

# **Sermon Preparation & Preaching**

## **Lecture Notes to Accompany Video Segments**

### **by Bishop Hockin**

#### **Introduction**

To write a sermon takes a considerable amount of work and effort no matter how often you do it. This course isn't about using someone else's sermons, it's about you writing yours and creating your own while letting God, through the Holy Spirit, guide you.

The real challenges faced and felt by layreaders include:

- i. Finding the 'gist' or theme of the Gospel
- ii. Writing the introduction
- iii. Finding the time & managing priorities
- iv. Not offending anyone
- v. Accepting that we are now allowed to write sermons
- vi. Preparing ourselves and letting the Holy Spirit guide us
- vii. Finding the common thread between readings. **Note:** Bishop Hockin indicates that it is not necessary to look for the common thread between readings. Focus on one reading ...most importantly the Gospel. There may be a verse in one of the other readings that would be of benefit but the focus should be on the Gospel.
- viii. Putting the 'theme' into today's context
- ix. Understanding what the text is saying
- x. The length **NOTE:** Bishop Hockin indicates that 5 to 10 minutes minutes is ideal.
- xi. Resources - where and how to find them
- xii. Making the sermon 'fresh' and not using 'old' sermons.

#### **Definition of Preaching by Eugene Peterson:**

"A sermon does what all sermons are intended to do: Take God's words, written and spoken in the past, take the human experience, ancestral and personal, of the listening congregation then reproduce the words and experience as a single event right now, in this present moment. No word that God has spoken is a mere literary artifact to be studied; no human experience is dead history merely to be regretted or admired."

There are therefore two elements of a sermon:

1. The Word of God through Scripture and reading of the lection's, and
2. The human experience.

- Isaiah 50:4 I have called you to be a teacher to sustain the weary with a word.
- The object of the 'Word' is people...people who are tired and weary of life and pain. An article in Leadership Magazine states that there is pain in that pew - preach to that pain and you will never lack for a congregation.

## **The 5 Basic Principles for Effective Preaching**

### **1. Preaching is about Spiritual Growth**

- The person in the pew is growing spiritually because of something that you said.
- Spiritual growth also happens through bible studies and prayer groups however only 10 to 15 % of people attend these. It therefore is very important, as Pastor Gordon MacDonald says, to 'Preach for change - inner spiritual change'.
- The church is not just a place to go - it is a place to grow. It is where spiritual development is put on the front burner.

### **2. Sermon preparation and preaching are not just about providing information - they are about giving inspiration.**

- Information is top-down knowledge which the current culture is very suspicious of.
- The main goal is to touch the heart where we are living - today.
- When the sermon provides inspiration as well as information it makes it real and personal - it gives the weary something of God to take home.

### **3. Both preachers and lay preachers need to be students and engage in serious daily devotion**

- Resources for daily spiritual devotion include:
  - The Bible
  - Our Daily Bread (very useful resource)
  - Bishop NT Wright's writings from Matthew to Revelations. Book titles are "Matthew for Everyone"; "Mark for Everyone"; "Luke for Everyone"; "John for Everyone"; etc. and can be found on Amazon.
- Much of a preachers devotional life is found when preparing for a sermon.
- A quiet time every day helps us find a deeper understanding of the human condition and finding God's desire in the Scripture.
- Martin Luther called the 'kernel' or the heart of the text, is found in the biblical text itself not in daily life. It is important to be a student of the scriptures and read them over and over. The theme will come from the scripture.
- It is important not to wait until the last minute to write a sermon. Start on a Tuesday and read the Scripture passage daily. Dwell with it.
- Be aware that we live in a world of biblical illiteracy. Adopt a language that can make it real and alive for people to understand while being faithful to the meaning of the text. That is why NT Wright is such a great resource.
- As a student of the Word spend 15 minutes (at least) a day with Scripture. This will help keep us, as disciples, in touch with the source of our lives and in touch with God.

### **4. Meeting people where they are and offering alternatives for living.**

- For example when preaching on the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) it can be introduced in two ways. The first way would be to provide information about the story and the second way would be to provide inspiration from the story telling it in such a way that it connects the listener - with what is actually going on.

- When reading the gospel to prepare for telling the story, read it at least 5 times and look for 1) the human struggle in the story and 2) the divine desire which is identifying what God does through Jesus or what God wants to happen.

5. A good preacher uses image and illustration telling the story rather than argument or proposition.

- A line to a familiar song can also be used to help provide the image or illustration.
- The old way of preaching sermons was more argumentative and full of proposition. They were never "illustrated" and never touched us "at the heart level".
- Jesus himself taught through parables which were "created images". For example Luke 18:9 the story of the Publican & the Pharisee. In this parable people could actually picture these men when Jesus told the story.
- The image given is that God approves of me and accepts me whether I am a Publican or a Pharisee.

These 5 principles - preaching for spiritual growth; providing inspiration not just information; engaging in daily spiritual devotion; meeting people where they are; and using image and illustration provide a strong foundation for effective sermon preparation and preaching.

### **How to Organize Your Sermon (The Lead; The Lction; The Leaven and The Lock)**

Refer to the handouts 1) "Worksheet for Sermon Preparation" and 2) Luke 5: 1-11 (NIV) and 3) Luke 24: 13-35 (NIV)

- One thing that spoils a good sermon is if it is not organized. It may have good material and good illustrations but not be well organized.
- Read the passage and make notes as you read; write down words and thoughts then first identify the human conflict in the story - the fatigue, the despair, the hopelessness noting that the struggle may be a human struggle, a faith struggle or a crisis of conscience. Secondly identify what the Divine Desire is that God wants.

### **The Worksheet for Sermon Preparation contains the four key components of organizing the sermon:**

1. The Lead - This is the introduction and should be 1 to 2 minutes. It "hooks" the listener to the message to engage them. Harry Emerson Fosdick says "People come to church on Sunday morning with every kind of personal difficulty. A sermon is meant to meet some of those needs. Every sermon has for its main business to meet head on some human problem which is puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives and no sermon that even attempts to do that can ever possibly be futile". It reaches for the pain and identifies it.

- Choose and name the human struggle you find in the text and how God responds to it, in the person of Jesus.

- Find a story. This could be a new story or a story from your own experience. Alternatively, it could be words from a song or a reading that illustrates the human struggle you have found in the text. This is your lead. What your lead is intended to do is to arouse in your listeners a connection between their human struggles and what God's word says about His will for them.

2. The Lection - Retell the Bible story (the reading)..don't interpret it. Remember that most of us are biblically illiterate. Look for the theme or themes and retell the story. Make it real.

- Retell the story, often the gospel story, in a way that illustrates the human struggle and how Jesus responds to that struggle in the text. Be faithful to the text by checking a good commentary so that you interpret it correctly.

3. The Leaven - This contains what the text has to say about our lives. It's the take home message that the Holy Spirit gives us by us spending time with the Word. Read alternate versions of the reading from different bibles or alternatives such as The Message or The Voice to gain insight. The take home message offers words of hope and connection with God.

- Extract, from your telling of the text, two or three illustrations of how the same grace that happens to the people in the text can happen for us as well. This is your take-home. It is the application of the human struggle to God's word and the transformation that results. The leavening is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the weary being sustained, supported and strengthened by a word from God.
- A simple form for this leavening is to ask questions of the text. First, what does it tell us about God? Second, what does it tell us about us, our human condition? And thirdly, what does it tell us to do? What action or decision can we make? Each of these needs to be illustrated.

4. The Lock - This section contains the final summary that sends people home refreshed and convinced that God wants to sustain them by his love and Grace.

- This is your summary of the sermon. It is restating your key points – something of the human struggle – something of God's will for our lives – His love acceptance and grace. Conclude with a challenge to do something, i.e. "And now as we come to the Lord's table we can pray, "Father I need you; I need your grace and mercy."

#### **Tips for Preaching:**

- Read the passage over many time and jot down words and particular points of interest.
- Develop a draft sermon and revise using the 5 Principles and the 4 L's (Lead, Lection, Leaven, and Lock).

- Read the sermon out loud and practice, practice, practice.
- Don't rush in the delivery of your sermon.
- Have the full text in front of you - don't rely simply on talking points.

**RESOURCE:**

Hockin, Bill. (2015). Gospel Therapy: Homilies of Hope and Possibility from Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Taylor Printing Group Inc. Fredericton, NB.

The above book is available by contacting Bishop Bill Hockin by email at [bihockin@gmail.com](mailto:bihockin@gmail.com) or if in Fredericton at Christ Church Parish Church located at 245 Westmorland St. The cost is \$15.00.