



Can We Talk?

What the Bible Can Teach Us About Dialogue in a Divisive Time

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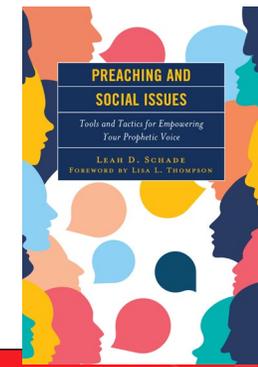
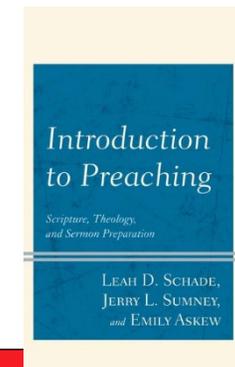
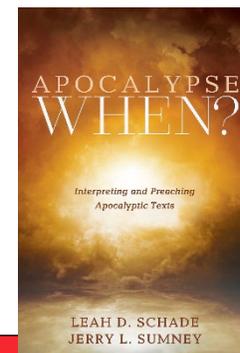
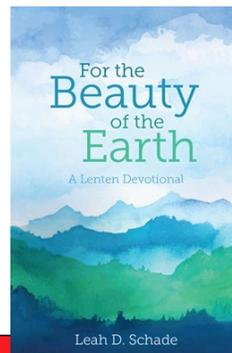
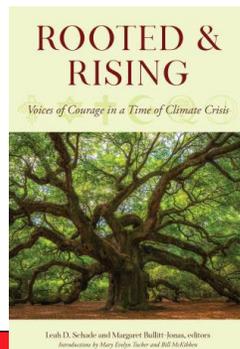
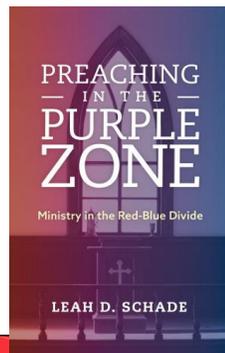
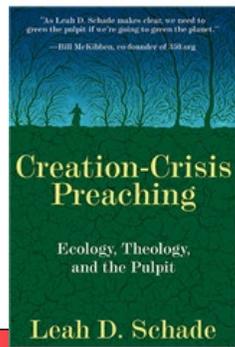


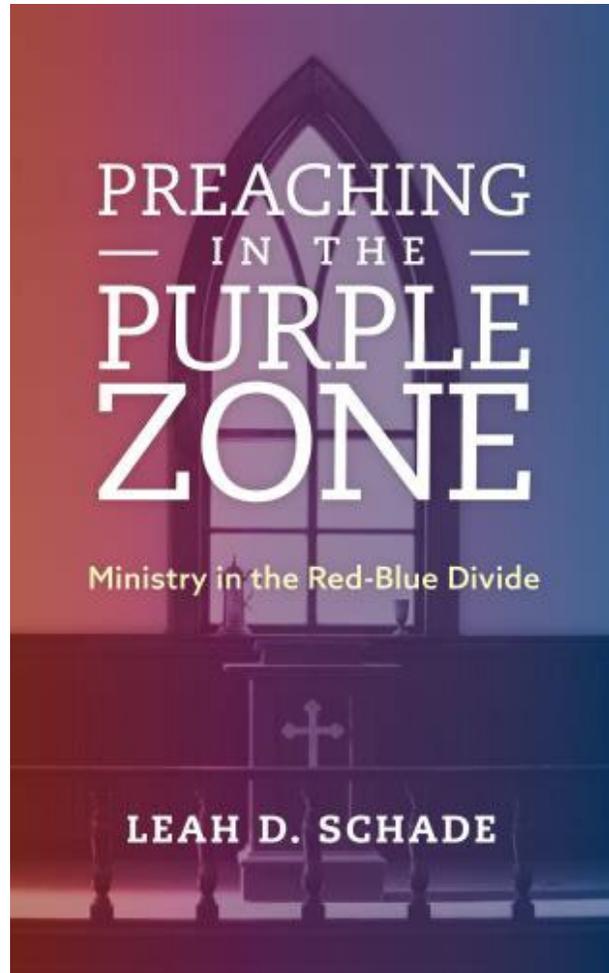
The Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade

**Author, Speaker, Educator,
Researcher**



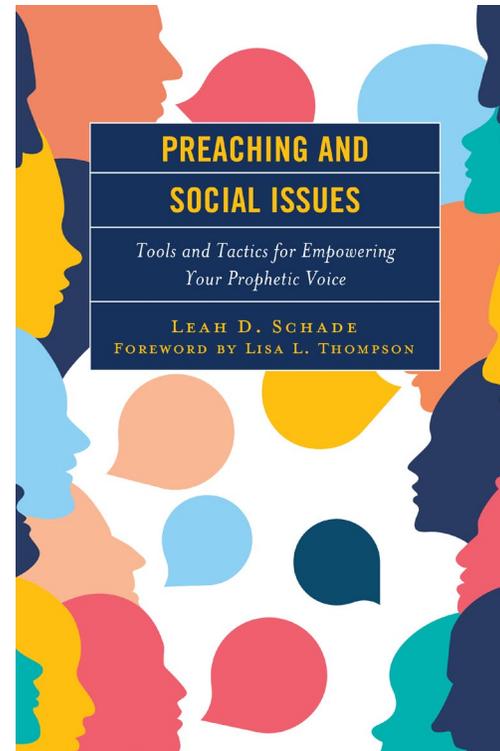
- Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship, Lexington Theological Seminary
- Ordained Lutheran (ELCA) clergy since 2000
- *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit* (Chalice Press, 2015)
- *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019)
- *Preaching and Social Issues: Tools and Tactics for Empowering Your Prophetic Voice* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2025)
- “EcoPreacher” blog at Patheos: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/>





Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019)

<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538119891/Preaching-in-the-Purple-Zone-Ministry-in-the-Red-Blue-Divide>

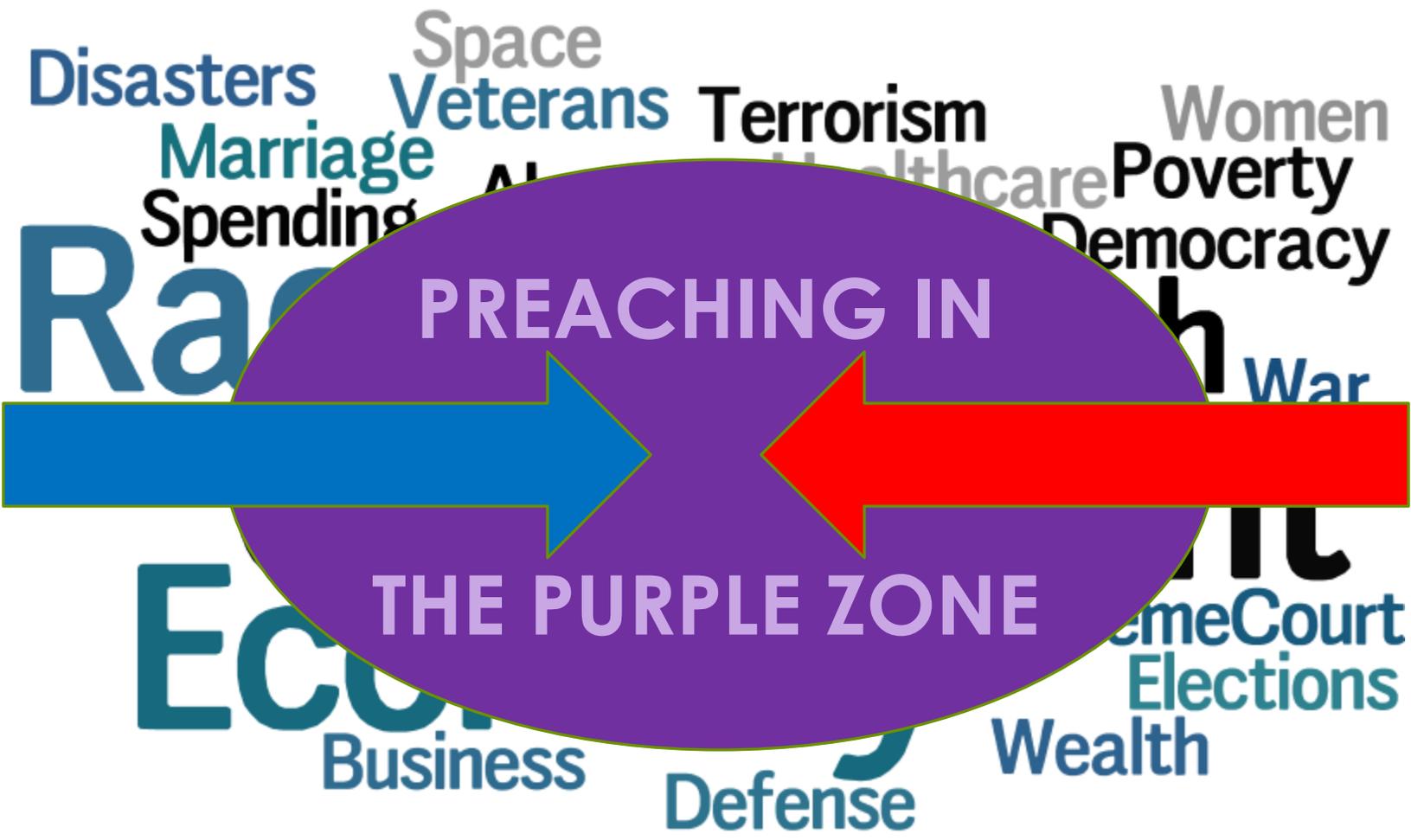


Preaching and Social Issues (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024)

Use discount code RLFANDF30 for 30% discount!

<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538187616/Preaching-and-Social-Issues-Tools-and-Tactics-for-Empowering-Your-Prophetic-Voice>





PREACHING IN

THE PURPLE ZONE

Questions for these controversial topics (implicit and explicit)

- What does the Bible have to say about these things?
- What do theological traditions have to say about these issues?
- What word does the preacher have to proclaim about these things?

Those in power *dare* clergy and congregations to answer these questions.

The powers mostly assume clergy and congregations will not answer these questions in a public way, or in a way that has any impact on how they conduct themselves in the world.



So how can clergy and congregations navigate this time of divisiveness in the red-blue divide?

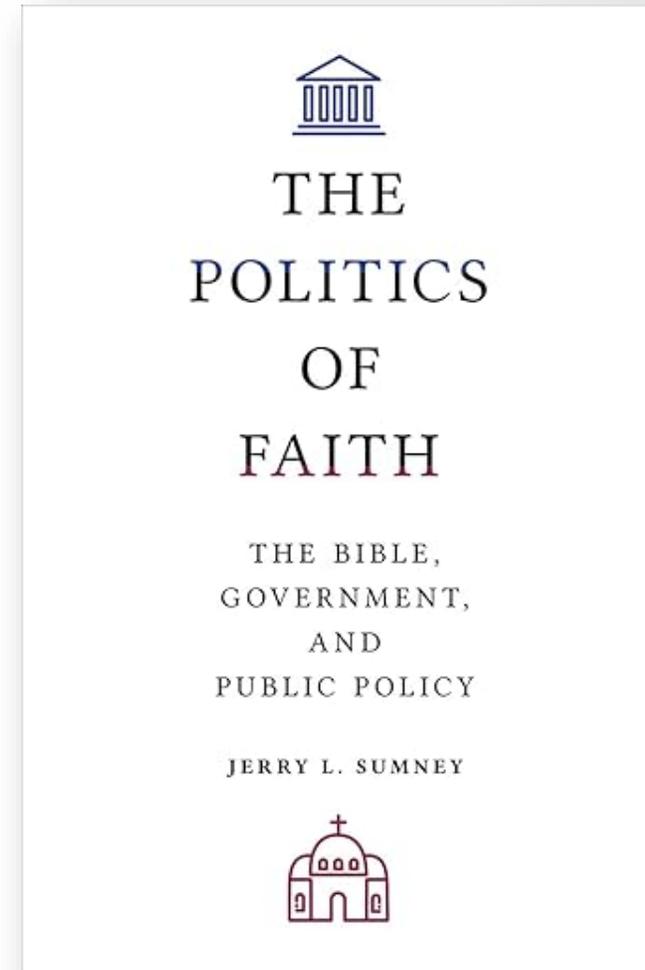
What the Bible Can Teach Us About Dialogue in a Divisive Time: USING THE “DIALOGICAL LENS”



Where do we find community deliberation in the Bible?

- Moses appointing elders (after Jethro's sage advice) – Exodus Chapter 18
- Phineas and the Israelites deliberating and avoiding a war – Joshua Chapter 22
- Ezra-Nehemiah rebuilding the temple, restoring community and worship after returning from exile
- The Acts of the Apostles – difficulties, debates, discernment and decisions about the early church

Highly recommended: *The Politics of Faith* by Jerry Sumney



Interpreting Scripture and Preaching Through a “Dialogical Lens”



WORKSHEET FOR USING THE DIALOGICAL LENS * Leah D. Schade, lschade@lextheo.edu

Text: _____

<p>1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage. In broad terms, describe how this passage of the Bible is an instance of conversation, dialogue, or some other kind of interchange.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Presumed author, and intended audience?B. Social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?C. Other books or authors in the Bible implicitly in conversation with this text or author?D. Characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?	
<p>2. Determine what's at stake.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Presenting issue? What does each of them want?B. Fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters? What are they afraid of losing? What or who is threatening to them?C. Overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?	
<p>3. Identify the values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. What is important to author/audience/characters? What do they cherish and hold dear?B. What is their "best self" that could emerge?C. Where do values overlap, points of commonality? What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share?D. Where are there gaps? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?	

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

- **In broad terms, describe how this passage of the Bible is an instance of conversation, dialogue, or some other kind of interchange.**
- **Who is the (presumed) author, and who was the intended audience?**
- **What were the social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?**
- **What other books or authors in the Bible are implicitly in conversation with this text or author?**
- **If the story is a narrative, who are the characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?**

2. Determine what's at stake.

- **What is the presenting issue?**
- **What are the fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters?**
 - **What are they afraid of losing?**
 - **What or who is threatening to them?**
- **What are the overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?**

3. Identify the values.

- **The deeper ideals and principles that underlie a character's actions or writer's intentions.**
- **What is important to them? What do they cherish and hold dear?**
- **What is their "best self" that could emerge?**

3. Identify the values.

- Find the overlap – and the gaps.
- What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share? In other words, where are points of commonality among or between them?
- At the same time, where are there vast differences? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

- **What is God doing in the midst of this interchange?**
- **Is God's action explicit, implicit, or apparently absent?**
- **How is the larger community wrestling with or expressing their faith in God?**

5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

- What is this exchange, dialogue, or conversation teaching us about what it means to be church in the midst of contentious public issues?**
- What can we learn about being faithful people who engage the conflicts and sin of the world, while maintaining the commitment to grace, hope, and love?**
- What can we determine about who God is, what God does, and what God intends for us based on this interchange and dialogue in the passage?**

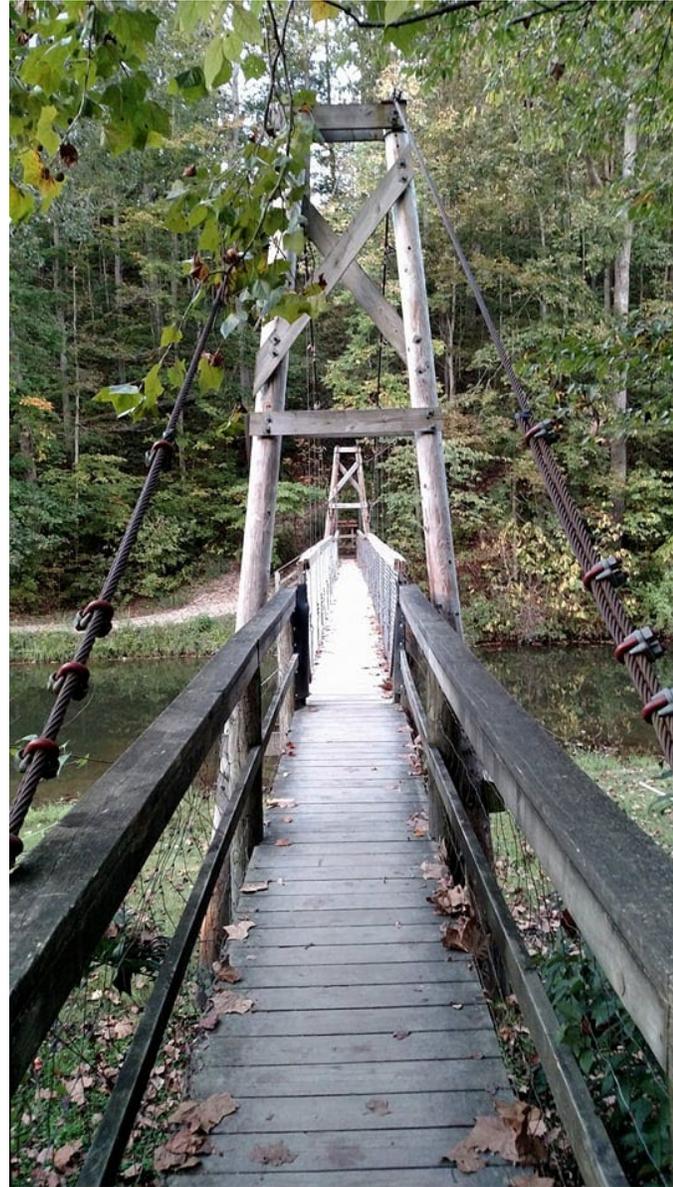
6. Suggest possible next steps.

- **What are next steps we might take based on what this biblical passage models for us?**
- **Are we sensing God's invitation to engage public concerns?**
- **Are we being invited into dialogue with each other, with this passage, and with God about specific justice issues?**

6. Suggest possible next steps.

- Are we learning what *not to do* based on what we see in this text?
- Are there common values we share that can be the basis for our response to a societal matter?
- What kind of church shall we be, knowing what the Bible models for us, and knowing what challenges our community is facing?

Reading the Bible through a dialogical lens shows that we are permitted, authorized, encouraged, and even urged to preach about public issues because Scripture has already opened the conversation for us – we need only to step into it.



Let's try it!

Applying the Dialogical Lens to a scriptural passage

- 1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.**
- 2. Determine what is at stake.**
- 3. Identify the values.**
- 4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.**
- 5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.**
- 6. Suggest possible next steps.**

First Sunday of Advent, Year A

Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus said to the disciples, “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

- a. Presumed author, and intended audience?
- b. Social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?
- c. Other books or authors in the Bible implicitly in conversation with this text or author?



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- a. **Matthew is the presumed author.**
Original audience is Jewish Christians in the early church living in anticipation of the coming of Christ.
- b. **Post-Temple Destruction:** Cataclysmic event, but not to be taken as a sign that the final end is near.
- c. **Genesis Chapters 6-9:** The story of Noah would be well known to this audience. Matthew/Jesus uses the story to elicit themes of urgency, unexpectedness, and unpredictability

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

d. Characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?



Characters:

- Jesus (telling the parable)
- Disciples (not speaking but listening)
- Chief priests and elders (in the background – they plot to arrest Jesus after this Temple discourse)
- Roman Emperor (in the background – Matthew is writing after the Romans destroyed the Temple)

2. Determine what's at stake

A. Presenting issue? What does each of them want?

B. Fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters? What are they afraid of losing?
What or who is threatening to them?

C. Overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?



- Disciples – **End Times Angst**
 - “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3)
- Matthew ‘s church - **Delayed Second Coming**
 - External challenges (detractors), internal challenges (discouragement)
- Jesus – **Theological Shift**
 - The church needs to shift from emphasizing the *nearness* of the Second Coming to focusing on its *certainty*, and what that means for their ministry.

3. Identify the values

A. What is important to author/audience/characters?

What do they cherish and hold dear?

- a. What's important for Jesus in telling his disciples about the necessity for **watchfulness** (and for Matthew by including this admonition)?

Impossibility of Predicting the Timing

The coming of the Son of Man will be unexpected and sudden, likened to the time of Noah, where people were going about their normal lives until the flood suddenly swept them away. Speculation about the timing of the end is **useless**.

Certainty of the Second Coming and Final Judgment

The impossibility of predicting the timing does not affect the certainty of the outcome. This text serves as a promise that God will act to do justice for the faithful and the wicked.

3. Identify the values

B. What is their “best self” that could emerge?



Constant Vigilance and Good Works

- Being ready means **living out your faith** as the people of God, which involves being engaged in doing the **good works** God expects.

3. Identify the values

C. Where do values overlap, points of commonality?

What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share?

D. Where are there gaps? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?

The hearers of this admonition – the disciples, Matthew’s church, and today’s readers – all desire to be **faithful and worship God.**

Eschatological quality to this text for Matthew’s church – the imminent return of Jesus.

- Self-protection v. community building
- Catastrophe used for power and control v. protecting weak & vulnerable

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

A. What is God doing in the midst of this interchange?

B. Is God's action explicit, implicit, or apparently absent?

- a. Jesus is urging his followers to **prepare to be the church** at a moment's notice to respond to a crisis.
- b. Jesus's admonition is explicit: As the world faces a "**Genesis 6 moment**," Christ calls us to respond with faithful, urgent preparation to live into its ministry.

BE AWARE

BE PREPARED

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

C. How is the larger community wrestling with or expressing their faith in God?

What kind of church did Matthew call Christians to be as they prepared for and endured **catastrophe**, and what is the role of the today's church in the face of the current crisis?

Matthew/Jesus is motivating the church to active preparedness and to live out its faith as an **“ark” of safety and refuge.**

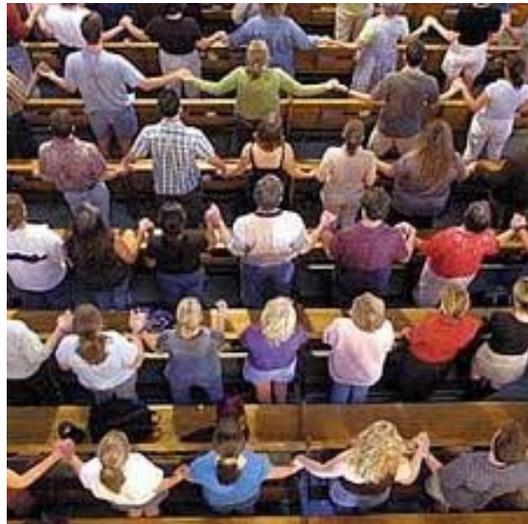


5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

What does it mean to be a Genesis 6 church in the face of:

- Weaponization and manipulation of apocalypticism
- Authoritarian leadership currently in power mirroring Rome's system
- Kidnapping and forced imprisonment of those without documentation, journalists, nonviolent activists
- Use of military in U.S. cities; threats to arrest leaders
- Climate crisis and global catastrophes

A. What is this exchange, dialogue, or conversation teaching us about what it means to be church in the midst of contentious public issues?



5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

B. What can we learn about being faithful people who engage the conflicts and sin of the world, while maintaining the commitment to grace, hope, and love?

- Recent **Rapture** prediction in September.
- **Apocalypse** *is* happening – in the sense of unveiling.
- **What kind of church shall we be** given our community's needs and the ways injustice is experienced here?



5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

C. What can we determine about who God is, what God does, and what God intends for us based on this interchange and dialogue in the passage?



- What vision of church did Matthew offer for **communities facing upheaval**—and how does that vision guide the church’s role in today’s crises?
- In this “Genesis 6 moment,” Jesus summons us to **faithful, urgent preparation**, so that we can live fully into the ministry to which we are called.

6. Suggest possible next steps

- A. Next steps we might take based on what this biblical passage models for us?
- B. Public concerns God is inviting us to engage? Are we being invited into dialogue with each other, with this passage, and with God about specific justice issues?

- Tell the story of Wisconsin Council of Churches and its ministry of helping communities **recover from floods**.
- In what ways can our congregation **prepare for the next disaster**?
<https://www.wichurches.org/articles/preparing-for-the-next-disasters>
- What would it mean for us to see our neighbors as **kin** rather than as the labels others have given them (race, immigration status, gender, etc.)?



6. Suggest possible next steps

C. Are we learning what *not* to do based on what we see in this text?

D. Common values we share that can be the basis for our response to a societal matter?

1. **Stop trying to predict “the end”!**
2. **Don’t get distracted** by the things you can’t control and, instead, prepare for ways you can help, no matter when or how it happens.

Common values:

1. Caring for the vulnerable
2. Being vigilant
3. Being prepared
4. Identifying the ways your church is uniquely situated to make a difference

6. Suggest possible next steps

E. What kind of church shall we be, knowing what the Bible models for us, and knowing what challenges our community is facing?

- What is one thing we could do to **prepare for an emergency**?
- **Who in our community is at risk?** Undocumented people? Children? International university students? Those who work for the system while also being harmed by it?
- How can we **model** basic decency, compassion, caring for the vulnerable, honoring our neighbors, protecting the weak, and ministering to those who are caught in the flood?
- **Encourage preparation** for ministry amid threats against the most vulnerable.
- What are ways we can prepare to be the church at a moment's notice to respond to when there is a crisis? What are examples of churches that are serving as an "ark" and **what can we learn from them**?

BE THE CHURCH!

Ultimately, there is a **power** that is greater than any destructive forces (the Empire), more effective than violence (the flood), longer-lasting than uncertainty (worry about end times).

It is the power of generosity, curiosity, creativity, joy, acceptance, and peace. It is found in the community of those who watch, prepare, and are ready to live out their **Jesus-shaped ministry**.



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EcoPreacher Sermon Coaching Groups start in January 2026!



EcoPreacher Sermon Coaching Groups

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**Small groups of preachers
sharing their eco-sermons
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Thank you for visiting “The Purple Zone”!

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