Week after week preachers use words. We read them, we write and speak them. We look for the exact words for the moment. They are our means for doing: celebration, lament, explanation, remembrance, justification, anticipation, beseeching, condemnation, comfort. This is all to say that words are our medium for the proclamation of the good news of the Triune God whom we know through Christ Jesus. For most of us this word work is still done through the oral medium of speech. But even preachers who make use of computerized visuals, display screens, and musical interludes still work with words.

We do all of this work in a time of word inflation and overuse. Words do not carry the same stock they once did. But they are our coinage. So chapter 1 looks at the care we must show in choosing and handling words. Chapter 2 maps certain theories of language as a way of exploring the tension between the function of language: Does it reflect or create reality? Chapter 3 presents steps for weekly sermon preparation that help preachers pay attention to word choices. Chapter 4 is a case study of a sermon with commentary about word choices. Chapter 5 is a glossary of additional ways words are used in sermons.

This book is part of a series, and so I depend on readers to put these words in conversation with the other volumes of Elements of Preaching. Moreover, this book is for continuing conversation: the glossary is not exhaustive but should stimulate critical thought about how we use words; the map of language theories is only a nod in the direction of linguistic complexities, but it should raise good questions about our intentions; the other chapters should generate reflection about how careful we are with the content of our speech and in our preparations for preaching speech.

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