

SERMON PREPARATION FOR 17th Sunday after Trinity (October 4, 2009)

Matt.15: 21-28.

INTRODUCTION

I was asked to prepare a sermon that *elders* can use in the relevant Sunday Services. This is possible, but seeing that our *Homiletical Consideration* (see below) differ so widely, I will rather show you the steps to be taken/things to be taken into consideration when preparing a sermon. I will not give you a fish (sermon), but hopefully start to teach you how to fish. You will need commentaries, Bible dictionaries and other helpful resources. Do speak to your pastor for these tools. Maybe you can build up a library that all elders can use, but more helpful now is to use the internet. Do not be afraid to consult material from other denominations and even Jewish sources, but apply them correctly to your situation.

Step 1

Selection of the text

You do not need to decide on a text as this is prescribed. However sometimes at Prayer sessions/funerals where the ELCSA Almanac is not prescriptive you will need to decide for yourself.

For this **17th Sunday after Trinity, that is October 4, 2009, our text is Matt.15: 21-28.**

Do read the support texts for the Sunday as sometimes clues can be gained as to the intention of compiler of the texts. The Sundays after Trinity has green as the altar color-we must grow, we need to enhance our Bible knowledge, learn from the guidance of the Scripture and imitate our Saviour much more closely. This is a period where we mirror ourselves in the Word.

Step 2

Meditation

This text need to grow *on* you and *in* you. Start as soon as possible and read it over and over, sometimes aloud. Read different Bible translations and languages if it is possible. The comparison is sometimes use of a pregnancy. The Holy Spirit is preparing a message through and in you for His people. Have a notebook ready when ideas come into your mind. Continuously ask questions to the text. What is happening? Why is he saying that? How can this be understood? Try to get behind the scene, visualize the scene. Feel for/with the people, the characters in the scenes. Check for *words*, *places*, *concepts*, *grammatical constructions*, *etc* that are not known to you. Listen to words or ideas that are repeated. Watch out if there are linking words that connect passages sections or divide them, e.g. Then, therefore, afterwards, but, however, etc. These will be helpful in your exegesis later.

You are special, with special skills and insight, and so it is important to read what other people said about the text, have written about the text (commentaries), but do not merely copy their words, struggle with the

text yourself first before consulting other helpful resources. Commentaries were written in the past for the European and American context and thus their emphases are different from Africa. Fortunately, this is changing, but still look for information that is relevant to the African context.

Step 3

Exegesis:

(We are starting to interpret the text. This term *exegesis* refers to the discovery of material. We are drawing out the hidden meaning. We are looking for gems that we can share with others. Thus this process must be always thoroughly done, as to always bring a fresh exposition to the hearers).

It is crucial to take note that each of the Biblical books was written from a certain background (timeframe, historical conditions, socio-political and religious tradition), and for a specific reason. The Gospels likewise, although they apparently deal with the same subject matter uses that information for a specific purpose to reach a specific audience. Matthew (most likely the converted tax collector, who became a disciple) was writing to Jews trying to convince them that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah or Christ and thus all their hopes and dreams, prophecies were fulfilled in Him. This can be deduced from Matthew's style to build in a boring genealogy to us, yet crucial for the Jews. He leaves Jewish manners and customs unexplained, plus he softened certain concepts, e.g. he changes *God* to *heaven* in the kingdom of heaven so as not to take the name of God in vain.

What is the context of the text?

Firstly, we need to look at the bigger (**macro**) picture of the Gospel. Matthew devotes most of his book to the preaching, teaching and healing of Jesus in Galilee. Starting with Jesus' genealogy and birth (ch.1-2), Matthew shows that Jesus is a true descendant and of royal lineage with the great King David. Then he focuses on Jesus' "praise singer", i.e., John the Baptist, before Jesus steps in the limelight with His baptism and testing in the desert (3-4). A narrative then follows which is periodically halted with five major teaching sections or sermons: The Sermon on the Mount (5-7), Instructions to the twelve before their first evangelism trip (ch.10) Parables about the kingdom of God (ch.13) the cost of discipleship (ch.18) and Jesus' words about the destruction of Jerusalem, the end times and the new age (ch.24-25). These sections are interspersed with Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem (19-20) His last week in the city which culminated in His death and resurrection. Matthew breaks his exclusivity of Jesus' mission to the Jews, with the Great Commission to all the nation (ch.28). Last-mentioned is crucial to remember for the **micro** picture, i.e. our text, as at various stages in the Gospel, Matthew will bring non-Jews into the picture to show that Jesus' mission extends beyond the borders and people of Israel.

Moving to our text *per se*, we see that the text is bracketed by sections dealing with unbelief and opposition from the religious leaders (15: 1-20). The idea of clean and unclean is also debated, just to see Jesus leaving the so-called clean territory into unclean or heathen regions (our text) for a while. After assisting a heathen mother, He returns to continue his healing ministry (15: 29-31). During this public

ministry He also provided for the needs of the people (32-39). As mentioned earlier , in this way our text is a pointer to the Great Commission showing that Jesus is not the Savior of the Jews only, but that He even has mercy on the heathen nations. .

Are there Synoptic parallels? Similar occurrences/stories in the other Gospels?

Please read Mark 7: 24-30 but give careful consideration to the different emphases of the Gospel.

Analysis into sections:

Introduction and setting of the passage v.21

A woman (only identified as Canaanite) appears suddenly on the scene with a request for help v.22

Silence from Jesus , annoyance to the disciples v.23a

Dialogue between Jesus and His disciples v.23b-24

The woman came and kneels before Jesus asking for help v.25

Dialogue between Jesus and the woman v.26-27

Request granted v.28

Literary type and stylistic features?

Here one need to consider various tools that authors used to get their point across. They could use saga, parables, miracle stories , poetry, fables, love songs, genealogies, etc. Look out also for anecdotes, similes, metaphors, etc. How does the author use these and why? Our text can be considered a historical narrative.

Detailed interpretation

Jesus withdrew from the demands for healing and legalism of His own people into heathen territory. It should be noted that Tyre and Sidon were considered ungodly cities. Canaanite refers to the descendants of the early inhabitants before the conquest under Joshua and the judges. They were the chief enemies of the Israelites and there was supposed to be no relationship or interaction with these nations in fear of corruption on a religious level. During the times of the prophets this region was key to the worship of foreign gods, especially the fertility gods Baal and Astarte.

It is clear that her gods failed her, so she calls upon Jesus for help and mercy with the words that we also use now in our liturgy: *Eleison me*. At first He ignores her pleas, but her persistence annoys the disciples. They wanted to send her away. Luther stressed that nowhere in the Gospels is Jesus portrayed as so harsh. His answer to His disciples implied that she was not part of His mission outreach as she was outside the fold of the Jews. Driven by the anguish in her heart and faced with first silence then rebuff from Jesus, this woman doubles her effort and blocks His way by kneeling in front of Him. She again pleads for help, just to be told, that she and her nation were considered on the level of dogs, whilst the Jews were children of God. Humiliated to the core the woman latches on to the difference between house dogs (*kynarion*) and street dogs (*kyon*) and indicated that at least crumbs come the way of house dogs occasionally. Her reply shows

her faith and humility. Jesus rewarded her request and her child was healed.

Step 4

Homiletical Consideration

Context of the specific Parish/congregation

Here you need to know the make-up of your congregation. Sermons are always situational speeches and thus delivered for a specific time and place. Who will your hearers be? You will need to reach them on all levels of their personality, e.g. physical, intellectual/mental, emotional, moral and spiritual level. You will need to take into consideration what are their circumstances, needs, education levels, age groups, language. To which social groups do they belong? What is their status in society? What are their daily challenges? Research their social and economic conditions, their cultural and religious customs, if needed.

Message to my specific congregation

This you will need to develop yourself. I just give some guidance and questions

Focus on maternal love and family cares. What are families/mothers confronted with today? Do we care for one another in need? Where can they go for help?

Are your congregants considered to be the “in crowd” with special divine privileges or are they considered second rate citizens on the margins of society or even in a hostile region? Address the relevant position from the guidance of the text.

What is the reason for spiritual tests? What is binding your members? What disturbs the quality of their lives? Where do they take their distress?

Focus on delayed blessings. How do we react to initial barriers when we seek relief? Do we persist?

Silent objections

Watch your audience as you preach to see their reactions to your words, but even better try to anticipate where they will have problems with the message and answer these. Think about Yes, but.....arguments. E.g. Yes, but how can the loving Jesus be so heartless initially to this woman? Or, Yes, but I can not be helpful to my enemies. even when they are in need.

Illustration

This is a tool to grip your audience, to get their attention and also to help them to remember your sermon. So, the illustration needs to be relevant to their situation and frame of reference. They must immediately be able to identify and understand what you are trying to convey. By all means use the news or other media, but make sure your hearers got access to these.

Theme:

Based on the text construct a short sentence to guide the thoughts of your listeners. For example:

Option 1

Jesus, the answer for those in distress.

Subsections:

What is your distress today?

Where do you go with your distress?

Jesus , helper of all in need.

Option 2

Theme: Persistent prayer will not go unanswered by Jesus

Subsections:

Call out your request to Him

Kneel at His feet.

Dialogue with Him

Experience His reward

Presentation/Delivery

You are about to make *an oral address*, to the *popular mind*, based on *Scriptural truth*, with the *view to persuasion*. Therefore, there must be continuity, movement and a goal. All of these must have unity of thought. Hereto may God use you richly and may much fruit come from your labor.