or lame, who hear of such persons like themselves being cured, and yet when they leave the worship service, their disability is still with them? Healings have often been seen as a sign of the miraculous power of God. By healings, most people and theological interpretations have meant cures, physical and incarnate cures. There are those in the world who have played and preyed upon the desires for such cures; responsible theologians and pastors often speak with a sense of honest unease in dealing with questions such as 'why didn't God cure me?' Black looks at the healing narratives in the biblical text as being forms of liberation. At the same time, these same stories seem to reinforce the physical oppression to those with disabilities today. Both conservative and liberal camps fall short here. Those healed in the biblical texts are often portrayed as means to an end, rather than as persons with their own needs and histories in and of themselves. In the first part of the text, Black looks at theological perspectives on disability and God's relationship and responsibility - is this a punishment of some sort (of the person, or the person's family or community)? Is it some sort of curse, or test, or an opportunity? Black develops a theology of interdependence, a very communal-oriented theology, that looks for the work of inclusion in an accepting and supportive community, clearly identifying that disabilities do not come from God's intentional action for suffering. Secondly, Black looks at hermeneutical approaches, drawing a spectrum from literalism to metaphorical interpretations, locating most mainline preachers in the middle somewhere, not always a constant location for any particular preacher over time. She examines the different ways medical and disability issues are perceived from the time of the biblical text to today's society. The second major part of the text looks at specific disabilities - blindness, deafness, paralysis (lameness), leprosy (and other chronic illnesses), and mental illness. For each disability, a chapter is devoted with gospel texts, hermeneutic approaches, traditional homiletics and proposed healing approaches. Most of Black's texts come from the book of Mark, but there are representative passages from John and Luke as well. The persons with disabilities in these sections are described in modern terms rather than ancient terms. The 'traditional' hermeneutics and homiletics are actually from the past century or so (rather than looking too far back such as to the Reformation). Black does make a statement about her use of the term 'persons with disabilities' (which is continued in this review). While she affirms the use and development of other terms (physically challenged, differently abled, etc.), she uses the phrase persons with disabilities because it is readily understood in societal and legal contexts (ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act). This is also the term she uses for herself, placing the emphasis variably on the word 'person' and 'with', never permitting the disability to be primary. While each chapter is interesting, perhaps the most intriguing chapter for me was the one on mental illness.

Sometimes in the biblical text, healing is done in the form of casting out demons. Most of us today would recognise persons exhibiting such symptoms as occur in the scripture as mental illness in need of medication, psychological therapy or both, but not an exorcism. She uses the story of the man from Gerasa (Luke 8) and likens it to the story of a young epileptic, exploring the ways we look both at mental illnesses in the modern world as well as the particulars in the text. Like the modern world, where many of the mentally ill are also homeless, this man in Luke living in the country of the Gerasenes is also homeless, living among the tombs. Black looks at different aspects of the text - analysis of the imagery in the story (water, 'unclean' elements, etc.); socio-political connections between the man's illness and the politics of the time; Black then works through the passage verse by verse, exposing different possibilities. After examining the more typical ways preachers address this passage, she proposes her own healing homiletic: the elimination of irrational fears, the acceptance of those different from ourselves and the need to reach out to others. As Black states in a footnote to the introduction, there are various healing liturgies inspired by feminist theologies to help women get through various events that are in need of healing - divorce, miscarriage, menopause, etc. - that are gradually being incorporated and expanded into mainstream denominational life. However, the preaching has to address the healing issues properly or all the liturgical work can be easily undone. Black states in the final chapter that while cures almost always imply healing, healing does not always imply a cure. Sensitivity to those disabled can include a shift of language (stating that we do not understand something, rather than saying we are blind to something), drawing attention to the people in the texts, both the individuals and the onlookers as persons, and looking at the actions beyond the healing/curing that takes place. The only drawback of the text (and it is a minor one) is that there is no index and no bibliography for research or further reading. As an aid to preaching and understanding the healing stories, however, this is a rare text.

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