Is the sermon faithful to God's Word in the Bible?

How to Listen to a Sermon

In another video we talked about how God's Word shows up in three ways: First, in Jesus himself, God-in-the-flesh. Second, in, with, and under the text of the Bible. And third, in proclamation, that is, in preaching and the church's sacraments. When it comes to preaching, a sermon always begins with the second way God's Word comes to us: in the Bible. And it always points beyond it to how Jesus embodies God's regard for you from the first word in Genesis to the last amen of Revelation.

A faithful sermon doesn't start with a preacher's *internal* sense of what people need to hear. That always stands a good chance of becoming the *preacher's* word and not *God's* Word. But because God wants to be encountered in the text of Scripture, then it's important that the Bible be square one of crafting a sermon.

Preachers and their congregations have lots of ways of making sure the Bible is front and center in preaching and worship. Some churches follow a calendar or cycle of readings that are assigned for each Sunday. We call that a lectionary. Most lectionaries include an Old Testament passage, a section from one of the New Testament books that you find in your Bible *after* the four gospels, and a reading from the gospels themselves. Some churches also include one of the group of songs, poems, and hymns that make up the book of Psalms.

Your church might also be a place that takes a different approach in making sure preaching is connected to the Bible. You might hear a series of sermons that takes people through a single book of the Bible, like Esther or Ephesians so that folks get a more detailed understanding. There might also be times when a situation in the life of the church needs to be addressed, and your preacher will look to a single passage that helps understand what God is up to.

As you prepare to hear your preacher's sermon, you'll be better able to listen for God's Word if your preacher lets you know in advance what passage will be the focus of the sermon. That way you can read it ahead of time and have a sense of it *before* your preacher

ever speaks a single word. Try to zero in on what *you* think is the most important point. Formulate a question or two about it. Ask what information *you'd* need to know to understand it better.

No matter what biblical passage has been chosen, you can think about whether the sermon you heard clearly had its start with those words in the pages of the Bible. A sermon can include all kinds of things beyond the preaching text, but you should consider whether it all showed up because of what God has given us in that text.

Over time, you'll discover that connecting to those preaching texts has opened your eyes (and ears) to how deep and diverse the contents of the Bible are and how faithful God is. You may encounter a sermon on Psalm 119 (which has 176 verses) or a personal letter like the one Paul wrote to Philemon or the simple two-word declaration in the story of the raising of Lazarus: "Jesus wept." We hope your engagement with God's Word in the Bible by thinking about preaching sparks your interest in knowing more about scripture and exploring other avenues to increase your knowledge.