Witnessing in the Field Hospital of the Church

by Deborah Ann Organ

It was August 3, 2016. An ordinary day in St Paul, Minnesota.

Angela Martin, mother of two and grandmother of six, was driving east on I-94 when she saw a young woman climbing the fence on the Dale Street overpass, with the clear intention of hurling herself into the heavy traffic below.

Martin raced up the exit and ran across the overpass to where the young woman was. "Lord, help me," she said in that moment, "I look at her as one of my own."

"No, honey, don't do this!" Martin pleaded. And the young woman just kept saying, "My Mom don't love me. My Mom don't care for me." "No, we love you!" Martin cried.

Martin was not the only one who felt that way. Other motorists stopped on the bridge, and approached the fence. The young woman turned toward the traffic, and let go of the fence. Just seconds before, Martin had reached through the fence and grabbed the young woman's t shirt and belt. She hung onto her desperately, and soon others put their arms through the fence and grabbed onto the young woman in any way they could.

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Martin yelled to a passerby to go down and stop the traffic. The passerby "started to run like she was in track." She was a tiny woman, but she grabbed a huge construction drum and rolled it out onto the highway, yelling at cars to stop. It worked. Traffic halted. A truck driver backed his truck up under the bridge to break the young woman's fall, if it came to that.

Meanwhile, police officer Vlad Krumgant was heading with his partner west on the highway, and saw a woman dangling from the overpass,"held up by a giant mass of people." He called for backup and raced to the overpass, where he joined the people holding the young woman up.

Lucky Rosenbloom was half a block away, and from a distance saw what looked like a lone police officer surrounded by a chaotic crowd. He was thinking the worst . . .and thinking that he had to help this cop. When he got there and realized what was happening, he moved in to relieve those tired of holding on. He grabbed the woman under her armpit. "She was sweaty and slippery," he said. "Everyone was determined they weren't going to let go of that lady for any reason."

Another police officer arrived and got a bolt cutter from his car, and began to snip a hole in the fence. Then, said Officer Krumgant, "We collectively pulled the woman back through."

When I read this story, adapted from the one elegantly reported by Mary Lynn Smith[1] of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, my intuition told me that the scene on the bridge had something to say, in a metaphoric and perhaps allegorical way, about how suffering and trauma speak to preaching. In this paper I will sketch out the implications of this story as a metaphor for witnessing to the intersections of trauma, Church, and preaching. In our times, it is crucial that ministers of the Church preach in ways that strengthen and recover durable hope, even and especially in situations that appear to be hopeless.

Method

The decision to use the events on the bridge as a metaphor in this paper was intentional and reflects the methodology that I will use. I will adapt David Tracy's method of analogy[2] to bring into conversation the trauma likely experienced by the woman in the story, the experience of the community on the bridge, and the Christian "classic" of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to identify concrete implications for Catholic preaching. While acknowledging the important role of fundamental theology in his method,[3] Tracy points to the importance of reflecting on the diverse experiences of an event and highlights the importance of dialogue not only between the event and its interpretation in light of Christian beliefs, but also between different perspectives on the event itself. Thus, here I will proceed by reflecting on one possible interpretation of the experience of the woman on the bridge, and then do this in dialogue with both the experiences of the people who assist her and with the experiences of the readers, and I will correlate these with insights from contemporary trauma theory. I will then articulate insights into the preaching ministry that follow from these experiences and that respond to the call to dialogue and praxis that emerge from the Tradition as well as from contemporary contexts in the United States.

I will show that the bridge in this story is the metaphorical locus for preaching in the Church today. In order to do this, I will employ the theological insights of Johann Baptist Metz and that of Shelly Rambo, and I will also introduce contemporary trauma theory as a dialogue partner.

The Young Woman

As a mental health clinician, I try not to diagnose anyone whom I have not met in a professional capacity. Therefore, I can't say with certainty that this young woman, let's call her Elizabeth, was brought to that bridge by the trauma in her life. In fact, it is important to acknowledge that Elizabeth does not speak for herself in this paper, and that what I offer is one possible interpretation of her experience. Sometimes suicide attempts are the result of severe depression that is not related to circumstance but to a chemical imbalance that causes simply unbearable distress and grief. Howeever, the fact that Elizabeth kept telling Angela and the others that she wanted to die because her "mother doesn't love her" suggests that she may be living and acting out of a very old narrative, and, for the sake of this presentation, I am going to assume that trauma plays a part in why Elizabeth wanted to end her life. In this presentation, I'm defining trauma as a reaction to overwhelming life events that negatively impact the present, events that, post-trauma, are often not accessible to the conscious mind but are experienced in bodily sensations and intrusive memory.

1 The narrative I presented as the introduction is an adaptation of Mary Lynn Smith's story "Shoulder to Shoulder: Strangers Came to the Rescue of a Suicidal Woman in St. Paul," *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (August 3, 2016).

2 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 408.

3 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Foundational Theology," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* as well as David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 548-570.

At a minimum, Elizabeth is living out of experiences that disrupted her life when they happened, and which continue to disrupt her life in the present through intrusive memories and thought patterns. She is, in a concrete way, living the past in the present. One thing that trauma does is completely turn upside down any concept of linear memory. The past intrudes in the present in such a way that the person is robbed of the present because she is living the past. Clinicians in the area of trauma know that traumatic experience is not only held in head and memory, but also is held in the body which also remembers.[4]

This becomes even more complicated if the abuse or other trauma is ongoing. Elizabeth would likely be more sensitive to current abuse due to the abuse in the past. In fact, living out of the experience of abuse, that abuse itself would be a lens through which she would see the people and circumstances in her life. She would think it is impossible for Angela to love her, not only because she is a "stranger" but because her core experience—both past-in-present and present—is one of rejection and fear. And these experiences are not just "in her head." Elizabeth carries the trauma of rejection, pain, and abuse in her body—in her very bones. And this carrying is largely done outside of narrative because it may well not be conscious.

Bessel Van der Kolk discusses the way memory works with regard to trauma. Non-traumatic memory is often not very accurate or consistent—think of how your accounts of what happened as a child differ from accounts from family members! Traumatic memory, however, often works differently. There was a study done of over 200 Harvard men from their sophomore year in 1939 to 1944 to the present. Those who did not have traumatic reactions to WWII had modified their accounts of those years, robbing them of some of the horror, over time. Those who were traumatized, if they had memories, tended to recall events from the war in exactly the same way in the present as they reported them soon after the events transpired. In addition, and perhaps most importantly for our consideration here, van der Kolk discusses what happens when the events are so horrifying that the system becomes overloaded. It breaks down and the result of that is the disconnection between the rational and emotional memory systems. The events, then, are not organized into word narrative and image, they are imprinted in fragmented sensory and emotional trances.[5] Sometimes there is not any recall, as the person dissociates from the trauma initially in order to protect herself or himself from its impact. Part of what this means is that memories are not accessible to the intellect and formed into narrative when the trauma overwhelms the system. But they nonetheless intrude in the present in bodily sensations and unconscious reenactments. Traumatic memory remains frozen in time, often not accessible, and far from narrative.

Added to this, and likely crucial to understand Elizabeth, we need to consider what is known as developmental trauma. Van der Kolk and others continue to study this phenomenon that asserts that the earliest experiences human beings have greatly impact their biological make-up and to an extent lay frameworks for how persons will engage in relationships and other tasks in their lives. It is well established that children who have not been given security and physical expression of love early on in their lives often have significant mental health issues by mid-childhood or early adolescence. Also, the child often fails to develop a healthy self-image as a person able to manage the circumstance of her or his life. Elizabeth might have been set up for failure from the very beginning by having been hard wired by the memory of abuse and neglect.

Memory, hardwired, lived, sometimes suppressed, present in the bones is clearly at the heart of trauma, and many times these are dangerous memories.

4 Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York: Viking Press, 2014), 236.
5 Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 175-176.

Just as trauma erupts and causes disorientation and immense grief, and disconnects the sufferer from her or his own body, from their agency and from other people, recovery is, in broad strokes, often a complex and non-linear movement toward narrative, agency and connection. Healing is to re-script one's life, bit by bit creating a narrative that holds, and usually this happens in a space that holds the person.

Angela and the Crowd Holding Elizabeth Up

And now we will look at the people gathered at the fence, holding Elizabeth up—the people on the bridge. These people voluntarily came together, each from her or his own context, and worked together to support Elizabeth. I propose that this image reveals something about the Church at worship and in its work in the world. Angela, in her prayer as she raced toward Elizabeth, revealed that she saw Elizabeth as connected and related to her, and that she acted out of that deep sense. The stance of Angela and the people who showed up subsequently unified them into what looked to Lucky to be one, although initially he feared that it was one riot! Each reached beyond the fence to hold onto Elizabeth, and many cried out spontaneously to God to help them, knowing that by their own strength they would not be able to hold onto her for very long. No one of them singly could have accomplished what they did as a body. Their actions were very physical—their grip was personal, and I imagine, pretty gritty at times. Elizabeth was slippery and sweaty, as I would guess the people holding her were as well. August in St. Paul is hot! Each of them made a choice to come together. It was as if they were remembering and acting out of something that had been hardwired into them.

Johann Baptist Metz talked about memory in a way both quite different and quite similar to the way contemporary trauma theory talks about memory. He based much of his work on the contention that

> The Church must understand itself and prove itself as the public witness and bearer of a dangerous memory of freedom … It is in faith that Christians actualize the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi.* They faithfully remember the testament of his love, in which God's dominion among men and women appeared precisely in the fact that the dominion that human beings exercise over one another began to be pulled down, that Jesus declared himself to be on the side of the invisible ones, those who are rejected and oppressed, and in so doing announced to them God's coming dominion as the liberating power of an unconditional love. . . It is in this way a dangerous and liberating memory, which badgers the present and calls it into question."[6]

Metz challenges the ways that the Church has apparently "forgotten" the foundation upon which our faith stands—that God accompanied Jesus, and accompanies us, through death and promises life.

Metz developed his theology of dangerous memories primarily in order to articulate hope in situations that human beings experience as hopeless. Deeply influenced by the Holocaust, he searched for a way to wake people up from (he borrowed this phrase from Jon Sobrino) the "sleep of inhumanity."[7] For Metz, faith was praxis, or reflective action. Retrieving the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ's irruption into the world and his saving life, death, and resurrection provide hope in God's promises for not only the living, but also for those who have died in situations of intolerable suffering and injustice.[8] Further, Metz's structure for retrieving dangerous memories for hope

6 Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 88-89.

7 James Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 131.

8 Ashley, *Interruptions,* 124.

seemed to enable him to retrieve the German memory of the Holocaust as well as his own traumatic memory of the battlefields of WWII, in a way that allowed him to live in hope.[9]

On the bridge, we have the encounter between the dangerous memories that Elizabeth has that are erupting into her present, the memories of abuse, rejection, and abandonment that have become the messages settled into her bones and bodily experience that she replays constantly—and the hope coming from the dangerous memory of the Church. Both kinds of dangerous memories challenge our sense of time. As mentioned earlier, traumatic memory tends to not stay in the past, but to erupt into the present in an intrusive way. Dangerous memories of faith, according to Metz, erupt the future into the present by rooting our future life of salvation right in the present. The praxis of the people on the bridge, in their holding of Elizabeth, represent by their actions praxis that truly makes a difference in the world. On the bridge we also encounter Metz's three categories of memory, solidarity, and narrative.

Elizabeth needs flesh and blood praxis of the Kingdom that speaks of a God who erupted into history and promises salvation, rather than hearing about some domesticated Hallmark Card Jesus who in some distant past was a really nice guy, or, worse, hearing a message of judgment that further reinforces her sense of self as entirely wrong or bad. The narrative that the people on the bridge embody is one that speaks against the painful narrative that Elizabeth has been given. She needs the Church to be a place and a people who give her kind of a holding space as she struggles to create a new narrative of her own life, a narrative that can lead her through the twists and turns of Holy Saturday to widening glimpses of Easter. Not a Hallmark Easter. It is here that healing from trauma and Christian praxis come together—narrative of hope is essential for both.

Good preaching helps a community to form narrative. Preaching needs to be the coming to narrative of the dangerous memory of the Church. Both word and bodily presence are necessary. We might not like to look at Elizabeth's anguish—we may feel uncomfortable, and she may trigger feelings that we might not want to remember. Sometimes it is inconvenient to remember the Paschal Mystery. Metz's dangerous memory "seem to subvert our structures of plausibility. Such memories are like dangerous and incalculable visitants from the past. They are memories we have to take into account; memories, as it were, with future content.[10] The memory of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a message that we as preachers, in a certain sense, show into speech together with, and for, the Elizabeths in our world, in order to create space for a durable hope, even in the midst of hopelessness.

Pauline images of the Church as body are among the oldest and most foundational images that we have. The gifts of the Spirit and the power of witness and memory connect deeply to the Pauline Body. The image of the Church as Body of Christ was deepened and articulated anew in the Second Vatican Council. Our theological tradition affirms a connection between the wholeness and healing of one member of the body, and the well-being of the whole. Mary Catherine Hilkert points out, using the work of Edward Schillebeeckx, that "Precisely because the Christian message is a living tradition of grace—the mystery of God among us—it must be handed on through the lived experience of the community as well as through word."[11]

Schillebeeckx connects this healing to redemption and salvation. Julia Feder, in her doctoral dissertation, articulates his position well:

9 Metz discusses his memory of the Holocaust and alludes to his personal experience of the war in Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope Against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak out on the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 14-19.

10 See Johannes Baptist Metz, "The Future of the Memory of Suffering," *Concilium* 76 (January 1, 1972): 9-25.

11 Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 37. It is important to note that Metz and Schillebeeckx, while both stressing the importance of narrative, memory, and praxis in their work, differed and offered mutual critique, the substance of which is well developed by Steven M. Rodenborn in *Hope in Action: Subversive Eschatology in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2014), especially in the conclusion on 309.

> Christian salvation involves the healing of the whole human person. As Schillebeeckx puts it, Christian salvation cannot be simply the "salvation of souls"; it must be healing, the making whole of the whole man and woman, the person in all his or her aspects and the society in which the person lives. Thus Christian salvation includes ecological, social, and political aspects, though it is not exhausted by them. Although Christian salvation is more than that, it is at least that. As he explains in another text, the comprehensive meaning of salvation can be garnered etymologically: "the root of the word salus or salvation is connected with sanitas, health; with being whole or with integrity." Therefore, Christian salvation concerns the broad health of the individual person in her social context. The trauma victim is in need of salvific healing not only spiritually, but also physically, relationally, and politically.[12]

The lived witness of the Church, then, is not only concerned with the well-being of individuals and of the whole, but is also somehow connected to the working out of the salvation that is our "memory of the future." As we love one another into wholeness, narrative witness, proclamation, and praxis are all crucial.

Trauma healing, for a victim/survivor, is a mixture of her or his own agency (as it comes back, usually gradually) and of relationship with other people. It is rare for a trauma sufferer to be able to heal in isolation, and yet it is also true that some approaches to healing trauma seem aimed at "fixing" the person. These can, in fact, validate the trauma survivor's lack of agency in the wake of traumatic events. The people on the bridge could not fix Elizabeth. They held her, though, until a future possibility presented itself. Her agency, at least in deciding not to struggle to jump, likely came into play sometime as they hung there together.

That said, most of the trauma literature agrees that there is no stronger element in healing from trauma than relationship. Healthy, mutual, and compassionate relationships serve as a corrective to the violence and dislocation caused by the trauma, and can create a space where a trauma survivor can more often inhabit the present rather than the traumatic past. Frequently, as a mental health professional I get referrals from pastoral agents in parishes, and once in a while one of them expresses relief at "getting the person the help they need." It can feel like, yep, I've now done all I can and she or he is out of my hands. Therapy can be very important—even crucial—as a space for healing, but that doesn't mean that the faith community is of less importance. Relationships help trauma survivors to come back to life, to engage in the non-linear, difficult path of healing and to gradually re-script the narrative of their lives.

The people on the bridge reveal something about the Church, and they reveal "something more" that is present after trauma, even as the pain lingers. In a certain sense, they may have come to recognize themselves through the lens of Elizabeth's pain. The comments of the ones holding her after she was taken to the hospital included "We are actually one human family. We can do something different from the violence and division to which we have become accustomed." One might see that they acted out of the power of their dangerous Christian memory, and out of a durable hope.

There is another part of this story that is important. Three weeks to the day before Elizabeth climbed that fence, in that exact physical location, there was a major confrontation between the St. Paul Police force and demonstrators demanding justice for the shooting of a black man by a white police officer. Twelve police officers were wounded in the confrontation. The contrast between the two scenes is enormous. The image of the Church in the space of threatened violence, witnessing to the possibility of community where it appears that the fragmentation of violence has made that impossible, is compelling. The very nature of the Church demands that witness. The embodied

12 Julia Feder, "A Mystical-Political Theology of Post-Traumatic Healing: Teresa of Avila, Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Trauma Theory" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2014), 110.

witness of the people on the bridge emerged out of the polarization that the neighborhood and community had been living in, and provided another way of being.

The Pulling of Elizabeth through the Fence

There is more to the story of this community. The more defies easy expression, and yet, I believe, forms the basis for our preaching and proclamation. Theologian Shelly Rambo argues that, rather than being a "problem" for Christian theology to contend with, traumatic suffering is a lens through which the Church can see our selves[13] and re-evaluate our theological commitments. This insight is similar to Metz's thinking, but Rambo takes it in another direction by opening up the essentially wordless space of what she refers to as the middle ground—the, as she expresses it, "what remains" after trauma, and she concludes that the "what remains" in the Church's story is love. She uses "remains" primarily out of John's frequent use of *menein* (to remain) throughout the Gospel to refer to both the disciples remaining after his death, and to the Paraclete who will remain in and with them, making them witnesses.[14]

Hans Urs von Balthasar is a primary source for Rambo, as he developed a well-known theology of Holy Saturday that, in many respects, mirrors aspects of healing from trauma. His observation of the problematic nature of the Christian tendency to move seamlessly (in liturgy and preaching) from the passion to the resurrection focuses attention on what happened in between Jesus's death and resurrection, when he descended into the abyss. Really dead, there was no obvious path to life for Jesus. In his Holy Saturday sermon,[15] von Balthasar speaks of a bridge over the abyss that allows Jesus (and us) to walk to life, and then he notes that awareness comes that we walk alongside the bridge, unknowingly having been transformed by God into resurrected people. People healing from trauma may well recognize this trajectory. There is a space between the violence of trauma and healing; it is a space without form, and without immediately discernable exit. And yet, when healing comes, a way appears.

Rambo and von Balthasar speak of the power of witness in the in-between spaces of death. The Church can and must construct narrative and witness to the unspeakable suffering of human beings. We preach from the bridge, from the place where death and life are inseparable and sometimes indistinguishable. We speak, quietly, perhaps gently, and not always triumphantly, a message of the love that remains, the Spirit who hands us a rope that constitutes a bridge when there is in fact no way across.

And we do this simultaneously from within our in-between spaces in life, and from within the narrative structure of our faith and story of salvation, magnificently expressed in the Eucharistic liturgy. As I have said, preaching creates narrative that does not deny trauma and violence, but that offers the memory of our God who erupted into history with the promise of salvation and who remains with humanity, even into death.

Metz points to the necessity of narrative, based on the very premise that our whole story of salvation has a narrative structure, beginning with creation.[16] He reflects on the way that stories need to be told in order to bring out the power of memory. To illustrate that, he recounts a story told by Martin Buber. There was once an old and crippled rabbi who told the story of another rabbi who danced and jumped when he preached. The narrative so caught up the crippled man that he danced and jumped in the telling. Memory, told in story, can make the impossible real.[17]

13 Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).
14 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma,* 103-105.
15 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons through the Liturgical Year (*San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 87-92.
16 Metz, "The Future of the Memory of Suffering," 188.
17 Candace Kristina McLean, "Do This in Memory of Me: The Genealogy and Theological Appropriations of Memory in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz" (PhD diss.,University of Notre Dame, 2012), 57.

The implications of allowing ourselves as preachers to be caught up and transformed by the narratives of our faith are many and far-reaching.

But what happens when the Church itself is traumatized and is living out of a trauma response? Trauma disrupts the life of the survivor; trauma may, in an ultimately life-giving way, also disrupt the life of the Church. We certainly have ample historical evidence of this, beginning with the very first Christians gathering in community in the wake of the crucifixion. We have seen some of that disruption in our time in the collective pain that we are living in the clergy sexual abuse crisis. In my archdiocese, we are discerning our future in the wake of bankruptcy, and the discouragement, grief, and anger have had a huge impact on our life as Church. In a certain sense, we will never be the same again. We need to remember and tell our core narratives now more than ever. Rambo argues that the middle space, and the Spirit, who remains, can offer new possibilities right in the midst of the pain of trauma, whether that be individual or collective.

Concrete Implications for Preaching

It is important to look at homiletic preaching in its liturgical context. There is a growing body of research on the connection of liturgy to trauma. Much of it focuses on the role in healing of relationship and ritual. Because trauma itself resides in our bodies, ritual can be a place for healing, as the ritual movements engage our bodies in mystery and communion with one another and with God. Marcia Mount Shoop and Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, when discussing the trauma of racism, note that Eucharistic celebration is the occasion of the re-membering of Christ's body; that through ritual action God enacts in and with us the coming together of our body broken by so many things. They ask "How can we re-member the Body of Christ if we deny the wounds of the Body itself? Truly tending to the wounds of the body, the memories that continue to diminish and distort the integrity of our narratives will mean opening our memory and our deep connections up to transformative possibilities." And they continue, "Re-membering is not simply a cognitive activity, it is an embodied dynamic. We come to Eucharist to remember, to re-live our story and to re-member the Body of Christ… liturgy embodies the already and not yet of Christian identity and community. Trauma reveals and conceals the unavoidable disruption, aspirational integration, and strange conflation of past, present and future."[18]

The homily is part of the liturgy itself.[19] It is part of the embodiment of the mysteries of our faith, celebrated in and from our middle spaces, and forms the community to witness. Here are four specific implications for preaching through the lens of trauma.

First, preaching witnesses and speaks from the middle spaces, where death and life exist together. Hence, it goes deep and does not race to resurrection. Binary presentations of death and life do not do justice to our Tradition or to the biblical witness. We may rush to resurrection out of the sincere desire to preach a message of hope, but authentic hope, real hope, cannot emerge without adequate attention to pain. Preaching that denies or simply glosses over the abandoned wastelands, terror, and ambiguity inherent in life in our Body and bones cannot offer a full account of the Gospel. As Rambo remarks, "Suffering itself is not the source of redemption." Instead, she writes, it is 'the persistence of love in the midst of suffering."[20] An example of how present and current and past pain in a community and the dangerous memory of the Paschal Mystery can intersect in powerful ways took place in Triduum of 1988. I was in one of the remote farming communities that I was serving as pastoral minister in the parish of Guadalupe, diocese of Matamoros, Mexico. On Good Friday, we placed a large crucifix that belonged to

18 Marcia Mount Shoop and Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, "Transforming Memory: Re-Membering Eucharist," *Theology Today* 70 (July 2013): 152.

19 Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), no. 52, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

20 Rambo quotes Jones from "Hope Deferred: Trinitarian Reflections on Infertility, Stillbirth and Miscarriage," *Modern Theology* 17 (April 2001): 159.

one of the families in the village propped up on a chair before the community. It was the bloodiest one I had ever seen—not just a *divino rostro*, but the whole bruised and bloody body of Jesus. The crucifix was positioned with a small blackboard on either side. We listened to the passion proclaimed, and then people spoke in groups, and in tears, about the sufferings of Jesus. Then we spoke about the sufferings in the community—the kidnappings, the rising interest rates, the emigration of young people, the low prices for crops, the family problems. People wrote them all down on the blackboards, the sufferings of Jesus two thousand years ago and the sufferings of Jesus then. There was an energy, a something of life, in that space.

I will never forget the way the light reflected in the faces of those people as they built the Easter fire.

Preaching is a living into the power of the text and of life, and can be rendered as what Rambo calls an embodied practice of imagination.[21] She asserts that imagining is kind of a process of connection—to exercise imagination is paradoxically to conceive of what is unimaginable. And that leads to my second implication about preaching.

Preachers who are sensitive to trauma are in a continual process of learning to be witness to the trauma they carry in their own bones, as well as to that of people in their parish and society. In other words, a preacher must dare to remember in an embodied way not only the dangerous memories of our faith, but also to engage the concrete trauma history that most personally touches the preacher's life. A preacher does not have to be "completely integrated or healed" herself/himself in order to be aware of the effects of trauma. In a very important sense, preaching dares to stand in the midst of the impossible and find a way to proclaim possibility. We are formed by engaging our own narratives as well as those of our communities, and we proclaim hope principally from what we have seen.

Third, preaching that strives to ground communities in durable hope demonstrates awareness of what is happening to us collectively, both locally and globally. For instance, in the parish I serve now as Pastoral Associate and where I also have my clinical practice, more than half of the parishioners are undocumented immigrants. We have become aware of the many ways of the heightened fear that our current public rhetoric is sowing in the hearts, minds, and bodies of so many in our community. That collective trauma does not only affect undocumented immigrants, it affects all of us as the Body of Christ. Implicitly and explicitly, our preaching must account for this. Preaching has the potential to ground us in who we are as Christ's body, even as we live in uncertainty and fear. Imagination and memory in the midst of troubling times is essential in preaching.

Related to this, and fourth, we are not only the Body of Christ when we are together at Eucharist, as Elizabeth and the others on the bridge attest. We remain so everywhere we are in the world. Preaching that is attentive to what is happening to the both completely concrete and timeless struggles in the present and in history constitute a crucial aspect of preaching. We do not preach in a bubble, only relating to the parish. Solidarity, not only with our own parishioners but with the world, is key. Also, we preach in the midst of the communion of saints and of all who have gone before us. The promise of salvation, as Metz so eloquently stated, is not only for us, but also for them.

In a 2013 interview, Pope Francis said, "I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up."[22]

21 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma,* 162.

22 Pope Francis, interview with Antonio Spadaro, SJ, *America* (September 30, 2013).

Our willingness as Church to be with one another on the bridges of the world creates space for hope and healing. In fact, much of what I have said here about Elizabeth and the people who surrounded her is summed up in the pope's message.

We stand with Elizabeth and the people on the bridge. As preachers and in the Spirit, we have the privilege to speak the unspeakable, to witness to the apparently impossible, and to put into narrative the memories of our faith that open space for hope. Death persists. Love remains. Can we witness to it?