

Preaching through the Lectionary

2 Timothy 4:1-5

1. Preach the Word
2. Do the work of an Evangelist
 - They are basically the same thing – we want to **Preach the Word & Preach Christ** – we preach Christ as we preach the Word faithfully because it is the Word of Christ and when we want to preach Christ we pick up the Word because we know no other Christ than the one we meet in the pages of Scripture.
 - Let's not lose sight of this – preaching the Word / preaching Christ – this is Vine work. The lectionary is a Trellis – a structure that can help us by giving us a framework and order for our preaching of Christ from the Scriptures.
 - We serve God and serving his people. We do not serve the lectionary.
 1. So if we find the occasional error in the lectionary (the reading is from "Mark 17") we don't worry. We are reminded that this is a creation of men. It is not the infallible Scripture.
 2. If there is a massive national tragedy or tragedy in the congregation on Saturday and we feel we must preach from e.g. John 11 then do that – we are not slavishly serving the lectionary.
 - If there is Thanksgiving/Harvest service or a baptism or a confirmation and we don't feel that the lectionary readings are at all suited what should we do? Well we do not slavishly serve the lectionary but at the same time we could say 2 other things:
 1. It may often be possible to plan ahead. The great thing about the lectionary is that you know what is coming up months ahead. With a bit of planning it may be possible to arrange the baptism or special service for a Sunday when there will be a particularly appropriate reading.
 2. If we seek to preach Christ from all the Scriptures we will often find that the readings which seemed irrelevant and inappropriate to the occasion are much closer to it than we first thought. **E.g. Esther – God is the God who works through weakness. His power is not in armies and dictators but in a weak oppressed vessel. Esther is a pattern of Christ ("If I perish for my people...") and Haman is the seed of the serpent. The gallows (the 'Cross') that Haman plans as the means of his victory turns out to be the place of his defeat (cf. Col. 2:15). The day ordained for the Jews defeat turns out to be the day of their triumph. Before that final triumph the messengers of the good news go out to tell of this salvation. Now if we preach the Bible like that and preach Christ then we will find that is not at all inappropriate to a baptism or confirmation or any Christian celebration.**



The benefits of the lectionary

- **Hearing lots of Scripture** – The reason people started producing lectionaries was so that people would hear lots of Scripture.
The lectionary that came with the 1662 BCP – OT 1 x per year, NT x 2 per year, Psalms 1 x

per month. Morning Prayer = 8 chapters of Scripture = at least 30 minutes of pure reading the Word of God.

1 Tim. 4:13 – devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture

A strength of Anglicanism is at least the reading of 3 passages every Sunday

Let's make the most of these opportunities

Reading well

1. Prepare well – read multiple times, aloud
2. Practice names and difficult words
3. Understand well so you can speak with meaning
4. Speak clearly and loudly

- **Seasons and doctrines** – Focus on different doctrines at different times. In some ways we should celebrate Easter every Sunday but when do we actually preach on resurrection? We could preach on the incarnation any Sunday of the year, but would we?
- **Word-driven preaching** – Discourages us from starting with an idea and then trying to find a passage. Discourages just preaching my favourite topics. Forces us to start with the passage. The Bible sets the agenda.
- **Whetting appetite for the Word** – Both 1) in the sense that the congregation knows the Scripture passage that will be preached on in advance and can read in advance and prepare and be hungry to hear it preached and 2) in the sense that the preaching of the Word can excite people about the book of the Bible and equip and encourage them to go back and read the rest of it for themselves.

Choosing a reading versus seeing connections

Should we try to find a theme that cuts across or just choose one of the 3 readings?

- Connections can help us see the Bible as one story
 - There will often be connections.
 - On the seasonal Sundays there will definitely be a theme and connections. E.g. All Saints Day – theme of resurrection – Isaiah 25 – on this mountain God will destroy the shroud that covers all people, he will swallow up death forever – Psalm 24 – lift up your heads you gates that the King of Glory may come in – a song of triumph for the King of Kings who has just defeated death and is ascending into heaven – John 11 – I am the resurrection and the life.
 - The Apostles in Acts sometimes did this more thematic preaching gathering a few passages together.
 - It is very hard work. You have to have done all the hard 'Getting it Right' work on each of the passages. Then you need to work really hard to come up with One Thing to say that is faithful in bringing together all the passages.
 - It may depend on the maturity of your congregation and how well they know their Bibles. Are they able to jump around from book to book and quickly know where they are in the Bible story?

- But great advantages of sticking with one passage – easier to prepare, easier to follow

Preaching a season – uncommon doctrines

- Advent – preparing for the return of Christ
 - ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. Amen. [Advent 1]
 - We might be tempted to leave the doctrine of the return of Christ to the cults and get on with more ‘practical’ business. But this is the most relevant of doctrines. The logic of the whole NT is that we are to live now in light of the future. E.g. look at the end of each chapter of 1 Thessalonians.
- Christmas – preaching the incarnation
 - Lots of wonderful doctrine and implications to preach. E.g. Hebrews 1:1-4 – Jesus is the radiance (outshining) of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being. Tom Torrance in WW2 - the biggest question soldiers asked: “Is God really like Jesus?” Yes he is! Exactly. He is a humble God who washes feet of sinners.
- New Year – eternity & humility
 - Will we just preach the ego boosting motivational New Year message everyone else is preaching? The lectionary readings (Ps. 8, Rev. 21, Matt. 25) point in a different direction towards the smallness of man and the coming of Christ in glory. These BCP collects strike the right note:
 - O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen. [Trinity 4]
 - O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [Easter 4]
- Epiphany – the nations and mission to the nations
 - Ephesians 3 is one of the readings here, makes two very helpful points:
 1. Our oneness in Christ (v6) – no place for negative ethnicity in the church
 2. What is mission? (v8-9) – not about crusades and PA systems, not about getting numbers into church, definitely not about spreading a culture or ‘influencing society’ – it is simply talking to people about the riches of Christ, making the gospel plain to people – could be the Christian fundi at the building site to fellow workers, could be the old lady talking to other old ladies.
- Transfiguration – the glory of God in the face of Christ

- Lent – Repentance, Wretchedness, Sanctification, Suffering
 - Repentance should be our daily life (Luther) but helpful to have a season to particularly remember and acknowledge our wretchedness. Especially important when some Christian teachers are teaching that we should not call ourselves sinners (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15)¹
 - ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [Ash Wed]
 - ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [Lent 2]²
- Holy Week & Good Friday – preaching Christ crucified
 - Do not assume that people know the gospel of Christ taking the punishment in the place of sinners. Take the great opportunity to preach it.
 - John's Gospel particularly shows in its narratives the substitution that occurs as one man dies for the people, the Lamb for sinner, Jesus the innocent for Peter the guilty. And the wonderful word from the Cross: "It is finished."³
- Easter – preaching the resurrection
 - Esp. 1 Corinthians 15 – Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection – that is the great Christian hope – the resurrection of the body
- Ascension – sovereignty and security
 - Psalm 47 – God has ascending (which must mean he first descended) and seated as King over all. He is our King and we are His.
- Pentecost – the work of the Spirit
 - To glorify Jesus – as a projector projecting an image on a screen – we don't look at the projector we look at the image on the screen. E.g. Acts 2 – the sermon from Joel

¹ The BCP services of Morning and Evening Prayer include 13 occasions when we say we are "miserable sinners/offenders".

² A helpful doctrine of sanctification in this prayer. It is God who works in us to will and to act. I struggle with all his strength that he powerfully works in me.

³ Hudson Taylor's conversion: "On a day which I shall never forget, when I was about fifteen years of age, because my dear mother was absent from home, I had a holiday, and in the afternoon looked through my father's library to find some book with which to while away the unoccupied hours. Nothing attracting me, I turned over a little basket of pamphlets, and selected from among them a gospel tract which looked interesting... I sat down to read the little book in an utterly unconcerned state of mind, believing indeed at the time that if there were any salvation it was not for me, and with a distinct intention to put away the tract as soon as it should become tedious. Well while reading the tract I was struck with the sentence, "The finished work of Christ." The thought passed through my mind, "Why does the author use this expression? Why not say the atoning or propitiatory work of Christ?" Immediately the words "It is finished" suggested themselves to my mind. What was finished? And I at once replied, "A full and perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin: the debt was paid by the Substitute; Christ died for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Then came the thought, "If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?" And with this dawned the joyful conviction, as light was flashed into my soul by the Holy Spirit, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on one's knees, and accepting this Savior and His salvation, to praise Him forevermore.

could easily have been about the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit but it is a sermon all about Jesus from beginning to end.

- Trinity – not a maths problem! the happy three working in love for our salvation

Preaching a Bible book or book section

Sometimes when there are 3 or so reading in a row from the same book (either continuous passages or from different places in the book) we can preach a short consecutive expository series. These are great opportunities to preach the Bible as it wants to be preached – Act 1, Acts 2, Acts 3.

Someone might object, I only go to each church I am responsible for once in 6 weeks, the rest of the time it is the evangelist or lay reader. Well, why not try meeting up with the lay reader and saying, Joel is coming up in the lectionary, I will preach Joel 1, I'd like you to follow on with Joel 2 and 3. You could discuss the series together, you could even give them a sermon outline. It might not work and it will be more work for you but it could have great benefits for the congregation.

- Getting hold of the big picture / big theme of the book – often it will be helpful to look at the beginning and the end and to find one or two key verses in the book as a whole
 - Ruth 1:1; 4:22; 2:12
 - Hebrews 8:1; 2:1; 3:1; 12:1-2
 - Mark 1:1
 - John 20:30-31
- When you have continuous readings: Let the book teach us in the way it wants to teach us
- When you have select passages: Let the passages give us a flavour of the whole book

Above all: Preach the Word & Preach Christ