

Richard A. Rhem

List of Sermon Series

1986-2004

1986

1986 Lenten Series: The Human Face of God

- #1 The Mystery of Salvation: God Was in Christ
- #2 Costly Obedience
- #3 Following in His Steps
- #4 The Highest Freedom: Thy Will Be Done
- #5 Jesus Christ, Superstar: A Contemporary View
- #6 Disarming Vulnerability

God's Prodigal Love

- #1 I Want To Make It On My Own
- #2 Is That All There Is?
- #3 I Wish I Could Start Over
- #4 I Can't Believe the Love I've Found

No Stained Glass Saints

- #1 Abraham: Shaky Faith in a Faithful God
- #2 Jacob: The Conquest of a Wheeler-Dealer
- #3 Moses: Short-Fused Freedom Fighter With a Song
- #4 David: This Was a Man After God's Own Heart
- #5 Mary Magdalene: Bedeviled
- #6 Peter: Rocky
- #7 Paul: Mellowing of a Fanatic
- #8 Thanksgiving: Living a Wow!

1987

The Mystery of God's Sovereign Grace

- #1 No Doubt About It: No Comfort In It
- #2 Finding Our Destiny In God's Gracious Purpose
- #3 The Thread of God's Plan in the Tapestry of Our Lives
- #4 Commitment and Prayer in the Purpose of God
- #5 Let the Children Come
- #6 Worship: The Context of Encounter and Calling
- #7 The Freedom of the Sovereign God

1987 Summer Series on Psalms

- #1 A Song of Serenity
- #2 A Faith For All Seasons
- #3 Hanging On In the Darkness
- #4 Surprised By Grace

The One Covenant of Grace – The Salvation of the World

- #1 One Covenant – One World in Christ
- #2 Conversion From Religion To Grace
- #3 The Gospel of Radical Grace: No Human Invention
- #4 Lure of Legalism: Fallen From Grace
- #5 Grace and the Healing of Personality
- #6 Free to Love
- #7 Free to Care

1988

1988 Lenten Series: The Servant of the Lord

- #1 The Lamb of God
- #2 Identity and Intentionality
- #3 Universal Salvation
- #4 Compassion
- #5 Crisis (Palm Sunday)
- #6 Authentication (Easter Sunday)

Summer Series: Faith's Foundations

- #1 In the Beginning – God
- #2 Humanity: Creative Purpose and Response
- #3 Creation's Goal: Sabbath Rest
- #4 The Election of Grace: A Particular People For a Universal Purpose
- #5 God's Providence: Human Testing
- #6 The Creation of a People: Covenant and Law
- #7 Broken Covenant – New Covenant: Judgment and Grace

1989

Lenten Series: Freedom, Costly and Conflicted

- #1 Freedom's Quest: Search For Identity and Vision
- #2 Freedom's Stumbling Block Unconditional Traditionalism
- #3 Freedom's Gift: Grace
- #4 Freedom's Risk: Confrontation
- #5 Freedom's Cost & Foundation: Thy Will Be Done (Maundy Thursday)
- #6 Freedom's Triumph: Life Out of Death (Easter Sunday)

The Worship of the Church

- #1 Come As A Child
- #2 The Significance of Place: The Tale of the Stones
- #3 The Shapes and Sounds of Celebration
- #4 Lost in Wonder, Love and Praise
- #5 When Words Become the Word

1990

1990 Epiphany Series: God: Transforming Presence

- #1 In Community
- #2 In Cosmos
- #3 In History

1990 Lenten Series: Love Story

- #1 God So Loved
- #2 God's Love in Human Form
- #3 God's Love in Concrete Demonstration
- #4 God's Love Creates a New Beginning
- #5 God's Love: Vulnerable and Crucified
- #6 God's Love: A 'Yes' That Conquers Our 'No'

On Being an Easter People

- #1 A Call to Significant Living: Resurrection: Tradition and Freedom
- #2 The Spirit and Freedom: Transformed into the Likeness of Christ
- #3 The Freedom of Christian Life and Ministry (Dawn Boelkins)
- #4 The Motive and Resources For Christian Giving
- #5 One Body of Christ: Diversity of Gifts
- #6 Love: The Spirit's Highest Gift
- #7 The Body of Christ the Spirit Creates

1990 Summer Series: Trust in God

- #1 The Good Shepherd
- #2 When the Soul is Cast Down
- #3 Permission to be Human
- #4 Who Forgives the Unforgivable
- #5 Who Changes Faithfully
- #6 Whose Mercy is New Every Morning
- #7 Who Carries Us
- #8 Who Keeps Us on the Move When We Would Rather Give Up

The Church on the Way to the Future

- #1 Is There One True Religion?
- #2 Christian Faith – A Place to Stand in a World
- #3 We Believe One Church – Catholic and Reformatory
- #4 The Bible: God's Word or Human Word?

1990 Advent Series: Embodiment: God With Us

- #1 Waiting for the Word to be Born in Us
- #2 Wishful Thinking
- #3 I'm Afraid That...
- #4 If I Live Before I Die
- #5 God's Glory in Cracked Pots
- #6 A Tale of Epiphany, Pain and Grace

1991

1991 Lenten Series: The Sign of the Cross: The Way of Jesus

- #1 In a World at War
- #2 The Cruciform Life
- #3 Where was God?
- #4 Whose Truth Are You Living?
- #5 The Way That Leads to Peace
- #6 Prayer and the Will of God

#7 God Did!

Easter People

- #1 Rocky II
- #2 Doubt – the Other Side of Faith
- #3 Living Open-Hearted, Open-Handed
- #4 From Religion to Grace – An Easter Transformation
- #5 Letting Go – Reaching Out

Summer 1991 Series: The Footprints of God in the Sands of Time

- #1 Midwifing a Nation to Birth
- #2 Providence, Personality and Power
- #3 This Promise is All You Need
- #4 Freedom Flight
- #5 Fear of Freedom
- #6 Wings of Grace
- #7 This is Really Living
- #8 An Intimate Dwelling
- #9 The Experience For Which the Heart Longs

The Tradition That Has Shaped Us

- #1 The God Who Delights in Our Delight
- #2 East of Eden: Judgment and Grace
- #3 Sheer Grace: The Other Option
- #4 Prickly Prophets and Purple Kings
- #5 Are We Still Protesting Or Have We Made Our Point?

Only a Poem Will Do

- #1 When You Lose Your Balance
- #2 When We Are at a Loss for Words
- #3 When We Are Surprised by Grace
- #4 When Gratitude Fills the Heart

1991 Advent Series: God With Us

- #1 God With Us: In the Mystery of the Sacrament
- #2 God With Us: In the Care of the Community
- #3 God With us: In the Wonder of Worship
- #4 God With Us: In the Overshadowing of Mary's Womb
- #5 God With Us: In the Humanness of Jesus
- #6 God With Us: In the Other For Whom the Heart Longs
- #7 God With Us: In the One Light That Enlightens Us All

1992

The Sacramental Character of the Church

- #1 A Means of Grace, A Sign of Belonging
- #2 Eucharist: A Means of Grace, A Sign of Presence
- #3 The Word: A Means of Grace, Story as Sacrament
- #4 Observing Sabbath; Sanctifying Creation
- #5 The Church: Sign of the Kingdom, Community of Shalom
- #6 Spinner of Chaos

The Sacramental Character of the Church

- #1 Baptism: A Means of Grace: A Sign of Belonging
- #2 Eucharist: Means of Grace: A Sign of Presence
- #3 The Word: Means of Grace: Story as Sacrament
- #4 Observing Sabbath: Sanctifying Creation
- #5 Observing Sabbath: Celebrating Grace and Freedom
- #6 The Church: Sign of the Kingdom: Community of Shalom

Images of God in the Stories of Jesus

- #1 Abba
- #2 Prodigal Love
- #3 Nothing To Pay
- #4 God's Mercy For the Asking
- #5 All is Grace

From Proclaimer to the One Proclaimed

- #1 How a Man Became God?
- #2 Awestruck and Stammering
- #3 E.T.?
- #4 Truly Human and Truly God?
- #5 Out of This World – Dwelling in You
- #6 Someone to Watch Over You
- #7 The Wind Beneath Your Wings
- #8 Doxology

Heroes in Clay

- #1 Moses: Somebody Has to Believe
- #2 Samuel: Does God Take Sides?
- #3 John the Baptist: Wrath, Sometimes Necessary: Never the Solution

1992 Advent Series

- #1 Do You Really Think He is Going To Come?
- #2 Life After Life?
- #3 Hell?
- #4 What Are You Afraid of?

Jesus' Way

- #1 Finding His Way
- #2 His Way of Human Transformation
- #3 His Way of Freedom With Religious Tradition
- #4 His Way of Compassion With Human Dis-ease

1992 Lenten Series: Following Jesus

- #1 Do You Get the Picture?
- #2 Tough Teaching: Are You Serious, Jesus?
- #3 World Flight or World Fight?
- #4 I Don't Know How to Love Him
- #5 No Exit
- #6 Forsaken

- #7 Night
- #8 The Dawn of a New World

1992 Lenten Series: Portrait of the Crucified Painted in His Words

- #1 Dying Unto Life
- #2 Forgive Them
- #3 I Thirst
- #4 It is Finished
- #5 Into Thy Hands
- #6 Forsaken

1993

1993 Wed. Evening Lenten Series: Job & Jesus: The Mystery of Human Suffering

- #1 Suffering: Is There a Reason For It?
- #2 Suffering: Is It Punishment?
- #3 Suffering: Can It Be Vicarious?
- #4 Suffering: Is One Abandoned?
- #5 Suffering: Nevertheless...
- #6 Suffering: The Need For Another

The Faith of Jesus: Trust in a Gracious God

- #1 Table Fellowship: A Sign of God's Nearness
- #2 God of the Abandoned
- #3 Smashing Idols – Again and Again
- #4 By What Authority... Or Who Says So?
- #5 The God Who Forgives
- #6 Jesus Died Because of Our Sins, Not For Them
- #7 Easter Sunday: The Faith of Jesus Vindicated
- #8 Easter II: Good News

The Care of the Soul

- #1 – The Care of the Soul I
- #2 – The Care of the Soul II

1993 Epiphany Series: On the Threshold of the Third Millenium

- #1 Marks of Leadership
- #2 Credo
- #3 Mission: Passion Unleashed

1993 New Testament Series

- #1 Good News! The Light Has Come
- #2 Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life
- #3 The People of the Way
- #4 And the Story Goes On

1994

The First Testament Series

- #1 Creation: God's Risky Decision – Dream or Nightmare?
- #2 Why Not Ishmael? Election: Exclusive or Inclusive?

- #3 Israel: God Wrestler – A Tale of Providence and Grace
- #4 A Founding Story – A Visionary Leader and a People Set Free
- #5 The Test of Trust
- #6 Culture Wars
- #7 Believing in Christ and Following Jesus
- #8 Speaking Truth to Power
- #9 Trust Tat Survives Tragedy

Credo: A 1994 Eastertide Series

- #1 Credo: I Believe!
- #2 Jesus in a Reverse-Angle Lens
- #3 God With a Human Face
- #4 The Community of Saints – Love, Forgiveness
- #5 Christian Hope: Life Now and Forever

1994 Lent Series: The Seven Words From the Cross

- #1 Father, Forgive Them
- #2 Today, Paradise
- #3 Woman, Behold Thy Son
- #4 My God, Why?
- #5 I Thirst
- #6 It is Finished
- #7 Father, Into Thy Hands...

Easter Sunday: Embraced By the Light

Wisdom Literature Series

- #1 Wisdom For Life
- #2 A Healthy Perspective: But Is This All There Is?

1994 Job Series

- #1 What It Takes to Make a Heretic
- #2 Does Sin Reap Suffering?
- #3 Retribution Is Not God's Idea
- #4 When the Facts Don't Fit the Faith: Wrestling With God (Colette De Nooyer)
- #5 God Beyond All Human Conceiving
- #6 The Mystery of Suffering: Trust in the Darkness

1994 Advent Series "Home"

- #1 Come, Lord Jesus
- #2 Longing for Home and At Home Away from Home
- #3 Going Home
- #4 Home is Not a Human Possibility
- #5 Birth: The Way Home

1995

1995 Lenten Series "The Dream"
#1 Retrieving a Dangerous Dream
#2 A Dream Declared
#3 A Dreamer's Portrait of God
#4 Dream Embodied
#5 A Dreamer's Final Appeal
#6 The Death of a Dream
#7 Dream On

1995 Summer Series: "The Human Story: Paradigms of Grace"

- #1 Adam and Eve – Mudslide or Emergence?
- #2 Cain: Sin Crouches At the Door
- #3 Noah: The Tipsy Sailor
- #4 Abraham: Keeping Faith
- #5 Sarah and Hagar: Manipulation, Meanness and Bitter Fruit
- #6 Jacob: Expletive Deleted
- #7 Joseph: Breaking the Cycle of Violence
- #8 Moses: Violent For a Cause

1995 Fall Series "Good News"

- #1 That Not One Little One Be Lost
- #2 No One Need Despair
- #3 No One Is Excluded
- #4 Life is Not a Trivial Pursuit (with Ken Medema)
- #5 Newness Keeps Breaking In (Colette De Nooyer)
- #6 God Has More in Store For Us
- #7 Dancing With God
- #8 Thanksgiving: Thanks For the Memories

1995 Advent Series "Now – But Then"

- #1 Life Broken and Poured Out
- #2 When the Crisis Comes, It's Too Late
- #3 Can We be Both Truthful and Hopeful?
- #4 Love's Vulnerability
- #5 Face to Face

1996

1996 Lenten Series: "Will of God in Human Action"
#1 Face Set – Steely Will and Gracious Heart
#2 Struggle to Discern
#3 No Doubt – Free Faith (Peter Theune, R. Kleinheksel)
#4 Secure Enough to Forgive
#5 Struggling To Be True
#6 Completion – No Higher Prize
#7 You Need Never Be Afraid; God is For You

1996 Eastertide Series "I Do Believe"

- #1 The End Is Life
- #2 The News is Too Good Not to Tell
- #3 Our Little Systems Have Their Day
- #5 Where Love Dwells, There is Family
- #6 The Holy, Catholic Church (Day of Vote, May 19, 1996)
- #7 In the Holy Spirit: Butterflies are Free (Pentecost)
- #9 God Has a Grander Scheme

Exclusive Is Over!

A Collection of 6 of the Sermons in the series "I Do Believe", and the sermon "The God Who Never Gives Up On Us" from the sermon series "If God Be For Us...", preached from the pulpit of Christ Community Church during the situation of conflict in which the Classis of Muskegon, the local judicatory of the Reformed Church in America, challenged the theological perspective of Richard A. Rhem regarding the extent of God's grace. Claiming that the Reformed confessional position required the view that God's saving grace is available only through Jesus Christ, the Classis called on Richard Rhem to recant his view that God's revelation and God's grace are manifested beyond the confines of the Christian tradition.

In these messages, Rhem probes the Christian founding story, pointing out that the early Jesus movement was a Jewish movement and that the conflict situations recorded in the New Testament are intra-Jewish.

In John 5, the parents of the man born blind whose sight Jesus restores, refuse to acknowledge the miracle for fear of being "put out of the synagogue"; Stephen accuses the temple leadership of repeating the sins of their forebears who killed the prophets; Paul's vision that Gentiles need not be circumcised nor keep the dietary laws was tempered by James' concern that the Jewish community following Jesus remain observant; Peter's vision wherein he heard God's voice calling him to embrace what formerly he had considered unclean, prepared him for his encounter with the Gentile Cornelius, who, in Peter's presence, received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Revisiting these stories, Richard Rhem points out the relative adequacy of the respective religious institutional structures and faith formulations. He insists, however, they are "human containers" – adequate, but never absolute.

The central insight of the Reformation of the 16th century was that the Church must be ever in process of reforming, of being re-formed by the word of God – not simply a biblical text, but the biblical text heard within the long tradition of the Church in the present context of human experience. The Church continually fails to live up to this ideal. Again and again, fresh insights and new forms are frozen, absolutized and treated as the last word, quenching the Spirit.

God's Spirit is the Spirit of freedom and the story of the people of God is the story of the Spirit shattering "our little systems," creating newness. In a world marked by global consciousness, Richard Rhem declares that *Exclusivism* is over. That is not a fact to be feared; rather, an occasion to find a fresh translation for the Good News that appeared in Jesus Christ, with confidence that God has a grander scheme.

From his mentor, Hendrikus Berkhof, Rhem adopted Tennyson's lines as the hallmark of his theological reflection:

*Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be.
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.*

1997

Meeting God Again for the First Time

- #1 Shall the Fundamentalists Win?
- #2 A Simpler Way
- #3 Living Before the Face of God: The Social Dimension
- #4 Living Before the Face of God: Healed and Whole

Tough Questions: No Easy Answers

- #1 The Providence of God: Is It Wishful Thinking?
- #2 What Lies Beyond Death's Veil?
- #3 Is Religion Really Escape From Life?
- #4 Why is There So Much Anger in Religion?
- #5 Is Christianity Dying?
- #6 The Church: Who Needs It?

1998

1998 Summer Series "Can I Honestly Believe?"

- #1 A-Theism?
- #2 How Can I Pray?
- #3 Religion and Science: Can We Talk?
- #4 Is It Enough To Be Human?
- #5 What Does It Mean To Be Saved? (Colette De Nooyer)

2000

2000 Epiphany Series, "A Millennial Vision"

- #1 Light of the World
- #2 From Babel to Bethlehem to Spirit and Truth

2000 Midweek Lenten Series "What Wouldn't Jesus Do?"

- #1 If I Should Wake Before I Die
- #2 The Mind of Christ: Walking in His Steps
- #3 Grace is the Last Best Word – But Will It Work in the World?
- #4 Judging and Condemning is Not Our Prerogative
- #5 Proud Ambition Comes Up Empty
- #6 Angry Resentment Poisons the Soul

2000 Lenten Series "The Human Face of God"

- #1 The Face and the Flesh
- #2 Seeking Justice in a Brutal World
- #3 The Message of the Kingdom
- #4 Harmless Religion: Loss of Soul

2000 Summer Series, "Religion: Significant Critique and Fresh Expression"

- #1 Religion Made on Earth
- #2 Religion as Prozac
- #3 Religion as Illusion

The Heart of the Matter

- #1 A Charter of Freedom: A Matter of Choice
- #2 An Emerging Vision: What Matters?
- #3 An Intentional Commitment: A Matter of Heart

Christmas Eve: Advent IV: This is Our Story

Christmastide I: Of Angels, Songs in the Night and Deep Human Intuition

2001

2001 Epiphany Series, "Spirituality in the Modern World"

- #1 Worldview: Room for God?
- #2 Where in the World is God?
- #3 The Experience of God
- #4 Living Within a True Myth

2001 Lenten Series, A Fresh Look at an Ancient Story"

- #1 The Human Dilemma
- #2 Do We Need God to be Good?
- #3 Why Jesus?
- #4 Will We Ever Learn? (Palm Sunday)
- #5 An Invitation to Life (Easter Sunday)

2001 Eastertide Series, "Credo"

- #1 The Rise of Easter Faith
- #2 Creation Emerging: Tending the Garden
- #3 The Human Face of God
- #4 Mary: Mother of God or Jewish Mother?
- #5 Crucified! Violence in History
- #6 As Intimate as Breathing (Pentecost)

2001 Advent Series, "God in the Mirror of Christmas"

- #2 A Tale of Three Cities
- #3 A Human Face
- #4 A Child

2001 Christmastide I: Leaving Bethlehem

2002

2002 Epiphany: The Best is Yet To Be

2002 Lenten Series "Journeying With Jesus on the Road Less Traveled"

- #1 This Do; But Why?
- #2 Jesus, the Human Being...
- #3 What Comes Through in the Jesus Story?
- #4 Thy Kingdom Come, Meaning...
- #5 The Road Taken Makes All the Difference

2002 - Spiritual Life – Religion Re-Imagined

- #1 To Be Human Is Enough
- #2 Prayer With Eyes Wide Open

Hunger for God

Creation – God's Ecstasy

- #1 The Self-Creating Universe and the Problem of Good
- #2 The Garment of God
- #3 Where in the World is God?

2002 Advent Series

- #1 Icon of God from Cradle to Grave
- #3 The Risk of Love
- #4 The Deeper Truth of Incarnation

2003

The Feast of Epiphany: When the Radiance Breaks Through

Religion and the Human Story

- #1 In a World in Peril
- #2 The Source of Authority
- #3 Institution and Community

2003 Lenten Series, The Way of Peace/The Way of the Cross

- #1 Memory and Solidarity
- #2 Steely Resolve and Gentle Spirit
- #3 People of the Way

Easter Sunday, The Festival of the Resurrection, The Impossible Possibility

The Dangerous Memory of Jesus

2003 Summer Series "The Fundamentals a Century Later"

- #1 Have the Fundamentalists Won?
- #2 Crossing the Rubicon
- #3 Jesus: Episode or Epiphany?
- #4 When God Will Be Satisfied
- #5 A Vision of Shalom in a Random Universe

#6 Religion: Response to Mystery Emerging Naturally

Independence Day Sermon
My Country, Right or Wrong

All Saints Day Sermon
The Secret of Dying Well

November 23 Sermon
A Little Less Certainty and a Lot More Love
2003 Advent Series: "The Vulnerability of God
#1 Life Broken and Poured Out
#4 Two Births, Two Views, Two Empires

Christmastide I: The Grace to Embrace the Future

2004

A Littlefair Legacy
#3 One Reality – Rigorous Science, Passionate Religion
#4 This Quiet Dust (Ash Wednesday)

2004 Lenten Series "Remembering Jesus, Experiencing God
#1 Remembering the Way He Was
#5 Do You Suppose God is Really Like That?