



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #22

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

Once you have determined the main point of your text, in most cases, you have also determined the main point of your sermon. There may be times when a subordinate thought of the text becomes the main point of your sermon because of some special needs of your audience, but usually you will want to make the main point of the text also the main point of your sermon.

The next thing you need to determine is the order in which you are going to explain your text and present the main point or theme of your sermon. Order is important in any oral address. We have all probably heard addresses or sermons that lacked order. The speaker would make random remarks about one subject, then another, and then another, without any logical sequence. Such sermons and addresses are difficult to follow. The listener easily gets lost and cannot always understand what the speaker is talking about. The speaker may have some very good thoughts and he may speak very important truths, but because there is no order in what he says, these good thoughts and important truths do not reach their audience. It's like a gun that sprays bullets in many different directions but does not hit the target.

Because order is so important, it is important that you, either in your mind or on paper, make an outline of the order in which you are going to explain your text and communicate the main point of the text. There are two main ways you can do this. The most natural way of presenting the truth of a text is to follow the order of the text.

Natural Order

In the last lesson, we looked at Luke 10:38-42. We determined that the theme of our sermon would be the idea that being served by Jesus is more important than serving Jesus. In preaching a sermon on this text, you would first of all explain that Jesus traveled to various villages in His ministry, and in this one village there were two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha invited Jesus into her home, and when He accepted the invitation, He spent His time talking. Mary sat near Jesus and listened to what He had to say. In other words, you would explain the first two verses in the text, Luke 10:38-39. The first point in the outline would be something like this: Jesus opened His mouth, and Mary listened to what he had to say. You would explain that Jesus was doing something for Mary that she considered more important than anything else.

After discussing the actions of Jesus in His teaching and Mary's response, you would go on to discuss verse 40 where we have a description of what Mary's sister Martha considered important. Martha was busy with trying to serve Jesus. She was no doubt preparing a meal for Jesus, her honored guest. The

text says that Martha was distracted. Jesus later told her that she was worried and troubled. In other words, she was hurrying and scurrying around to do the best she could for Jesus.

But as she was busy in trying to serve Jesus, she became upset that her sister Mary was not helping her. Instead of helping, Mary was just sitting there listening to Jesus. Did her sister not think that serving Jesus was important? What could be more important than serving such a special guest as Jesus? But Mary was just sitting there and not helping her sister at all.

Finally, Martha became so upset with Mary's lack of cooperation that she asked for Jesus' help. In fact, she even implied that Jesus should have noticed that Martha was doing all the work and that Mary was just sitting there, listening to Jesus. Martha wanted Jesus to direct Mary to get up and help her prepare the meal. No doubt Martha fully expected Jesus to comply with her wishes. She may have expected Jesus to apologize for keeping Mary with Him and not noticing that Martha needed help. Mary would then quickly get up and help her, and the meal would be served.

You have the two different reactions of the two sisters to Jesus' presence in their home. Mary used this special opportunity to listen to Jesus' teaching. This is what was most important to her. Martha, on the other hand, thought that what Mary was doing was not as important as what she was doing. That is why she asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her. So first we have said that Mary's priority was listening to Jesus' Word. Then we stated Martha's viewpoint that serving Jesus must be the most important thing to do at this time.

Finally, we come to verses 41-42. Here Jesus expresses His opinion about the choices of the two sisters. Will He agree with Martha and ask Mary go help her sister in serving? Will He gently rebuke Mary for not helping her sister Martha? This is certainly what Martha expected Jesus to do. But Jesus surprised Martha and probably also Mary. He gently rebuked Martha for being so worried and troubled about her need to serve Jesus. Instead of rebuking Mary, Jesus rebuked Martha. Instead of siding with Martha and approving of her priority, Jesus specifically said that Mary had made an excellent choice. Mary had in fact chosen the one thing that is needed, that is, the most important thing of all. She chose to take the time to listen to Jesus and His teaching. Jesus said He would not tell Mary to quit listening to His teaching in order to serve Him together with Martha.

So, we have this order of presentation:

1. Jesus came to the home of two sisters. Mary sat down and listened to Jesus' teaching.
2. Martha considered it more important to serve Jesus and expected Jesus and Mary to agree with her.
3. Jesus stated that Mary had made the better choice, because listening to His teaching was the one thing that is needed. Listening to Jesus more important than anything else.

This kind of order simply follows the order of the text. It discusses the first two verses first, then the middle verse, and finally, the last two verses. This order leads up to the main point, namely, it is more important to listen to Jesus' teaching than to serve Jesus by what we do for Him. In other words, it is more important to have Jesus serve us than to have us serve Him.

This order works out so well in this text that it is hard to imagine any other order than the natural order of the text. But let us present another order of presentation that could possibly be followed.

Logical Order

In this order, we begin with Jesus' statement that one thing is needed, and then we determine what He means by this statement. To do this, we follow this order:

1. We talk about Martha. We show that what Martha thinks is the one thing needed. It seems that Martha thinks it is serving Jesus. What could be more important?

2. We talk about Mary's choice. She was not serving Jesus, but she was being served by Jesus. She chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word.
3. We talk about Jesus' explanation that Mary has made the better choice. The one thing that is needed is listening to Jesus' teaching. This is more important than serving Him.

This order of presentation does not follow the order of the text, but it does have the advantage of presenting Martha's choice before Mary's choice. It talks about the negative before the positive. This is a very logical way to proceed.

Conclusion

In the examples above we divided the text into three parts. It is generally helpful to divide a text into two or three parts, sometimes even four or more parts, and present one point after another in a logical way. In your presentation, you should always keep the aim in mind.

The above is an attempt to put explain the process you would go through as you prepare to preach a sermon on a certain text. Often this process only takes a few minutes after you have studied your text and you have determined the main point. Sometimes it is more difficult to determine the best order to say what you want to say to your audience.

The important thing is that you have some kind of an order. You do not want to mix everything up so that your audience cannot follow your line of thought. You do not want them to miss out on what you are trying to say. An orderly sermon is not only easier to listen to and understand, it is also easier for you to preach. An orderly sermon is easier for you to keep in your own mind as you are talking, because one thing leads to another in a logical sequence.

Questions

1. Why is the order of presentation important?
2. What makes a sermon difficult to follow and understand?
3. What is the natural order of presentation?
4. What are three points of the sermon above that follows the order of the text
5. Which verses of Luke 10:38-42 pertain to each of the three parts?
6. How is the second example different from the first example?
7. In the second example, which verses of Luke 10:38-42 pertain each of the three parts?
8. Which of the two examples above do you prefer, and why?