



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #26

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

You have been called to preach God's Word. You began your preparation by asking God the Holy Spirit to teach you His Word. You have chosen a text. You have studied this text. You have determined the main point of the text and have made that point the main point of your sermon. You have determined the order in which you want to present your text. And you have considered what specific points of law and Gospel you will apply to your audience based on your text. All of this preparation requires serious concentration. Now you are in the final stages of preparing your sermon: you need to think of the actual words you will use in your sermon.

Not all preachers do this in the same way. One way to choose the words you will use is to write out your entire sermon in advance. Writing out your entire sermon, word for word, will help you carefully consider what you will say and how you will say it. It is important to remember, however, that what you are writing down is not something that people will read; it is something that people will hear. A person will not be able to go back and reread something again if they did not understand the first time. You will need to make things very clear in the words that you will speak, so that your audience will be able to understand what you are saying as you are saying it. As you write down and review the words you plan to use, it is helpful say them out loud to make sure they are easily understood when you speak them.

If what you are going to say is something that may be difficult to understand at first, you may need to repeat it several times, or you may need to explain it in more than one way. It is easy for our minds to wander as we listen to someone speaking, so it is good to repeat important points. You will probably want repeat these points in more than one way, so that you are not just using the same words over and over. Using different words to repeat important points in your sermon will help your listeners to hear and understand what you say.

The words you choose for your sermon will depend on what kind of people you are talking to. Your audience must be able to understand the words you use. When you have finished writing your entire sermon, read through your sermon again and make sure that your words are words your listeners will understand. You will also want to make sure that everything you say agrees with the Word of God.

Preachers with little or no experience should write out their entire sermons and have an experienced preacher read it and make suggestions for possible improvement. Do not expect your first sermon to be excellent in every way and to not need any improvement. Like almost everything else in life, preaching improves with experience.

Some preachers continue to write out their sermons in full throughout their lives. Others do this for a while and then realize that it is not necessary for them to do so. They can come up with the right words to use as they are speaking without writing out everything out in detail in advance. It is still helpful to write out at least an outline of what you want to say. That is, you list the main points you want to make and the order in which you want to present them. If you want to use quotations from other parts of the Bible, or from other books, you may want to write these down so that you quote these passages or statements accurately.

Some preachers are very good at memorizing what they have written. Others can keep everything straight without writing down anything. Each preacher develops his own way of preparing the words he wants to use. What works best for most is to write down the words of the sermon in full or in outline, and then to memorize the order of your presentation thought by thought, rather than memorizing the exact words of your sermon. You should not sound as though you are reciting something you have memorized. You should sound natural, as though you are thinking the thoughts as you are presenting them, just like you do in ordinary conversation. You also should not simply read your sermon. Nevertheless, if there is a very important point that you want to make, and your choice of words is important to make that point, write this point down word for word in advance and try to use the wording you have chosen.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs points out that our choice of words in speaking is very important: **“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver”** (Proverbs 10:20). **“The lips of the righteous feed many”** (Proverbs 10:21). **“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom”** (Proverbs 10:31). **“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable”** (Proverbs 10:32). **“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad”** (Proverbs 12:25). **“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness”** (Proverbs 15:1-2). **“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”** (Proverbs 15:23). **“Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones”** (Proverbs 16:24). **“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles”** (Proverbs 21:23). **“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear”** (Proverbs 25:11-12).

A respected Lutheran teacher in America once said to a group of pastors: “The first requirement of a sermon is that it contains nothing but God's Word – and that pure and unadulterated” (C. F. W. Walther: *Pastoral Theology*, p. 97). This agrees completely with what Paul wrote to Timothy: **“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing”** (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Paul also told him: **“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 1:13). Paul said to Titus: **“Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine”** (Titus 2:1).

Questions

1. List the steps that you should take to prepare to preach the Word.
2. How can a beginning preacher of God's word improve his sermons?
3. When you are writing a sermon, why is it important to realize that what you are writing is meant to be heard, not read?
4. What are some things to keep in mind in choosing the right words?
5. Why is it not necessary for everyone to write out his sermon?
6. What is wrong with reciting a sermon you have memorized?
7. Why is it better to memorize your sermon thought for thought, rather than word for word?
8. What parts of your sermon might you want to write down word for word?
9. Which one of the proverbs above is the most meaningful for you in your sermon preparation?
10. What is true of the person whose does not preach God's Word?