

The Quick-Start Guide

Craft an Effective Sermon *by Friday*

Backstory Preaching



BACKSTORY Lectio Divina for Sermon Prep Preaching™

Introduction

Backstory Preaching relies on the spiritual practice of Lectio Divina to craft sermons. We find this ancient discipline offers the most important aspects to pray an effective sermon into being. Lectio Divina creates space to slowly and deeply work with the text; lets our exegesis both inform and form us; builds in creative resting space between sessions to allow the Holy Spirit to breathe life into our thoughts; leads us to craft effective sermons; and best of all, the process itself draws us closer to God so we are fed in ways that affect our entire ministries.

We recommend spreading out your sermon preparation throughout the week, preferably on a five-day schedule (adjusting the schedule to suit when you take your Sabbath): Monday: Lectio (read). Tuesday and Wednesday: Meditatio (study, or formative exegesis). Thursday and Friday: Oratio (write or express). We hope you join us in spreading out your sermon preparation in order to ensure plenty of Contemplatio (rest) after each stage. It's when we let go and not think about the sermon that the Spirit has the greatest amount of room to work, and in many ways, writes the sermon for us. Thus, it's during Contemplatio that the sermon message is given to us instead of wrested from the text.

To practice Lectio Divina for sermon prep, Lectio, the first step, invites us to notice what is in the text itself. Go slowly. Read it out loud. Record yourself reading it and listen to it often through the week. Rewrite the text

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word for word. Soak in the scripture as often as possible. What do you notice? What questions arise? What makes you curious? This is the "micro" view of the text. Then rest in *Contemplatio*.

Meditatio, the second step, is akin to traditional exegesis, but is done with a different perspective: the goal is to discern meaning in the text with an attitude of willingness to be changed by the Good News we encounter. We describe *Meditatio* as "formative exegesis" when we can be transformed by the Spirit into the Good News we preach. Follow annotations, read commentaries, look at the whole book of which the text is a part, discover the culture and read other languages. How does the text cause you to turn around? What Good News did you discover? What Good News are you becoming in Christ? *Meditatio* is the "macro" view of the text. End the sessions with *Contemplatio*.

Oratio, the next step, is the expression of our prayer and study with the goal of making meaning for others. How will you make the message known for others? What stories, anecdotes, outlines, and introductions will convey this Good News? Again afterward, rest with God in gratitude in *Contemplatio*. The final step after writing (or drawing/dictating) your sermon is to compare it against the definition of an "effective" sermon, the last page in this handout. (An infographic and 8 1/2 x 11 are provided.)

I hope you find this process helpful. Be Good News to Preach Good News,

Lisa Cressman

Founding Steward, Backstory Preaching

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Day One: Lectio

In Lectio, we look at the text as it is.

- Notice who, what, where, and when.
- Observe the setting, the characters, and the sequence of events that comprise the "plot."
- Practice holding off the "why," and "how," until Meditatio.
- End the session in Contemplatio by resting in God with gratitude.
- Use each of your five senses and your intuition to notice, carefully, how these people live, move, and have their being individually and with each other.

Consciously remind yourself to read the text slowly, or you can use these methods to slow yourself down:

- Copy the Scripture passage phrase by phrase onto another piece of paper.
- Rewrite the passage in your own words.
- Create a mind map with each branch a different sentence of the passage.
- Listen to an audio Bible or let someone else read the words to you. Record yourself and listen to it while you drive or walk.
- Be a stage director and block the scene. Watch them carry out their roles.

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Day Two: Meditatio

Pray and play with the questions below that interest you most.

- How did the characters arrive in this scene? How did their past experiences, assumptions, biases, faith, or fears lead them to this point?
- What is said? What is not said? Why? Who's present and who's absent, and why?
- What do we usually say this story is about? What are other narratives?
- What might be the different characters' motives and points of view?
- Jesus often interrupts patterns and presents the unexpected. How does that happen in this text?
- Where is the invitation to a character to change their thinking?
- If the character's mind changed, how would their behavior change?
- Look for literary and rhetorical devices. What do the symbols, repetition, numbers, figurative language, etc. mean? How are they functioning in the passage?
- Follow inspiration/curiosity/wonder.

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Day Three: Meditatio (cont'd)

- Notice what you have in common with the text, what surprises you, what disturbs or troubles you.
- Rewrite the passage in your own words.
- Identify conflicts, tension and ask what the source(s) might be.
- Notice your gaps of knowledge and fill them in.
- Be part of the communion of saints in books and other sources who shared their knowledge and experience with you, and who guide you to see the Good News.
- Put your listeners "in the same room" with the text. What do they have to say to each other?
- Continue to let God and the people, and words from the text live, and move and have their being inside you.

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Day Four: Oratio

Sort and focus your thoughts for a sermon by answering these questions:

- What's the Good News?
- What do I believe?
- Why do we resist the Good News?
- What's the human condition?
- What does Christ hope for in us?
- What's the invitation to transformation?
- What do I hope my listeners come to know?
- What do I hope they see?
- In one sentence, what do I really want to say?

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Day Five: Oratio (cont'd)

Organize your thoughts into an order. For example:

- mind map
- outline
- cartoon
- dictate
- free write.

Of these thoughts, circle what shows your message rather than tells it. What can you do to strengthen these?

Organize again.

Compose your manuscript or notes.

Check it against the definition of an "Effective Sermon."

Revise.

Done!

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Better Sermons Faster

This handout is an abbreviated version of this process. To engage more deeply, here are four opportunities.

1) Live Lunch Hour Lectio. Every Monday at noon Central the BsP community prays the RCL Gospel for the coming Sunday and spreads the Good News through Facebook Live. <https://www.facebook.com/backstorypreaching>

2) Get our popular "Craft an Effective Sermon by Friday," our independent study e-Course that takes you through the deep dive of this process. <https://www.backstorypreaching.com/craft-an-effective-sermon-by-friday>

3) Join The Backstory Preaching Collective. The Collective is our ongoing, online, ecumenical community of preachers who use both RCL and Narrative lectionaries. We work together to grow, be inspired, and complete our sermons before the weekends. Learn more at www.backstorypreaching.com/collective.

4) Read my book, **Backstory Preaching: Integrating Life, Spirituality, and Craft** (The Liturgical Press, 2018), available at Liturgical Press and Amazon.

I hope you find this process fruitful for your sermons and transformative in your spirit.

Be Good News to Preach Good News,

Lisa Cressman

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An Effective Sermon



Offers



a Clear
Message



of
Good News



Authentic
to the Preacher



Relevant
to the Listener



Holding
their Attention



and
Inviting Transformation.

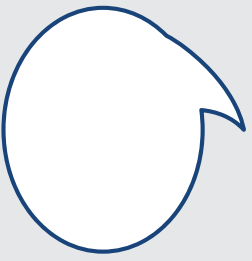
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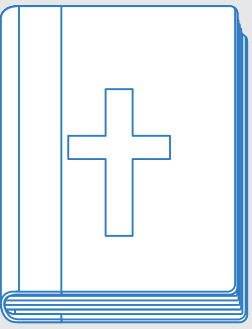
An Effective Sermon



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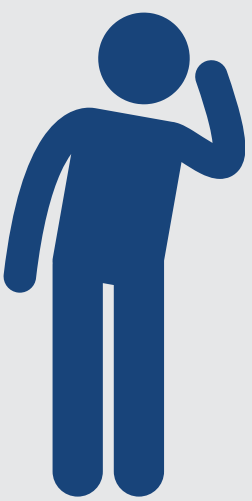
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Good News



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