



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #28

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 should have a good idea of what you are going to say in your sermon before you work on an introduction. The purpose of an introduction is to let your listeners know why they should listen to what you have to say. In the introduction, you want to arouse their interest in what you are about to tell them from God's Word. You can bring up a topic of current interest, present a question about that topic that they will want to be able to answer, and then answer the question in your sermon. You want your listeners to be eager to listen to what the answer might be. Of course, you want them to understand that the answer to this question does not come from you, but from the Word of God, and that you are only a messenger.

The apostle Paul introduced his message to the people of Athens by referring to a shrine that he saw in their city to an unknown God. He then told them that he would tell them about the God they did not know.

It is customary in America to read the text from the Bible before speaking about it. If you read the text first, the introduction will then move from the text you have read to the main point of your sermon. Another way is to speak a few words of introduction before reading your sermon text. This can help focus your hearers' attention the text and the main idea you want them to hear from the text.

In your introduction you are trying to get the good will of your audience. You do not want them to tune you out or stop listening even before you get to your main point. Your introduction, then, should be pleasant and not confrontational. You want a member of your audience to think to himself: "I am glad I am here because I want to hear what God has to say about this topic. This should be interesting."

In their book, *Preach the Gospel* (pp. 80-85), Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge present several suggestions concerning the introduction to a sermon:

1. Make it friendly. The introduction is not the time to accuse your audience of sin or to warn against false teaching. That can come later on in your sermon, if your text refers to such things.
2. Make it preparatory by raising questions that the sermon will answer.
3. Make it serve a purpose by building a bridge between the text and the main point of your sermon.
4. Make it personal by using the pronoun "you" in your introduction.

5. Keep it short. You do not want your audience to think to themselves: “Come on, get to the point.”
6. Keep it simple. Use short sentences. Save your thunder and lightning for what is to follow. The introduction is not the place to get deep or profound. Save that for the body of your sermon.

Gerlach and Balge warn against using the same kind of introduction for every sermon. For example, do not begin every sermon by going back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, or by saying what particular Sunday it is, whether Christmas or Easter or Pentecost, or some other special day. You do not want your audience to know exactly what you are going to say because that is what you always say. Use variety. Try to surprise your audience from time to time.

The important thing is that your introduction should always lead to the main point of your sermon, not away from it. If you refer to recent events in the life of the community or to various experiences the congregation or you, yourself, may have had, make sure that these lead to the subject of the sermon. You can refer to the season or time of the church year, if that helps draw attention to your point, but you should not do this in every introduction. You may want to explain briefly the reason you have made the main point of your sermon the main point, that is, why you think this is something that your audience needs to hear.

Besides planning an introduction for your sermon, you should also plan your conclusion. It is important to know when to stop. Sometimes a preacher has a hard time stopping. He may feel the need to repeat over and over again what he has just said to the point no one in his audience is listening anymore. The important point to remember is: when you have no more to say, stop talking.

It is often helpful to refer to the introduction in your conclusion. You introduced the topic of your sermon, you presented the topic in your sermon, and now, in the conclusion, you wrap it up with a short summary of what God says about the topic in the text. If you asked a question at the beginning, you can review in a brief way the answer God gives to this question in the text. Another thing you may want to do in your conclusion is to suggest to your audience the proper way for them to apply that answer in their own lives. If your text is predominantly a Gospel text, you will plead with your listeners to take the gift that God is giving them in Christ and His teaching. Remember Paul’s words: **“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain”** (2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1).

If your text is urging Christians to carry out a certain action or to have a certain attitude because of what God has done for us, use your conclusion to encourage your listeners to put this into action in their own lives. Sometimes the best conclusion is simply to repeat your text or a portion of it. Now that you have made this text clear to your audience, they will be able to apply it more easily in their own lives. In many cases, it is also fitting to conclude your sermon with a prayer that God, through His Word, will accomplish in the listeners what He desires to accomplish: namely, create in them a stronger faith in Christ their Savior and a stronger desire to do what he wants out of love for Him. **“We love Him because He first loved us”** (1 John 4:19).

Questions

1. Which should you plan first: the main point of the sermon or the introduction? Why?
2. How did the apostle Paul introduce his message to the Athenians?
3. What is the custom in your locale: to read the text of the sermon first, or to say some words of introduction first? Which do you prefer?
4. Why is it important to make the introduction friendly?
5. What are some ways you can encourage your audience to listen to you?
6. Why is it important to make your introduction short and simple?
7. Why is it good to use variety in your introductions?
8. What makes for a good conclusion to a sermon?
9. What are some ways of concluding sermons that are not good?