

How I Prepare my Sermons

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Sermons are about good news, not good advice
If we can't remember our sermon, how can they?
I need to go home and tell it to Helen

These three remarks have stayed with me - the first by Robert Runcie at theological college; the second by my priest father about learning what we are going to preach; and the third about sermon structure by a friend who went home and shared with his wife the content of the sermon.

I start on Monday morning and look up the readings for Sunday. I jot down the odd remark/thought during the week. On Friday I look up the commentaries. This year we are going through Mark's Gospel (Ched Myers' *Binding the Strong Man* and *Say This to the Mountain* are invaluable). During the early evening on Saturday I start the actual writing (no-one wants to see their vicar on Saturday evening!). I try to finish it by 9.00 pm.

On Sundays I usually take five services, at three of which I preach. I get up about 6.30am and go through the sermon - my study walls are heavily preached at! I leave for the first service at 7.45am, and after that service I have 30 minutes in church to go through it again. My first vicar's wife in East London said to me: "Julian, your material is OK, but you must be prepared for a small boy to want to go to the toilet at least three times during your sermon". I have a quick check again before the evening services. 10-12 minutes is the target time, so there is a lot to pack in, but it has to be clear, verbally visual, even with our intelligent congregations, and memorable enough to take home for possible discussion over Sunday lunch. The most appreciated sermons will end up in our Parish Magazine.