Preaching in Christian Communities

The Interpretive Process Form for Sermon #3 (Topical Preaching)

(“The Seven Steps of Biblical Interpretation for Preaching”)

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Stage I: The First Naiveté (the 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 methods:
   1. lectio continua
   2. a lectionary
   3. a local church calendar
   4. a preacher’s choice of text

What is the general topic that you intend to address in your Sermon #3? Specify your general topic to be relevant to the situation of your listeners. For example, where prayer is the general topic, the preacher may focus on the connection between faith and prayer or on the impact of prayer on healing.

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You are free to choose a text(s) by your own choice in relation to your topic. What is the text you chose for your topical preaching? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What did motivate you to use this particular text for your topical sermon? In other words, in what sense is the text appropriate to preach on your topic?

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When selecting the 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 be compared with more than two modern translations in order to arrive at the most accurate translation and make a smooth reading. What kind of translations did you refer to? What are differences among them?

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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 or draw any words, images, pictures, and symbols inspired from your imaginative and meditative listening to the text. You may compose a song or write a poem, a story, or a prayer, too. How does it relate to your topic?

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What are your questions or concerns about the text? Do you have any grammatical, philological, literary, or historical questions about the text?

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Stage II: Historical Criticism (the 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 or commentaries did you refer to? You are required to use at least two of the resources that are listed in the “Bible Commentaries and Other Preaching Resources” posted in Canvas, in addition to your own choices.

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If the preacher had specific questions or concerns about the text in Step 3, now it is time to seek appropriate answers through research. What are helpful information about or answers to your questions or concerns?

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Stage III: The Second Naveté (the Postmodern)

1. **Sensitive Listening (Empathetic Imagination)**. Not all the knowledge and information about the text or every insight and imaginative idea gained in Steps 3 and 4 are useful for creating a sermon, for 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.

Who are your listeners? 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 (a “glocal” context)?

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What is the situation of your listeners in relation to your topic? In other words, what are their opinions on the topic? Why do they think so?

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In your congregational context, how could your individual listeners relate the text to the topic? Can you imagine some of their facial or other bodily reactions when they are listening to the text? What would be their initial reactions to what the text imply?

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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 is supposed to be 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 theological theme or image among many insights and ideas that the preacher has gained in the previous steps.

What would be the theological theme emerging from the text in relation to your preaching topic? In other words, what is the good news of the topic? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Theological Reflection**. Once the theological theme is determined in relation to your preaching topic, the preacher needs to reflect on that at a deeper level by meditating it and referring to some theological resources.

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

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Write down the focus statement of your sermon in 1-2 sentences. The focus statement means “what the sermon aims to say.”

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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.*