A Process Approach to Sermon Writing

A few notes on writing as process:

-breaks large task into smaller pieces

-emphasizes purpose and genre

-encourages revision, which inevitably makes for better writing

-not a recipe—OK to skip steps, go back and forth

-more experienced writers tend to internalize process, becomes automatic

**STEP 1: Invite the Holy Spirit to be part of the process**

*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

I Corinthians 2:12-14

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.*

St. Francis’ Prayer (first part)

*On one side there is luminosity, trust, faith, the beauty of the earth; on the other side, darkness, doubt, unbelief, the cruelty of the earth, the capacity of people to do evil. When I write, the first side is true; when I do not write, the second is.*

Czeslaw Milosz, poet, Nobel Laureate in Literature

**STEP 2: Brainstorm**

RAW MATERIAL: Freewrite theological/religious/spiritual ideas that come to mind in response to these prompts:

1. Scripture passage – lectionary or other
2. Personal experience/memory/story
3. Contemporary issue (Barth: “We should preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other”)
4. Spiritual/religious/theological writing
5. Media – TV, films, music, plays, books

**STEP 3. FOCUS the PURPOSE**

HOW MIGHT THIS IDEA BE DEVELOPED INTO A SERMON THAT IS:

-Prophetic (calls to action)?

-Pastoral (provides comfort and encouragement)?

-Pedagogical (opens up a new insight about God/Christ)?

**STEP 4: DEVELOPMENT**

1. Explore ways to bring Scripture further into the sermon (use Bible commentaries & online resources)
2. Return to Step 2 (raw material). Now focus your freewriting specifically on the topic of your sermon
3. Imagine that you’re *listening* to this sermon. Freewrite ways you might respond to it—questions you might have; places you might disagree/agree; things that might be unclear or need clarification. Now, freewrite how you might “answer” those points in your sermon.

**STEP 5. FINISH DRAFT and REVISE!**

Remember sermons are a **spoken** genre—be sure to read it aloud as part of your editing process.

Be mindful of length/time.

NOTES from LIZ:

1. The preacher of the day is welcome to pick the scripture readings and hymns for that day, but are not obligated to. I am also happy to make suggestions that people can choose from. I assume that I am writing the liturgy and choosing the hymns, unless otherwise indicated by the preacher.