

From our Churches

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Lectionary Service

Colours of the Liturgical Year

Children's Story

What is time? (hold up a piece of string) For some people, time is like a line. It has a beginning, middle and end. Like school. You begin in September, and go all the way to June. It's the end of one grade and the beginning of another; an ending that's really like a beginning.

What would happen if we tied these two ends of string together? God's time is more like a circle than a line. (Lay it down on the church year wheel.)

This is a circle that includes all the Sundays in the church year. Can you tell where it begins? It's kind of hard. What is the first thing that ever happened to you? (birth) Did anything happen before you were born? Your mom and dad got ready for you to come.

So let's start there... getting ready for someone to be born. Who is going to be born at Christmas? (Jesus) Jesus was born a king, so we are going to use the colour PURPLE to stand for the time we wait for Jesus. (Ask one of the kids to hold the purple cloth)

After a time of waiting, Jesus is born. (Hold up WHITE/GOLD cloth)

The wise men came to visit Jesus. (Epiphany – Hold up GREEN cloth)

LENT is another waiting time - now we wait for Jesus to die and be resurrected. (PURPLE)

GOOD FRIDAY – BLACK - darkest day of the year

EASTER – WHITE/GOLD

50 days – GREEN

Then Pentecost – when Spirit came like a fire - RED

Between Pentecost and Advent is ordinary time - a time for the church to grow - we use GREEN.

Then we are back to Advent – PURPLE.

We call this the CHURCH YEAR - the way we tell time in the church. By colour and by repetition. So when you come into church and you see the color on the table you know what time it is.

Scripture

Luke 4: 16-30

Getting to Know the Lectionary

Need 208 strips of coloured construction paper in the colors of the church year (108 purple; 4 black; 4 red; 24 white; 68 green) At the front you will need 30 purple, 7 white, 3 red, 9 green, 3 black; hand out all the rest so everyone in the congregation has strips of paper. Let the congregation know they will have to talk and move around a bit; some will need to help the kids.

Imagine your best friend coming over for coffee this week. You haven't seen her for some time. She says she wants to hear ALL about your summer. Wow! That's a lot of time to talk about. So much has happened this summer. You think, "How am I going to tell her everything... so much of it is important."

On one hand, you could tell her every little detail from start to finish...on June 1st, I had breakfast at the bakery and then I worked in my garden, and for lunch my neighbor came over...and on and on.... That would be retelling the events in "real time" – and you probably wouldn't remain friends any more! Or, you could say, "It was fabulous; how was yours?"

Neither of these methods are very satisfying, are they?

How would YOU tell the story of YOUR summer? What method would you use – something between telling every detail to simply offering a one sentence summary. What would make it meaningful? Long enough to tell the story and short enough so they don't get bored.

Let's brainstorm a bit. Turn to your neighbor and talk about it.

After a couple of minutes ask the congregation to share their discussions with the full gathering. Here are a few of my options:

1. Thematic. You could tell all the stories that happened in the car with the grandkids. Then you could tell all the stories that related to the shows you saw, the books you read, the places you swam, the places you golfed, the restaurants you ate in, the places you hiked, the things your photographed, the people you met, the illnesses you had.....
2. Negative. Everything that went wrong.
3. Emotional. The highs and lows, the tears the laughter, the jokes, the scary moments.
4. Photos. Highlight the 10 best moments of summer with pictures.
5. Historical. Compare this summer with other summers in the past. Did you go to the same places? Who did you spend time with? Did you grow the same garden varieties this year? Etc.
6. Transformational. How did the summer change you? What were you expecting and what happened? What difference did it make to your life?

The challenge we have with telling the long story of our summer is a similar challenge that churches have had throughout the centuries. How do we condense the huge story of the Bible for Sunday readings? (*Hold up the big bible that is on the worship table*)

What is all in the Bible?

Invite congregation to name all that is in the Bible: history, letters, prayers, parables, miracles, ethics, theology...etc.aaahhhh!!!!. You've got 52 weeks in the year. What are you going to do with all of this?

We could read every word starting from Genesis 1 and read all the way to Revelation 22, which is what the Hebrews and early Christians did. Or we could summarize it in one sentence: This is God's story of love for humans.

Neither of these approaches are going to work well for us in 2009.

Whatever we do, we need a method, a way of organizing it. It has to be long enough so that we get the full and complete story, and short enough that we can fit it into our Sunday schedule.

Thank goodness, someone else has gone to the work of figuring this out. A group which represented 20 denominations called themselves the Consultation on Common Texts have come up with a group of readings. It was first published in 1983, revised and the last publication was 1992. This group of readings is called "the lectionary."

The lectionary. It comes from the Greek word for reading called *lectio*. The lectionary and its development have a long complicated history and we are not going to talk about that today...just the results.

First they had to come up with a method of telling the story. Just like we had to come up with a method to tell the story of our summer. They probably had as many options as you did.

This is what they decided.

They decided to go with the big theme of salvation history. Every year we go through the whole story of God saving us. In order to do that, they decided to focus on Jesus' life, death and resurrection. They begin with Advent to prepare for Jesus' birth and end with Christ the king Sunday where Jesus is crowned as ruler over all.

Second, they decided to go from a two-year cycle to a three-year cycle (Year A, B and C) so they could add more scripture readings. This also made it easier to fit the gospels in.

Third, they decided to have four readings for each Sunday; 2 from the OT and 2 from the New. It used to be two readings.

Fourth: They had decided on the primary or main theme as Jesus' life, death and resurrection. But now they had to decide what *part* of Jesus' life does the church need to hear about. The committee decided to choose a secondary theme for each year.

Invite a couple of children and adults to come forward and stand at the big Bible at the front of the sanctuary.

Year A. The gospel scriptures are from Matthew. They chose stories to help those who were new to the faith, perhaps going through preparation for baptism. They chose stories of new birth and living water. In the Old Testament we hear stories of the birth of the covenant, God's promise to humanity that God would always be with us.

Ask kids/adults at front to take 4 purple pieces of construction paper and put it at the beginning of Matthew and 4 purple pieces in Genesis.

Year B. The gospel scriptures are from Mark. They chose stories that focus on persons mature in the faith, who've been Christians for awhile. The Old Testament stories are from King David's life and the other kings.

Put 4 purple pieces in Mark and 4 in the Kings.

Year C. The gospel scriptures are from Luke. They chose stories that focus on persons who, like the prodigal son, have rejected God or are struggling with God. The committee chose stories from the OT prophets who dealt with Israel's constant rejection of God.

Put 4 purple pieces in Luke and 4 in the prophets.

Now, there is one more gospel, isn't there? The gospel of John. Because John has so much about Jesus as the Christ, they put stories from the Gospel of John during all the festival days: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost. All the Sundays where we have purple, white, gold, and red colours.

Put 4 purple, 4 white pieces, 1 red, 1 black piece in John.

The committee also said, "Ok, if we are going to celebrate the birth of Jesus every year, it would be best if we did it at the same time the rest of the world does." Doesn't that make sense?

They could have begun the liturgical year in spring, the season of birth, when calves and other animals are born. That would make sense too. But can you imagine, celebrating the birth of Jesus in December with the world and then celebrating it again in spring with the church? That doesn't quite work. So they looked at the North American calendar and chose the birth of Jesus to be the same time as the rest of the world. Good!

The first part was over, choosing the gospel texts. Now they needed to choose the Old Testament stories to go with the gospel texts.

Sometimes they chose an Old Testament text that either matched or complemented the story. Remember the scripture that _____ read for us? When Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, he read from the book of Isaiah. That was an easy match, they looked up the reference in Isaiah and that became the OT reading for that Sunday.

Put 1 green piece in Luke 4 and 1 green piece in Isaiah 61

Sometimes they chose a reading because it is the opposite or in contrast to the story. For example in Year A we have Matthew 18, the parable of the UNforgiving servant. The Old

Testament text is Genesis 50 where Joseph *forgives* his brothers. So you have the contrast of unforgiveness and forgiveness.

Put 1 green piece in Matthew 18 and 1 green piece in Genesis 50

Sometimes they chose a reading in order to give an example of the gospel. Like in Year C when Jesus asks his disciples to pray with persistence or determination. What does it look like to pray with persistence? They chose the story of Abraham begging God not to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Put 1 green piece in Luke 11 and 1 green piece in Genesis 18

The only time the OT is not used is during the Easter season because there is not much in the OT about resurrection. This was a totally brand new. So the committee decided to use Acts because it talks about how people responded to the resurrection.

Put 1 white piece and 1 green piece in Acts

Then the committee added a psalm. The psalm is a *response* to the Old Testament. It might not really fit with the New Testament readings, but it always fits with the Old.

Put 1 of each colour in the Psalms

We have the gospel, an OT reading, a psalm to respond and then the fourth text is usually one of the letters or epistles.

Put in all colours in the epistles. Kids/Adults can sit down.

The people who witnessed the resurrection and who were affected by it were trying to figure it out. What did it mean for Jesus to rise? What does it mean to follow Jesus? And so we read the epistles because they *witness* to how people struggled with their faith, how they struggled with what it meant to be a Christian in that day and age. Each generation after that has had to struggle with the same questions.

There is one more thing about the lectionary that we use today. There are often extra readings listed. Have you ever noticed that?

Well, the committee who put it together had lots of church groups who wanted to make sure they did it the RIGHT way. And everybody had an opinion of what should go in and what should be left out. Does that sound familiar?

The committee tried to honor this and several times during the liturgical year, especially during ordinary time, they put in other readings so you can just about read straight through a particular book. So at certain parts of the year you have a choice, reading through a book or going with the theme.

The compilers of this revised common lectionary listened to people's opinions. And I'm glad they did because now there are more stories of women, the OT readings fit better with the NT ones, and the language is more inclusive for people.

Invite congregation to come up and place all their papers into the Bible.

So this is the overall story of the lectionary that you use almost every Sunday. Four readings every week for three years.

(Pick up the Bible and show them the papers in it)

In three years you should get the whole big picture of the Bible. And remember, these are the highlights. There are many other things to read for personal or group study. It would be like your friend telling you the highlights of the summer and then a couple weeks later you say, "Remember that one highlight you had when you were camping? Tell me more about that." We can go to the Bible and say, I heard about the prophet Ezekiel on Sunday, I would like to hear more about him.

The Bible is an amazing book, and it is worth reading and studying because it is the story of people like you, like me, who are in trouble, who struggle with illness, who fight with their sibling, who are too busy... people who are being drawn to a God who loves us with a whole heart.

Prayer

God of the gospel

Who uses scripture to challenge, teach and remind us of your love

Grow in us a hunger for your word

That we may seek you and find you, knowing that we are your beloved children

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

RESOURCES:

Gail Ramshaw. A THREE YEAR BANQUET: THE LECTIONARY FOR THE ASSEMBLY. Augsburg Fortress, 2004

Laurence Hull Stookey: CALENDAR: CHRIST'S TIME FOR THE CHURCH. Abingdon Press, 1996

Web:

<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/faq2.php>

The Vanderbilt Lectionary website is excellent! They also have a great art index

http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=646

http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1416

<http://www.blc.edu/comm/gargy/gargy1/AlexRing.gpc.html>