The Seven Steps of Biblical Interpretation for Preaching

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Stage I: The First Naïveté (Premodern)

1. **Prayerful Preparation**. Biblical interpretation for preaching begins with prayerful preparation through which the preacher prepares to hear the text with a faithful heart. Through prayer, the preacher invokes the Holy Spirit to be present and work with her throughout the whole process of interpretation.

Write down your prayers: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Text Selection**. A biblical text(s) can be selected at least by one of the following ways:
   1. lectio continua
   2. a lectionary
   3. a local church calendar
   4. a preacher’s choice of text

What was your method to select a text(s)?

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When selecting a text, consider it in a larger context.

What are the previous and later paragraphs of the text about?

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What grammatical and literary factors caused you to determine the text (e.g., connectors between paragraphs, shifts in style, mood, location, and activity before and after the given verses, etc.)?

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The selected text needs to either be translated from the original language or

compared with a variety of modern translations in order to arrive at the most

accurate translation and make a smooth reading. What kind of translations did you refer to?

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1. **Attentive Reading (Intuitive Imagination)**. After determining the text, the preacher reads it from the heart, without any aid of commentaries or books written about the text.

Read the whole text slowly, aloud, and repeatedly until the whole text is engraved in your mind and heart (you may use the method of *Lectio Divina*). Do not concentrate too much on single words or sentences within the text. Instead, read it comprehensively and meditatively.

Write down words or draw symbols and pictures or compose a song inspired from your imaginative and meditative listening to the text.

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If you have any questions or issues in relation to the text, write them down.

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Stage II: Historical Criticism (Modern)

1. **Critical Understanding (Historical Imagination)**. In this stage, the preacher deepens her understanding of the text with the help of critical studies. Biblical dictionaries, commentaries, and other theological books help us read the text as “the other” and stretch our imagination by providing background knowledge and information about the socio-cultural context of the original audience, the author’s intention, some images, metaphors, stories, historical events, doctrines, and theological terms in the text.

What kind of biblical resources did you refer to?

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If the preacher had specific questions about the text in Step 3, now it is time to research on them to gain appropriate answers.

If you gain some helpful information or answers to your questions, write them down:

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Stage III: The Second Naïveté (Postmodern)

1. **Sensitive Listening (Empathetic Imagination)**. Not all the knowledge and information about the text nor every insight and imaginative idea of the preacher is useful for creating a sermon because the sermon is targeted on a particular congregation that is situated in a particular socio-cultural and existential context. Thus, it is important for the preacher to listen to the daily lives of the congregation with pastoral sensitivity.

What are the characteristics of your congregation as a group (race, gender, class, age, geographical location, theological orientation, etc.)?

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How do you describe the larger world to which your congregation belongs?

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Do you think that your congregation has some spiritual or social issues that need your theological guidance?

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In your congregational context, how could the text be heard by your individual listeners? Can you imagine some of their faces when they listen to the text? What would be their initial reactions to the text?

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1. **Dynamic Interaction (Analogical Imagination)**. The dynamic interaction or to-and-fro movement between the world of the text and that of the listeners has been done from the beginning of the interpretive process. In this step, however, the preacher narrows the gap between the text and the context and focuses on a specific theme or image among many insights and ideas that the preacher has gained imaginatively through the previous steps.

What would be a specific theme or image emerging from the text that appeals to your congregation? How relevantly does it relate between the historical context of the text and your congregational context?

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1. **Theological Reflection**. Retell the text from a particular view of the congregation and clarify the center of gravity of the text for the sermon. The center of gravity of the text will be the focus of the sermon, that is, the central idea or unifying theme of the sermon (“what the sermon aims to say”). Once the unified theme is determined, the preacher needs to reflect on that at a deeper level by meditating it and referring to some theological resources in relation to that theme.

What kind of theological resources (books, articles, magazines, etc.) did you refer to in order to deepen your understanding of the theme?

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Write down the focus statement of your sermon in 1-2 sentences:

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When the focus of the sermon relates to a particular experience of the congregation and is reflected in a certain theological perspective, the function of the sermon is determined. The function of the sermon means “what the sermon aims to do.” In other words, what does the preacher expect the impact of preaching to be on the listeners? To comfort them? To challenge them? To teach them? To encourage them?

Write down the function statement of your sermon in 1-2 sentences:

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*The process of the seven steps is not in a linear but in a spiral order. Some steps need to be visited again and again until the preacher creates a new meaning of the text relevant to her particular congregation.*