

Preachers are encouraged to be aware of and embrace the complexity of the preacher's exegetical task(s). The biblical text alone presents multiple contexts to interpret; namely, the context to which the biblical story refers, the context out of which the book's writer(s) come (often decades after the events themselves), the history of the interpretation of the biblical text, whether or not there is a present interpretation that is assumed to be normative, and one's own prior engagement with a particular pericope. While time-consuming, such biblical exegetical work with the various contexts is indispensable for reaching a probable and faithful interpretation. In addition, there is the oft-ignored vital work of intentionally exegeting the present context from which the preacher approaches the text and into which the text will speak anew. For the latter, preachers are encouraged to begin every sermon with the following reflective writing exercise. After praying for the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance in the sermon preparation process, set aside 20-30 minutes to free-write brief reflections on what you know going into this sermon with regard to: 1) the world, 2) the church, 3) the life of the congregation, 4) the life of individual hearers, 5) the church year, and 6) your life. The last element highlights the importance of the preacher's awareness of the lenses through which she or he views the biblical text, the world, and the preaching context. Your sermons will never be the same!

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