

INTRODUCTION

THE WORD OF GOD

The Christian church believes and confesses that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God incarnate in a human being. The word through which God created all things, liberated and sustained the chosen Hebrew people, and continues to give life became truly human for our salvation. Therefore, when we speak of God's word, we refer above all to this Word who "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14), "the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made [God] known" (1:18).

However, the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are also regarded by most Christians as the word of God in written form. This word communicates the mighty acts of God in the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. This written word also relates how God inspired the judges and psalmists and spoke to the prophets. This testimony was collected by the children of Israel, passed from generation to generation, written down, and proclaimed when they gathered daily and weekly.

The Christian church grew out of this tradition. Jesus of Nazareth was raised attending services centered on the proclamation of the holy scriptures. The apostolic witnesses to his life, death, and resurrection knew those same scriptures and worship patterns. As the new church grew and spread, apostles and evangelists taught communities of believers through gospels that told of the life of Jesus Christ as well as letters that expanded upon the understandings of this new covenant with God.

The proclaimed word of God continues to be essential to Christian worship. Despite ongoing changes in the ways people communicate, public reading of scripture remains foundational to proclamation within the assembly. Using patterns of worship inherited from the generations that have preceded us, we gather weekly as communities of faith. Here the triune God speaks to each person, to the gathered community of faith, and to the whole creation. Within the context of the whole liturgy, we hear readings from Old and New Testaments, attend as the word is further proclaimed and interpreted in the sermon, and respond in song, prayer, and praise. Both word and sacrament connect us not only to God, but also to the whole body of believers of all times and places.

SELECTION OF SCRIPTURES

Among all the books of the Bible, the gospels have particular prominence for Christians because they proclaim "the good news of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), telling the story of his life, his teachings, and most importantly, his

saving death and resurrection. In worship, the reading of the gospel for the day is similarly lifted up: We stand for that reading and surround it with acclamations.

From the earliest years of the Christian church, it has also been customary to read from letters of the apostles, valuable both for their theological insights and for their encouragement in the life of faith. In the liturgy, this reading precedes the gospel, much as all other witnesses testify to the centrality of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures, too, are acknowledged as God's authentic word for us today. Since the middle of the twentieth century, Christian churches increasingly have been including a reading from the Old Testament in corporate worship, usually as the first reading. Additionally, as a response to the first reading, a psalm is frequently sung by the assembly. (These psalm texts, though part of the Revised Common Lectionary, are not included here, both because there are many choices of versions available, and because the psalms are traditionally sung by the assembly or the choir.)

Though Protestant churches usually do not regard the books of the Apocrypha as part of the core, canonical Bible, they have generally esteemed them as worthy teachings for Christians. In this light, readings from these books are sometimes suggested as alternate choices for a given day.

This procedure opens up the entire Bible as a potential source of scripture reading in the assembly. That is both gift and challenge. Certainly, the Bible is an inexhaustible storehouse, overflowing with the riches of God's word. No part of it is unworthy of our attention. On the contrary, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). But with such a treasury available to us, how do we choose what to read on a given Sunday? If we are not to rely on individual preference, a system is needed. For centuries, the church has employed a lectionary method to address this issue. Over most of that time, a one-year lectionary repeated the same lessons on a given Sunday each year. In the last third of the twentieth century, in an attempt to make a wider selection of scripture available for reading in the assembly, many Christian denominations adopted a three-year lectionary. And most of those worked together to prepare the Revised Common Lectionary, toward the goal that the readings would be largely the same across the denominations on a given day. The present volume, based on the outcome of

that ecumenical effort, uses the Revised Common Lectionary as it appears in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006). This version includes additional readings for a number of festivals and occasions, as well as the church year calendar and terminology from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

In the Revised Common Lectionary, the gospels remain the core. In year A, most of the gospel readings are from the Gospel of Matthew; in year B, from the Gospel of Mark; and in year C, from the Gospel of Luke. Readings from the Gospel of John appear in all three years and are most numerous in year B. From Advent through Holy Trinity, the gospels relate to the season or festival. During the rest of the year, the gospel readings are excerpts from the life and teachings of Jesus, generally following the order of the gospel books.

The first readings are chosen for their relationship to the gospels, especially from Advent through Holy Trinity and, in the complementary series, throughout the year. An alternative series for the time after Pentecost within the Revised Common Lectionary, the semicontinuous series, provides Old Testament readings and psalms that, while not as explicitly connected to the gospels, explore many of the books and stories not covered by the complementary series. Both series are provided in this volume in separate sections for clarity and ease of use.

The second readings more often stay within a book for a number of Sundays, providing a more prolonged exposure to a given writer's thought. Although these readings are usually not intentionally tied to the gospel, a community that uses the lectionary will often find that the second readings open up the scriptures in unexpected ways, allowing the Bible to converse with itself as well as its hearers.

A NOTE ABOUT AVOIDING ANTI-JEWISH BIAS

As noted above, the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures are acknowledged as God's holy word for us today. Christian proclamation, however, needs to take care with references to the phrase "the Jews" in the Bible, particularly in the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles where it most frequently appears. Throughout history, these references have been used to perpetuate negative stereotypes and falsely assign blame for the death of Jesus. These references gloss over significant distinctions among religious leaders and obscure the fact that Jesus and his disciples were themselves Jews. You are encouraged to accompany the reading of these difficult texts with teaching, confession, and lament, being mindful that they have inspired discrimination and violence against the Jewish people. Being diligent in this regard helps foster love and respect for our Jewish neighbors.

READING FROM THE LECTIONARY

Proclaiming God’s word in the assembly is an important and blessed task. Any who are chosen to read the scriptures in public, though, will need to prepare. Training, rehearsal, and prayerful preparation assist those who read the scriptures to proclaim the word of God so that it can be clearly heard and its meaning conveyed.

Repeated reading—silently and aloud—of the assigned texts in advance will allow the reader to communicate the meaning behind the words, as well as to prepare for any difficulties in pronunciation or syntax. Practice in the worship space with the sound system, as necessary. Then, when actually proclaiming the texts in the assembly, remember that all need to hear and understand them. Speak loudly enough—through the end of each phrase—that the person farthest away can hear clearly. Speak slowly—there is no hurry. Pay attention to consonants, which aid greatly in understanding, and to phrasing. The readings in this book are laid out in “sense lines” to assist in logical breaks for breath and for meaning.

This volume provides introductions and conclusions for each reading. Although these are widely accepted formulas, if your assembly uses other wording, it may be substituted.

Brackets around verses indicate that those sections are optional within the reading. Because the spirit of the lectionary is to bring more of scripture to the assembly, proclaiming the fuller readings deserves consideration. Half brackets “⌈” “⌋” denote where explanatory words have been added or substituted to make the context of the reading clear.

The translation provided here is the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue). First published in 2021, the NRSVue reflects discoveries of ancient texts and new insights made in the thirty years since the NRSV was published. It offers clearer, more direct, and inclusive language, and increased cultural sensitivity absent of the unintended biases of prior versions.

A NOTE ABOUT THE READER HELPS

Pronunciation helps and reader notes to assist skilled and novice readers alike are provided at the bottom of the page for each lectionary reading. The notes were written, and for this updated volume newly revised, by Christopher Hoyer. These notes, while useful, are not canonical; readers are invited to make use of them as they see fit.

The pronunciation helps, also, bear no official stamp. They are an attempt to render difficult words (mostly from Hebrew or Greek origin) into American-inflected English. Most sounds are presented in a consistent manner—a long “a” is pronounced *ay*; a long “o” is *oh*, and so forth. The long “i” sound is most often shown with a *y*, but where it stands alone, it is represented by *eye*, and as a way of differentiating the noun “prophecy” from the verb “prophesy,” the long “i” at the end of the latter is designated PROF-uh-sigh. Note that an “h” at the end of a syllable relates only to the vowel preceding it and should not be voiced. Some of the pronunciations may seem obvious; the intent is to be relatively comprehensive. Pronunciations may, of course, be altered from these suggestions if another usage is preferred.

The holy scriptures, the written and proclaimed word of God, never fail to reward those who encounter them. Those who worship in community owe their gratitude to those who give breath to that word. May this lectionary assist in that holy ministry.