

The Sermon

In our worship, we have a formal dialogue with the Word of God. First we offer the Prayer of the Day as a congregation. Then God responds to that prayer in the First Reading that is usually from the Old Testament, then from the Second Reading that is usually from a New Testament epistle, and then from the Gospel Reading about Jesus Christ. And then the Word of God comes to us in another way; through the spoken Word – the sermon.

In the sermon, the preacher proclaims how the messages from the Scripture readings apply in our daily lives.

The sermon is delivered by either an ordained pastor or a professional lay minister who is recognized by the larger church body. Special speakers can give the message occasionally with the pastor's and congregational council's blessing.

A 'homily' is intended to be a shorter sermon. (I have to admit that many of my homilies are not as short as they should be.) Homilies are usually delivered during special prayer services – like Wednesday evening Lenten services or Advent services.

There many techniques used to prepare and deliver sermons. Here are the techniques that I usually use.

1. What is the main message in the Scripture reading?

Most Scripture readings have more than one message that a person can take away. But if you are the preacher, the main message that you hear in the text is probably what you are called to preach.

2. What is the style of writing in the Scripture?

- a. Some Scripture readings are narratives or stories. Then the sermon should be a story-telling sermon. Either retell the Scriptural story in your own words or come up with other stories that have a similar message to tell.

- b. Some Scripture readings are poetic. Then the sermon should be more poetic. If the Scripture is more praiseful of God, then tell why we praise God in a 'sing-songy' manner. If the Scripture laments all that is wrong or judges people for wrongdoing, then list our wrongs and grievances in a cadence – like black prophetic preachers do (like Martin Luther King, Jr.).
 - c. Some Scripture readings are more of an exposition – a letter or a sermon. Sometimes they are a teaching through a law, a proverb, or a parable. Then the preacher explains the point or the teachings using examples from everyday life.
3. What surprises you or confuses you in the Scripture reading.
- If there is anything that surprises you about the passage or you think people may not understand the context of what it is talking about, then that is something to address in the sermon.

Read the Scripture readings for the 3rd Sunday of Advent (December 13th).

Read Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11.

1. What is the main message of this text?
2. What is the style of writing?
3. What is surprising to you or confusing for you in this text?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

1. What is the main message of this text?
2. What is the style of writing?
3. What is surprising to you or confusing for you in this text?

Read John 1:6-8, 119-28.

1. What is the main message of this text?
2. What is the style of writing?
3. What is surprising to you or confusing for you in this text?

Conclude by praying the Prayer of the Day for the 3rd Sunday of Advent.

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, O Lord, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.