

The Lectionary Lens

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Which of the following is NOT true about the Revised Common Lectionary?

- a) There are four assigned readings for each Sunday (typically a reading from the Hebrew scriptures, a Psalm, a Gospel reading, and a reading from an epistle).
- b) It is a three-year cycle.
- c) It is used by many mainline denominations.
- d) It follows the cycle of the liturgical seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Ordinary Time)
- e) The Lectionary Police will arrest you if you don't use it every Sunday.

Which of the following is NOT an advantage of using the Lectionary in worship?

- a) It makes worship planning easier.
- b) Spell check will underline the word lectionary if you do not capitalize it.
- c) It keeps your worship in synch with the rhythms of the liturgical year.
- d) It pushes you to use scriptures in worship that you might otherwise ignore.
- e) There are many resources available in print, online, and even in person for Lectionary passages.

What are some reasons you might choose to go "off Lectionary" from time to time?

- a) Many cool Bible stories, like the one about the talking donkey (Numbers 22), are not included in the three year RCL cycle
- b) At times your church may want/need to focus on parts of the Bible that deal with specific spiritual themes or issues rather than the given Lectionary scriptures.
- c) You just got back from an AMAZING Year of The Bible launch and want to talk about that in worship instead.
- d) You are sick and tired of spell check underlining the word lectionary every time you forget to capitalize it.
- e) All of the above. (Except maybe "d.")

How can you use the Lectionary in worship? (Circle all that apply.)

- a) Make people recite one of the Lectionary passages from memory before you let them into worship.
- b) Preach on one or more of the assigned Lectionary passages.
- c) Use one of the scriptures as an opening scripture reading. (The Psalm often works well for this.)
- d) Use phrases and/or images from one or more of the passages in your call to worship and prayers.
- e) Use part of an assigned scripture as the benediction. (Selections from the epistles often work well for this.)

A Lectionary is a listing or collection of scripture readings for Christian or Judaic worship. It is a pre-assigned and scheduled set of scripture readings.

Where does the idea of a lectionary come from? The practice of reading specific verses at appointed times dates all the way back to the time of Moses. (Specific readings were used for special religious festivals such as Passover and Pentecost.) Jewish communities standardized a schedule of scripture readings to be read in the Synagogue. Early Christians then adopted this Jewish custom of reading extracts of Hebrew Bible.

Many lectionaries have been created and used in different parts of the world.

Revised Common Lectionary: After the 2nd Vatican Council (1960s), the Roman Catholic Mass Lectionary was created. Most current lectionaries used by western Christian denominations organize the scripture passages based on this revised lectionary. And thanks to the **Consultation on Common Texts**, an ecumenical consultation committee, we have something called a **Revised Common Lectionary** (Mennonites are included as members of this Consultation.)

How to use the RCL:

- It is organized into three year cycles of readings (Year A, Year B, Year C)
- The new Year begins first Sunday of Advent (see schedule produced by Vanderbilt)
- It follows the cycle of the liturgical seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Ordinary Time)
- There are four readings assigned to each Sunday (Selection from Old Testament, a Psalm, an Epistle and a Gospel) During Eastertide Acts is used instead of Old Testament reading
- Year A-Matthew; Year B-Mark; Year C-Luke and John is read at Easter and used at other special times.
- First three readings are selected to complement the gospel reading

e.g. See scripture readings for Sunday, August 4:

Hosea 11:1-11 or Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

Psalm 107:1-9, 43 or Psalm 49:1-12

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12: 13-21

Gifts and limits of the RCL:

Gifts:

- Unity: Study same scripture across denominations and geographies
- Provides sweeping survey of entire bible and focuses on breadth of biblical texts
- Allows scripture to interpret scripture before preacher begins... “holy spirit gets first word”
- Aids in worship planning and collaboration
- It is a spiritual discipline to think about difficult texts or texts not of your choosing
- Many lectionary-based resources
- Value in following a rhythm

Limits:

- The RCL often leaves out texts or disrupts the narrative flow of the gospels
- Works well when people know the sweep of Scripture; Does it work as well in situations or contexts of biblical illiteracy?
- We are always injecting our own themes and preoccupations onto Scripture, including lectionary passages.
- Sometimes lectionary passages seem so irrelevant; Is there such a thing as forcing unity? Honoring the particular, the local, the specific
- Does the lectionary make preachers lazy? Does it stifle creativity?

Helpful Resources

- textweek.com--has readings for each Sunday and links to many helpful resources
- Lectionary app--the Lectionary readings at your fingertips
- LiturgyLink.net--worship material based on Lectionary readings
- *Leader Magazine*--often contains Lectionary-based worship materials
- WorkingPreacher.org--Commentary on Lectionary passages, plus the Narrative Lectionary
- <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>
- *Feasting on the word*