



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #16

D. Preparing to Preach the Word

Step 1: Begin with Prayer

Step 2: Choose a Text

► **Step 3: Study the Text and Context**

Step 4: Look for Law and Gospel

Step 5: Find the Main Point

Step 6: Determine the Order of Presentation

Step 7: Apply the Word to Your Audience

Step 8: Choose the Right Words

Step 9: Prepare an Introduction and a Conclusion

After you have chosen a Bible text, you must then work, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to fully understand the text you have chosen. There are several steps you can follow to help you study and understand the text you have chosen so that you can correctly preach on it:

1. Read and re-read the text aloud and silently in the language in which you will be preaching

If there are several translations of the text available in your language, choose the translation in which you have most confidence, that is, the one that is the most faithful translation of the Hebrew or Greek.

Read and re-read the text in your chosen translation. This will give you a general understanding of the text. It is important read the text not only silently, but out loud as well. You will be reading the text before or as part of your sermon. Reading the text out loud as a part of your study will you the practice so that you can read the text correctly and clearly when you read it for your audience.

2. Study the context of your passage.

To understand a text in Scripture, it is almost always very helpful to study the *context* of the passage. The context refers to the verses or chapters that come before and after your text. Reading the context will give you a better understand of the general flow of thought in that section of the Bible. You should try to get a good idea of the general thought of the book and section of the book from which your text is taken.

If you have the time, you should read the whole book from which your text is taken. This will give you a general idea of the book as a whole and the best understand of the context of your verses. While this may seem like a lot of work, if you will be preaching a serious of sermons from the same book, this extra work at the beginning will help you as you continue to prepare sermons from the book. If you do not have time to read the whole book, read at least the whole chapter containing your text, and also the chapter before and after the chapter containing the text you are studying.

Studying the context will help you correctly understand your text. For example, if your text is a parable that Jesus told, reading the parables that come before it and after it can help you see the main point of the parable you are studying, as these other parables often talk about the same subject and give a similar lesson. And if your text begins with "And he..." or "And they...", you have to look at the context to figure out who "he" refers to and who "they" are.

3. Study your text verse by verse.

After you understand the context of your passage, study each verse in the passage one by one. Take notes as you study each verse. If you have questions on what a verse says, write down the question.

If you have access to other translations in your language, read the verses in those translations as well. If you know other languages in addition to the language in which you will preach, it will be helpful to study the text in these other languages as well. For example, if you are planning to preach in your local language, you should read and study your text first in that language. If you are able to read and study in another language, such as English or French, also study the text in this second language.

Studying different translations in your native language, along with translations in other languages you may know, will help you properly understand the Bible text. If we read only one translation, we might misunderstand what the translators meant by the words and phrases they used to translate the Greek or Hebrew. Looking at multiple translations and languages can help you avoid any misunderstanding and give you a more complete understanding of what God is saying. Reading the verse in different translations can also help you if you find some words that you do not understand. Different translations may use different words that explain the concept better.

If you have learned some Greek or Hebrew and you have access to the Greek New Testament or the Hebrew Old Testament, study the text, as far as possible, in the original Greek or Hebrew. Studying the original language can give you additional insight into the meaning of the text.

As you study each verse, it is usually helpful to examine the grammar of the sentences in your text. What is the subject of the sentence? What is the verb (the action word)? What words give us the object of the action? What are the connections between the various parts of the text? What are the tenses that are used? Are they past, present, future, or perfect? These are some questions that you can ask yourself to help you study and understand the passage in detail. Another way to think about this is to consider the five main questions:

- who?** Determine who is doing or saying something in the verse(s) and to whom they are doing or saying it. What do you know about the people mentioned? For example, if the passage talks about the pharisees, answer questions such as: Who were the pharisees? What were they like? What do we know about them?
- what?** Determine what is being said or done by each person.
- where?** Determine where the events took place. What do we know about this place? Is the place important?
- when?** Determine when the events described took place or will take place. Is what has happened before this important?
- why?** Look for reasons why the people mentioned in the text do or say what they do. You must be careful, however, to not invent a reason if the Bible does not clearly give a reason.

Find other verses in the Bible that talk about the same things. Many Bibles list verses that are related to the verses you are studying. Look for little letters or numbers attached to words or phrases in the verses and then find the cross-references in the center column or at the bottom of the page. Because the Bible interprets itself, something that may not be clear to you in your text may be more fully explained in another part of the Bible. These other passages can help you understand what your text is saying.

The Gospels often contain parallel passages. If you are studying a text from one of the Gospels, read the parallel accounts in the other Gospels (these are often given in the cross-references in your Bible). These parallel accounts often give additional information that can help you understand your text more fully.

All of this may seem like a lot of work, but it is important to thoroughly study the text on which you are preaching so that you understand it correctly and can preach on it properly. If you do not understand the text, how can you preach on it? And by studying your text thoroughly, you, yourself will grow in your understanding of God's word (see 2 Peter 3:17-18). As you practice all these steps, they will become second nature and you will become more adept in your study of the Bible.

Some texts are much more difficult to understand than others. It may even happen at times that you realize that you do not understand a text well enough to teach it to others. In this case, look for another text that you do understand and pray that the Holy Spirit will give you a better understanding of God's Word so that you can understand and preach the difficult text at a later date.

While it is important to take the time and effort to carefully study the text on which you will be preaching, remember that our understanding of God's Word ultimately comes from the Holy Spirit. May He bless all your efforts and give you understanding of the text you have chosen.

Resources for your study

As general rule, at least for beginning preachers, it takes about 20 hours each week to properly study a text and prepare a sermon on that text. When it comes to studying, preaching, and teaching God's word, we do not want to take shortcuts. Because of work and family, however, you may have limited time, so you will have to make the very best use of the time that you have available to study and prepare your sermons. There are resources that can help you make efficient use of your time to study the Bible.

If you have a friend or a mentor who can help you study your text, use him. If you can get together with other like-minded preachers in your area to study of that text, this can be very helpful in your preparation. This is another reason to use the same lectionary. If you are all preaching on the same text each week, you can discuss the text together, share insights, and help one another to prepare your sermons.

You can save a lot of time if you have an edition of the Bible that provides study helps. For example, you may have a Bible that has notes that explain certain difficult words or expressions. As mentioned above, your Bible may list passages from other parts of the Bible that deal with the same subject or provide an explanation of your text. Your Bible may contain maps, charts, and timelines that help explain the setting of your text.

Some Bibles contain *concordances* in the back that give a list of the various passages in the Bible that contain a particular word. This list can help you find other passages that talk about the same subject or use the same word. Looking at other passages that use a certain word can help you better understand what that word means. There are also Bible apps that you can download onto your phone or tablet that let you search for words.

Another resource that may be helpful is a Bible commentary written by someone who has spent much more time trying to understand what your text means. Such a commentary may provide helpful comments on the meaning of the original words or the grammar of the sentences. It may include parallel passages or information that help explain your text. But you must be very careful when you use commentaries, whether they are in books or on the Internet. Every commentator has his own point of view and follows a certain confession or creed that will color his understanding of the text. It is best to read only those commentaries written by Lutheran men who share the same confession that you have. You should be able to have confidence in a commentary written by someone who also believes that the *Book of Concord* agrees with Scripture. In general, it is best to consult a commentary only after you have studied the text yourself. It is important that you try to understand the text yourself first. Remember that the Holy Spirit works through the Word itself to enlighten those who study that Word.

You can find a lot of information to help you study your text on the Internet. There are websites, such as www.BibleGateway.com, www.biblia.com, and www.bible.is, that have Bibles in many languages.

These websites and various Bible apps allow you to search for words and phrases and find other passages that speak to the same topic as your text to help you better understand your text. As noted above, however, you must be careful when reading commentaries on the internet. It is easy to find comments on the internet from those that do not share our understanding of the Bible.

Questions

1. List the steps you will take in studying your text with the time and the materials you have available to you.
2. Which Bible translations are available for you to use?
3. Which languages can you use to study the Bible?
4. Why is it helpful to consult with others in studying a text?
5. What do we mean when we say that the Bible interprets itself?
6. How can a map or chart or timeline help you understand your text?
7. What is a concordance and how may it be helpful?
8. What is a parallel passage?
9. What can a person learn from the Internet about a specific Bible text?
10. Why do we need to be careful in our use of commentaries?