

The First Presbyterian Church

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PRESBYTERIAN POST



MARCH 2020

**Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.
If what you heard from the beginning abides in you,
then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.
And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.**

1 John 2:24-25

From the Desk of the Pastor



I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

~ Acts 20:27 ~



Selecting Scripture Texts for Sunday

I am sure we all know the feeling of working on a project and finding that we really aren't satisfied with what is taking shape before our eyes. It might be a sowing project, or a scrapbook, or a building project. The question keeps circulating in our minds, can I salvage this thing or should I start over? We hate to throw away the effort we already expended, but there is no guarantee that we shall end up with something we like, if we decide to push forward. Decision time!

Well, this recently happened to me. I had been working on a sermon series for Lent. I really was not happy with what was taking shape. The more I pushed forward the more certain I was that I would never be happy with the result. That's when I had a *God sighting*. Well, that's what I'm calling it. I had my first major coffee spill since I have been here. Coffee over all my notes. Totally ruined. I pushed together the sappy mess of unsatisfying notes and carried them into the trash can. I spent the next half hour mopping up my desk. I think I was smiling at the time. I was certainly thanking God. After the accident, I was committed to starting anew on my Lent series, forgetting everything I had done up to that point. Sadly, my computer keyboard was a casualty of *The Great Coffee Spill of 2020*. I also had to throw away a few other papers as well. Still, God made the decision easy and I was/am grateful.

I was telling this story to a few people, explaining that I was now taking a different path through the lectionary for our Lent sermon series. A number of questions about the lectionary came up. I am guessing that many of you may have similar questions, and this month's article is on the lectionary and why I use it, unless I am feeling led by the Holy Spirit to do otherwise.

What is the Lectionary?

In brief, the lectionary is a selection of Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments that capture the most important thematic teachings of the Bible. These Scriptures are arranged to accommodate the liturgical calendar (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc.). The selected Scriptures are organized in a three year cycle, before they repeat. The weekly Sunday readings usually have an Old Testament reading (non-Psalms); a Psalms reading; a Gospel reading, and a non-Gospel New Testament reading. While some congregations do all four readings every Sunday, the preacher will usually use only one text for the sermon.

How are the Scriptures that go into the lectionary selected?

The PC(USA) uses the *Revised Common Lectionary*. There are twenty-four (24) denominations that participate in the selection of texts that go into this lectionary.¹ Many other denominations around the globe also use this lectionary. The texts are selected to support the discipleship and encouragement of the people of God, which a desire of reflecting the entire counsel of God.

How Old Is the Lectionary and Should Protestants be Using It?

Preaching through the lectionary is the most ancient and most widely used method for preaching across the world. It finds its roots in the earliest Jewish and Christian traditions. Today Roman Catholics, the Orthodox Churches, plus many Anglican and Protestant denominations engage in use of the lectionary, uniting all of their local churches in a common engagement with God's Word. But when did use of the lectionary begin?

The concept of a lectionary is very old. We are certain that in Jesus' day, there was a Jewish lectionary that determined what was read in the synagogues each Sabbath. Even before that, there is evidence of a Jewish lectionary dating back to the Babylonian

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- ¹ American Baptist Churches/USA; The Anglican Church of Canada; Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Christian Reformed Church in North America; Church of the Brethren; Episcopal Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Free Methodist Church in Canada; Liturgy and Life: American Baptist Fellowship of Liturgical Renewal; Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod; Mennonite Church; National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States; North American Lutheran Church; Polish National Catholic Church; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Presbyterian Church in Canada; Reformed Church in America; Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship; United Church of Canada; United Church of Christ; United Methodist Church; Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/faq2.php>

captivity. The Roman Catholic Church also employed a lectionary early on. The answer that is probably most important to those asking me about the origin of the lectionary is that the lectionary was used in the protestant line churches as part of the Reformation. The protestant lectionary was created by making modifications to the Roman Catholic lectionary, rather than by starting from scratch. The *Revised Common Lectionary*, the one that I use, is only decades old and is subject to change, but it is quite stable and quite similar to lectionaries that came before it.

Why use the Lectionary?

This seems to be the most important question that is asked of me when I talk about the lectionary. The motivation behind the question is the idea that pastors should preach as the Holy Spirit leads to address the needs of the local congregation. I fully concur. I also believe that the Holy Spirit can work through the lectionary to bless the Body of Christ. So, unless I feel led to diverge from the lectionary, I shall use it.

I wish to explain some benefits to us from using the lectionary. And not only to us, these are benefits to the Body of Christ, when the lectionary is used more broadly in the Church.

Rhythms. All of Creation encapsulates rhythms. Rhythms are a blessing; those who enjoy the changing of the seasons know it well. The church year has its own rhythm. It begins (appropriately) with Advent—the season of anticipation of Christ’s coming to us and for us. We then move from Advent to Christmastide, when we celebrate the incarnation of Christ. After Christmas we observe Epiphany, and then Lent, when we enter the wilderness with Christ. After Lent, we celebrate Holy Week and go to the cross. Then, of course, we celebrate the season of Easter. Between the end of our Easter season and the beginning of the next Advent season, we observe what we call Ordinary Time, or Common Time.

Promotes Expository Preaching. The Lectionary discourages topical preaching (e.g., *What God says about bod language?*) where the preacher hunts through all the Scriptures to emphasize the points he or she wishes to make. Expository preaching is about letting the Word of God speak (through preaching) in the same fashion as which it was written (i.e., hearing the biblical author’s voice speaking into a context, rather than extracting a “nugget” for a message that the preacher is creating). In my spirit, I find

expository preaching to be the most reverent and humble handling of God's Word, and so most appropriate for the purpose of worship.²

Forces Encounters with Difficult Scripture Texts. The Lectionary does not play it safe, avoiding controversial passages of Scripture. Preachers who yield themselves to lectionary will not be able to avoid texts that may stir controversy. The preacher will be called upon to deal with these texts and explain what they do and do not say and how to apply them to our lives in our current context.

Diminishes Hobby-Horse Preaching. Every preacher has his or her own idea of what is the most important lesson that the Church universal or the congregation needs to learn and live out. And while the pastor may be correct in his or her assessment, it is easy to become too narrowly focused on the teaching that is needed most, while providing too little attention to the many other teachings that would benefit the Church and the congregation.

Preaching the Whole Counsel of God. Related to the above benefits of forcing encounters with difficult passages and avoiding an unbalanced focus on favorite ideas, the lectionary promotes preaching the "full counsel" of God over a three year period. Of course, not every verse of Scripture is accounted for in the lectionary, but there is a completeness to the Lectionary that few pastors could achieve, even if it were their heartfelt intention.

Over a three year period, if all the lectionary readings were read in Sunday services, only about 10% of the Old Testament would ever be read. About 50% of Psalms and 50% of New Testament (including 64% of the Gospels) would be heard in worship. This is another way of saying that Scripture has a lot of material (23,145 Old Testament verses and 7,957 New Testament verses). To read it all in three years would require us to read 199 verses each Sunday. Just to help put this in perspective, Philippians has 104 verses and Colossians has 95 verses; together they have 199 verses. Can you imagine reading both books and then having one sermon to cover all the teaching of both? And then do that every Sunday! So, it is very helpful when well-intentioned scholars and spiritual leaders help us identify the important thematic muscle movers that the Body of Christ most needs to hear on a regular (i.e. 3 year) basis.

² I do believe in topical Bible studies, where the emphasis is on discipleship.

It Connects Us. The Lectionary is used by many denominations and is used around the globe. On any given Sunday, the Body of Christ is being anointed with the same reading of the Word. Through the lectionary, much of the Body of Christ is reaching to heaven every Sunday with harmonized thoughts about our Lord and his gracious, powerful, sovereign, just dealings with His Creation. When I read about the Throne Room of God in the Book of Revelation, I see a concert of praise that is perfect in its harmony. In a diminished way, I see the lectionary as promoting that experience on this side of glory.

Summary

I believe that lectionary provides much benefit to the Body of Christ and all preachers should consider its merits. I also believe that the Holy Spirit is happy to work through the lectionary when it is used by the pastor with humility as an instrument of accountability. The preacher must rely on the Holy Spirit to select the proper lectionary text and to craft the specific message. It is also my sense that the Holy Spirit never wishes to be constrained by the lectionary, and so the pastor must be attentive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, to either use or not use the lectionary on any given Sunday.

Lastly, I believe and have confidence in the Body of Christ, the Church. I believe that faithful and wise scholars and pastors will generally do a better job of thinking things through than I could do on my own. At the end of the day, I regard the lectionary as a gift to God's Church, given from God through the labors of His Church. And this is why I use it, unless led by the Holy Spirit to do otherwise.

Peace,

Pastor Bruce

References

- "5 Reasons to Preach the Lectionary", The Foundry Publishing, October 19, 2017, <https://www.thefoundrycommunity.com/5-reasons-to-preach-the-lectionary/>

THE PRESBYTERIAN POST

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MARCH BIRTHDAYS

MARCH 6 Martha Shafer
MARCH 7 Lisa VanIderstine
MARCH 8 Sandy Karns
MARCH 11 Cathi VanIderstine
MARCH 15 Jodi Kendall
MARCH 19 Stan Ells
MARCH 21 Judy Osborn
MARCH 22 Madison Whiteman
MARCH 28 Gar Chatain

EARLY APRIL BIRTHDAYS

APRIL 4 Ed Karns
APRIL 6 Dick Smith (Swain)

BIRTHDAYS MISSED LAST MONTH

OR REPORTED WRONG

FEBRUARY 10 Tori Cross
FEBRUARY 16 Mary Ann Remsen
(NOT February 18 as reported)

GAR CHATAIN'S ADDRESS

Gar has been serving in the US Army in Iraq and very much appreciates hearing from his friends at AP. His birthday is March 28th so let's try to show Gar how much we appreciate his service to our country and send him a birthday card.

1LT Gar Chatain

E. Co., 1-227th, TF Attack

LSA Roberts

APO-AE 09316



MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

MARCH 20 Ron and Diane Kendall
MARCH 25 Dick and Darla Kennell

ANNIVERSARY MISSED LAST MONTH

FEBRUARY 16 Jim and Pat Robords



ELEVATOR SCHEDULE

MARCH 1 Dan Lacy
MARCH 8 Bob Osborn
MARCH 15 Jim Robords
MARCH 22 Mike Whiteman
MARCH 29 Nelson Whiteman

KATHY KEMP WHITEHURST

Kathy Whitehurst, Janice Ludwig's oldest daughter, is battling cancer. Cards and words of encouragement are most welcome.

Kathy Whitehurst
264 E Jefferson St.
Macon, GA 30650

NEWS AND NOTES

FAITH AND FAMILY FUN HOCKEY NIGHT

Seventeen adults and youths enjoyed a fun night watching the Elmira Enforcers win their hockey game in a thrilling overtime victory Sunday night.. Thank you to Pastor Bruce for organizing this road trip for our Youth Group.



CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

There will be a special congregational meeting immediately following worship on March 1, 2020. There are two items of business for this meeting: 1) Nominations to fill church officer vacancies for all three boards (Elders, Deacons, and Trustees) and 2) Nominations to form the new Nominating Committee.

COFFEE HOUR FOR BOB AND DIANNE JONES

There will be a coffee hour after the congregational meeting on March 1 to honor Bob and Dianne for their service to this church and to wish them well as they embark on the next chapter of their journey in their new home in Pennsylvania. The Jones' new address is 124 Heister Rd., Birdsboro, PA 19508. Bob's new phone number is 484-663-3068.

INSTALLATION AND ORDINATION OF NEW CHURCH OFFICERS

New church officers will be installed, Ordained and/or recognized during worship on March 8.

AFTERNOON GAME DAY

The Fellowship Committee would like to try something new by hosting a game afternoon on March 22nd in the Fellowship Hall. Bring a bag lunch and your favorite game. It is anticipated that the fun would be over by 1:00 pm.

MISSION COMMITTEE NEWS

New List of items needed for the month of March from Turning Point in Hornell. Personal Hygiene Items such as shampoo, body wash, shaving cream, toothbrushes, toothpaste, men and women deodorant. Items may be placed in a basket at back of our sanctuary.

This committee has sent \$350 from our Local Mission Funds to the Elizabeth Rose Ministry of the Bath area. At end of year, we will consider listing them in our budget for 2021. We have included the following information on this ministry that was sent to us.

Elizabeth Rose Ministry

The Elizabeth Rose Ministry was born out of a Ladies' Bible study Deb Wilson held in memory of her daughter, Elizabeth Rose, 31, who was murdered on Feb. 25, 2013 while trying to escape an abusive relationship. In Aug. 2016, Deb began going into the domestic violence shelters and sharing Elizabeth's story. After a while the Bible study ladies wondered what more could be done? They realized there was more these women and their children desperately needed after escaping their abusers. Most of these women left with very little if anything but what they could carry for clothing. When they found an apartment, they had nothing. The domestic violence shelter helped with a few things but that still left the women lacking so much. Sometimes they wouldn't have a kitchen table or if they did, they wouldn't have enough chairs. So, the ladies of the Bible study came up with the idea of doing housewarmings for these women. In Oct. 2016 the ministry did its first housewarming by going in and furnishing just about everything that the woman could possibly need in their new apartment to make it a home. Deb and others from the Bible study put the word out about what they were doing, and donations came pouring in, so much so that there was the need to have a storage shed. We had one donated to us, then we had to rent another. When that was full, a local farm family allowed us to use the upper portion of his barn which we almost filled. After this the need for our own storage facility became very apparent. We raised funds to build a storage building, and in the Spring of 2018, we were in our new 40x60 building. To date we have had 60 housewarmings and many assists in which we may just provide a few things for the women. Between sharing Elizabeth's story and housewarmings, 100's of lives have been changed forever.

*Deb Wilson (who started this ministry) lost her battle with cancer last month. Those who knew her take comfort in knowing that she has been reunited with her beloved daughter and they are both dancing in the arms of Jesus.

Arkport Presbyterian Church

March 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 COMMUNION SUNDAY 2 CENTS A MEAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING FOLLOWING WORSHIP	2 5:00 PM - GIRL SCOUTS	3 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	4 8:45 AM - WINGS 6:00 PM - CASUAL WORSHIP 7:00 PM - BIBLE STUDY	5 6:00 PM - YOUTH GROUP	6	7
8 INSTALLATION AND ORDINATION OF CHURCH OFFICERS	9 5:00 PM - GIRL SCOUTS	10 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	11 8:45 AM - WINGS 6:00 PM - CASUAL WORSHIP 7:00 PM - BIBLE STUDY	12 6:00 PM - YOUTH GROUP	13	14
15 5:00 PM - GIRL SCOUTS	16 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	17 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	18 8:45 AM - WINGS 6:00 PM - CASUAL WORSHIP 7:00 PM - BIBLE STUDY	19 6:00 PM - YOUTH GROUP	20	21
22 GAME AFTERNOON FOLLOWING WORSHIP	23 5:00 PM - GIRL SCOUTS	24 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	25 8:45 AM - WINGS 6:00 PM - CASUAL WORSHIP 7:00 PM - BIBLE STUDY	26 6:00 PM - YOUTH GROUP	27	28
29 5:00 PM - GIRL SCOUTS	30 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	31 9:00 AM - BIBLE STUDY	1 ELDER OF THE MONTH: BARBARA MOORE	2	3	4