



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #24

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

When you prepare to preach God's Word, it is important to think about what kind of people you will be speaking to. Do most claim to be Christians, or are they unacquainted with Christ? Are they members of a Christian congregation who have been Christians for a long time, or are they newcomers to the Christian faith? Are they literate or illiterate? Are they highly educated, or are they without much education? What language do they speak? Do they read the Bible, or do they who know very little about Bible teaching? The more you know about your hearers, the better you will be able to apply the Word of God to their situation. As we have seen, Paul presented God's Word in one way to an audience in a Jewish synagogue that was well-acquainted with the Bible. He presented God's Word in a different way to an audience in Athens who knew nothing about God's Word or His promises.

Once you have a general idea of the order in which you want to present your text and who your audience is, it is good to consider how you want to apply this word to your audience. In other words, how do you make your audience understand your text? To answer this, think about what this text should mean to your audience. What difference should your text make to them?

Let us continue to use as an example Luke 10:38-42. As we determined in lesson 20, the main point of the text is that it is more important to be served by Jesus than to serve Jesus. While it is good to serve Jesus, it is more important to listen to His teaching.

Finding the Law in Your Text

At this point it is helpful to consider the law elements in the text and the Gospel elements in the text. To find the law elements in the text, consider which of the Ten Commandments is being broken. Let us look for the law in our text:

1. Was Martha doing anything wrong in welcoming Jesus into her home? Not at all. Martha was doing a good thing. So, the wrong thing would be to do the opposite of what Martha is doing: not welcome Jesus into your home. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25: what we do to the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters in His name we do to Him. If we help a brother or sister of Jesus, we are serving Jesus. If we fail to serve a brother or sister of Jesus, we are failing to serve Jesus. A possible application of the law to your audience might be: *Be careful of how you treat your fellow-Christian, for as you treat that person, you are treating Jesus Himself.* But this is not the main point of the text, so you may not want to make a big point of being a good neighbor in this sermon.
2. In verse 39 we read about Mary who was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His teaching. Was there something wrong in what Mary was doing? Not at all. Mary was doing a good thing. In fact, Jesus said that what Mary was doing was the one thing needed; it was something good that would not be taken away from her. So, the wrong thing would be failing to sit at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word. Since this really is the main point of the text, you will certainly want to apply this word to your audience. Make your audience realize that it is indeed a sin to ignore or neglect the hearing of God's Word. As Martin Luther wrote in explanation of the Third Commandment: *"We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God's Word, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it"* (*Book of Concord*, p. 352).
3. In verse 40, we see that Martha **"was distracted with much serving,"** and that Jesus scolded her for this, saying: **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things."** It was good that Martha was serving Jesus, but she was making the serving of Jesus more important than what Mary was doing. She expected Jesus to agree with her because she didn't realize that Mary had made the better choice. Martha's "sin", therefore, was that her priorities were wrong. She thought that what she was doing for Jesus was more important than what Jesus was doing for Mary. Thus, the application of this text to any audience would include a warning not to make major things minor and minor things major. Serving Jesus or anyone else can never be as important as sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word, because that is **"the one thing"** needed.

When you apply the law found in this text to your audience, you make them aware of their sins of neglecting the Word of God, or of considering serving Jesus to be more important than hearing His Word. But this can be only a part of the application of your text to the audience. Preaching the law alone cannot do anything except make the person aware of his or her sin. It is important that everyone recognizes that they are a sinner, but we dare not stop there. There can be only two results if we only preach the law:

1. The members of your audience compare themselves with others and become proud of the fact that they are listening to God's Word. They consider themselves better than others for making a good choice.
2. The members of your audience realize that they have not made listening to God's Word a high priority in their lives and therefore there is no hope for them. They have not lived up to God's demands. It is good to reach this conclusion, but we cannot stop at this point and be satisfied that our listeners are aware of how sinful they are for not listening to Jesus' teaching. That is only the first step.

Finding the Gospel in Your Text

We are not ministers of the old covenant of law, but we are ministers of the new covenant, so we must look for Gospel elements in our text. We are preachers of Good News. The law that we must preach is only preparation for the gospel; it is not the last word. Are there any Gospel elements in Luke 10:38-42, or must we bring the Gospel in from other texts? Since Jesus has told us to preach the Gospel, we must preach the Gospel even if our text doesn't directly contain the Gospel. We cannot leave our audience

without the good news of Jesus.

In Luke 10:38-42 the Gospel is *implied* rather than presented in full detail. The Gospel is present in this text because Jesus is present. The fact that He is on earth talking to persons like Mary and Martha is good news in itself, because of who Jesus is. Jesus's name means Savior, and that is what He is. Jesus is the Savior sent from heaven above to save us from our sins.

Because of who Jesus is, we can be sure that when He was talking to Mary, He was bringing her the Gospel. He was telling her the good news of who He was and what He had come to do. That is why Jesus could say to Mary that what she had chosen was the one thing needed. We do not know what Jesus said to her specifically, but we can be sure that Jesus did more than teach God's law. If Jesus only made Mary aware of the fact that she was a lost sinner who had broken all of God's commandments, it would not be **"that good part"** which would not be taken from her.

We get some idea of what Jesus must have said to Mary from what happened a few weeks later. Jesus was again at the home of Martha and Mary. We read about this in John 12:1-3: **"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil."**

Judas Iscariot and the other disciples complained that this was a waste, but Jesus defended Mary and said: **"Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial."** Mary showed her appreciation and understanding of Jesus' mission by anointing Jesus with this precious oil. She anointed Him in advance for His burial. No doubt it was through her careful listening to Jesus' teaching that she knew about Jesus' coming death. She probably had a better understanding of what was about to happen than Jesus' twelve apostles!

This same incident is described in the Gospel of Matthew in these words: **"A woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table"** (Matthew 26:7). When His disciples complained about the waste, Jesus replied: **"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her"** (Matthew 26:10-13).

Because of the way Jesus defended Mary's action on that day, we can be sure that Mary anointed Jesus out of love for Him. This love can only be generated by the hearing of the Gospel. John wrote: **"We love Him because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). Mary loved Jesus because Jesus first loved her. She knew that love because she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His Word. His Word certainly was predominantly Gospel, the good news of Jesus' love that He was about to demonstrate by His sacrifice on the cross.

Of course, we ought to listen to everything Jesus says to us, whether it is law or whether it is Gospel. But we know from Jesus' words throughout the four Gospels that His words to penitent sinners were Gospel words of love and forgiveness. He spoke to them of caring and blessing, and even gave them the assurance of eternal life. You could include a few examples of these sayings from Jesus' lips in your sermon as you apply your text to your audience so that they can begin to understand the blessings that come to us through listening to Jesus' teaching.

Here are a few examples from the Gospel of Luke, the same Gospel from which our text is taken. In His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus told the audience in the synagogue that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: **"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted"** (Luke 4:18). Jesus said to a crippled man who was brought to Jesus by his four friends: **"Man, your sins are forgiven you"** (Luke 5:20). To the messengers sent to Him by John the Baptist Jesus said: **"Go and tell John the things you have seen and**

heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Luke 7:22).

Notice that Jesus emphasized the hearing of the Good News (the Gospel) that He taught. He did not only point to His miracles of healing. Today Jesus' blessings come to us only through His Word. It is only by listening to His Word that we begin to believe in Him and His work in our behalf. It is only through His word that we begin to respond to His Good News by our love and service to Him. The hearing of His Word is the one thing needed, for, as the apostle Paul wrote, **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17).

Summary

The application of your text to your audience will include some law elements, so that your listeners are aware of their sin. In this example, you would talk about specifically their sin of failing to listen to Jesus' teaching at times. But what you want to emphasize above all is the Good News that God sent His Son, Jesus, to sinners like us to be our Savior from sin. The message of what Jesus has done for us comes to us through His words, and that is why it is so important to listen to His teaching. It is through His words in the Gospels and in the entire Bible that we come to know Him, to believe in Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. Listening to His teaching is the thing that Jesus Himself says is the one thing needed, for it is through His Word that we receive His blessings.

There are different ways in which you can apply the text to your audience. One way is to apply the teaching as you discuss of each part of the text. Another way is to save the application to the very end, after you have explained the whole text. If your sermon has two or three divisions, another way would be to apply the text after each division. You will learn how to do this in your speaking in a way that is most natural for you.

As a preacher, you will want to answer two questions in his sermon: What does this text of Scripture mean? What does this text of Scripture mean to you and your audience at this time and at this place?

Questions

1. Why is it important to know something about the persons you are addressing?
2. How would you address a congregation of Christians differently from an audience of mostly non-Christians?
3. How would you speak differently to a congregation made up of new believers as opposed to long-time believers?
4. In what way are all audiences the same?
5. What does it mean to apply the text to the audience?
6. Why is application important in preaching the Word of God?
7. What law elements can be found in Luke 10:38-42?
8. What is the purpose of calling attention to people's sins?
9. What happens when your sermon contains only law preaching?
10. What Gospel elements can be found in Luke 10:38-42?
11. Why should the preaching of the Gospel predominate in a Christian sermon?
12. What are some different places in the sermon you can apply the text to your audience?