



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #29

E. Preaching the Sermon You Have Prepared

Everything we have said up to now has dealt with preparation to preach a sermon. Preparing to preach the Word of God is very important. That is why we have spent so much time talking about it. But all of this preparation has one purpose: to preach the Word of God to people. This is our directive from the Lord Himself. We are to open our mouths and proclaim the good news. Jesus said: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). **“And they went out and preached everywhere”** (Mark 16:20). The apostle Paul told Timothy: **“Preach the word!”** (2 Timothy 4:2).

The sermons you prepare to preach must be preached. The words you have worked on must be spoken to an audience. The thoughts you have put together from your study of God’s Word must be delivered to the glory of God and for the benefit of sinful human beings who need to hear what you are going to tell them. Therefore, just as we need to devote ourselves to sermon preparation, we need to devote ourselves to sermon delivery. And here, as always, the first step must be prayer. David’s prayer in Psalm 19:14 should be ours as we step forward to deliver a sermon in Jesus’ name: **“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.”** Another good prayer is found in Psalm 51: **“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You... O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise”** (Psalm 51:12-15).

The voice we have is the voice God has given us. Some speakers have high voices; some have low voices. Some have loud voices; some have softer voices. Whatever voice we have been given, we can learn how to use it in a way that delivers God’s message. Speaking may be easy for you, or it may be difficult. But try to do your best with the voice God has given you.

Our aim in preaching is to be conversational. That means you are thinking what you are saying at the moment you are saying it. This is the way all of us speak naturally in our ordinary conversation. We are thinking what we are saying as we say it. If you have the words of your sermon written out in front of you, you might simply read your sermon without thinking of what you are saying, or give that impression to your listeners. Perhaps you have tried to memorize what you have written, so that you can speak without anything written down. But from the way you speak we can see that you are trying to remember what you have memorized – what you are saying does not appear to be what you are thinking. You are thinking only of remembering the words you have memorized instead of speaking freely.

Do not concentrate on the exact words you are going to use. Concentrate on getting your thoughts across to your audience. Be concerned with getting your message across, which is a message from God. You are speaking what God has revealed in His holy Word.

The goal in preaching is a free presentation of your sermon. This means that you are full of the truths and thoughts you have learned from your careful study of God’s Word, and now you are presenting your message to your audience from your heart. Do not be concerned with anything else except getting your message across, so that your listeners can hear and understand what you are saying. Pray that the Holy Spirit will use your words to accomplish what He pleases, that is, to make sinners aware of their sins and to comfort such sinners with the good news of Jesus Christ and what He has done to save sinners from their sins.

It is not necessary to know word for word what you are going to say, but it is important that you know the ideas and thoughts you are going to present and the general order in which you are going to present them. If you have had time to write out your sermon in detail, read it over and over again, so that you have the thoughts clear in your mind. If you have only an outline or summary of what you are going to say, go through that outline until you know it well.

When you first begin preaching, it is a good idea to rehearse speaking your sermon out loud in a private place when you are all alone. This gives you an idea of what it is like to say what you want to say in the order you want to say it. After you have had more experience, such a rehearsal is usually not necessary.

My own practice as a preacher is to write out a sermon fully and to read it over and over again until the ideas and the progress of thoughts are clear to me. I do not take a printed copy of my sermon to the pulpit, but I usually write down the Bible passages that I want to quote, so that I quote them accurately. I make a few notes for myself, that is, the main points I want to cover, so that if I somehow get lost or have forget what I want to say, I can look down and have my memory refreshed. Usually I do not have to refer to my notes, but they are there just in case I need them. You should do what makes you the most comfortable, but still allows you to preach naturally and focus on your message as you are saying it.

You may be very self-conscious the first few times you address an audience. You will probably think about yourself and how well you will do. You will probably wonder what people are thinking of your preaching. What is important to think about, however, is God's Word and how to get it across to our audience. Do not think about yourself. You should be filled with your message from God's Word. The more you stop thinking about yourself, the more natural you will be in your preaching and less of an obstacle you will be to the Holy Spirit in His use of your words.

The voice you use should be the voice you normally use in your speaking with others. Do not call attention to yourself by speaking in some way that appears artificial or unreal. Speak loudly and clearly enough for your listeners to hear what you have to say. An unheard message does not accomplish anything for anyone. If you speak too fast, the minds of your listeners will not be able to keep up with you. If you speak too slowly, your listeners may lose interest. If your voice always sounds the same, your listeners may tune you out and not pay attention to your message. You should vary your volume and pace based on what you say – you should get louder or softer at times, slow down or speed up, and change your pitch to show your excitement or interest. Do not make it difficult for your hearers to understand you. Do not it difficult for the Holy Spirit to use you because of your dull manner of speaking. Changing how you speak to match what you are saying can require some practice and will become more natural the more you preach.

Your facial expression and the movement of your hands and body should fit with the words that you are saying. For example, you should not preach God's law as though you were telling a joke, nor should you preach the Good News of Jesus with a frown on your face. If you are thinking of what you are saying as you are saying it, your facial expression and your gestures will match what you are saying in a very natural way and you do not need to be thinking about it at all.

The best way to become a good preacher is to preach. You will improve as you gain experience. You will no longer be thinking about yourself and the impression you are making, but you will be concentrating on getting your message across.

What will be most helpful in most cases is to have a good mentor or good friend listen to your sermons and give you suggestions as to ways in you can improve. They can tell you whether you are speaking clearly, loudly, with good emphasis, at the right speed, and so forth. They can tell you if you are developing bad habits that interfere with the transmission of God's Word, such as mispronouncing certain words, or failing to make eye contact with your audience. Sometimes family member, such as your wife or a brother or sister can give you helpful advice that will improve your sermon delivery.

To summarize, we quote the following paragraphs from *Preach the Gospel* (p. 130) by Richard Balge and Joel Gerlach:

Sermon effectiveness depends on a good delivery. To qualify as good, the delivery of the sermon must be free. The sermon must neither be read nor mechanically memorized, but should be delivered without hesitation and without reliance upon notes.

The role of the voice in the delivery of the sermon is another element of critical importance. Whether or not the preacher's voice is natural and appropriate to his task depends on his attitude toward his task. Practical consideration regarding the role of the voice include: speaking with proper volume, speaking naturally, speaking clearly and speaking with proper modulation and emphasis.

The body also plays an important role in the delivery of the sermon. Facial expressions, gestures, and body movement assist the preacher in the communication of the message. Most important of all is the necessity to be yourself.

Questions

1. For what purpose does a preacher study a text and prepare a sermon?
2. What differences are there in the way preachers speak?
3. Why is it important to think what you are saying as you say it?
4. Why is it usually not a good idea to read your sermon?
5. What problem arises from memorizing your sermon word for word?
6. What is meant by memorizing a sermon thought by thought?
7. What is meant by free delivery?
8. What should you be thinking about as you preach your sermon?
9. What do beginning preachers often think about?
10. What do you want to avoid with respect to facial expression and hand gestures?
11. How can we avoid developing bad habits in our preaching?