



Worship the Lord

No. 31, July 2008

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Included in *Christian Worship Supplement* are optional readings for the three-year lectionary found in *Christian Worship*. Professor Paul Zell of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, who served as one of the reviewers for this part of the supplement project, offers this issue's sneak peek.

Christian Worship Supplement: Supplemental Lectionary

By Paul Zell

It's worth a look, whether you purchase it or not.

The new *Christian Worship Supplement* (CWS) has a number of outstanding features, including an expansion of the lectionary. This is not intended to replace the Series A, B, and C lectionary that many congregations have been using for the past fifteen years. In fact, more than half of the lessons found in the supplement are identical to their *Christian Worship* lectionary counterparts. The intent of the supplemental lectionary is rather to offer worship leaders additional lessons for corporate worship and preaching.

The Gospel of the Day

Generally speaking, the Gospel sets the worship theme. Readings for Year A are taken from St. Matthew; for Year B from St. Mark; and for Year C from St. Luke. Readings from St. John are dispersed throughout all three series. The supplemental lectionary has left the Gospel of the Day nearly untouched, with just a handful of exceptions.

One verse ("No one knows about that day or hour ...") is added to the Gospel for Advent 1, Year A. Four verses stressing the revelation of God's glory are appended to the Gospel for Christmas Day, Year C. In each case the theme of the day has been made more apparent. The only new reading in this column is for Saints Triumphant, Year B. The *Christian Worship* Gospel for this Sunday (from John 5) has been moved one week earlier and joined to the Gospel for Last Judgment. In its place the supplemental lectionary fittingly proclaims Jesus' promise that he will return with his angels "and gather his elect from the four winds" (Mark 13:24-27).



The First Lesson

Drawn almost entirely from the Old Testament, the First Lesson in the *Christian Worship* lectionary is meant to coordinate thematically with the Gospel of the Day. Approximately two-thirds of those lessons come from the prophets. The CWS expansion proposes a significant number of Bible narratives in their place.

- Pentecost 15, Year A In the Gospel (Matthew 16:21-26) Jesus announces that everyone who follows him must himself be willing to take up his cross, losing his own life in the process. The First Lesson (Judges 16:22-31) recounts Samson's death between the pillars of the pagan temple at Gaza. He followed the Lord rather than the idols of the Philistines, even to the point of losing his own life.
- Pentecost 18, Year A The Gospel of the Day (Matthew 20:1-16) is Jesus' parable of a landowner so generous, he pays the laborers hired at the eleventh hour the

same as those who worked in his vineyard from the first. The First Lesson (Jonah 4:5-11) depicts Jonah sulking in a foreign vineyard, disgusted that the Lord has granted the Ninevites a reprieve. Jonah too learns that the Lord has the right to be generous with his compassion and forgiveness.

- Pentecost 21, Year A Here the Gospel (Matthew 22:1-14) is Jesus' parable of the king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son. He must persist with his invitations, but eventually the hall is filled with guests clothed in the garments he provides. In the First Lesson (2 Chronicles 30:1-5,10-22) King Hezekiah invites all Israel and Judah to celebrate the Passover at the temple. Most of the people ridicule his messengers, but not all. Faithful men from several tribes actually come up to Jerusalem. Though they are ceremonially unclean, the Lord hears the king's prayer on their behalf and clothes them with his pardon.

Will not God's people benefit from a regular diet of such Bible stories? From the supplemental lectionary they will hear about Jacob stealing Esau's birthright; Moses at the burning bush; the golden calf; Rahab and the spies; Joshua's commissioning and his farewell; Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel; Elisha raising the Shunammite woman's son; Satan putting Job to the test; and much more. The theme of the Gospel of the Day resonates in each of these narratives. At the same time, whether the worship leader elects to preach on one of these lessons or not, including them in the service will deepen the Bible knowledge of the hearers.

Will not God's people benefit from a regular diet of such Bible stories? . . . Jacob stealing Esau's birthright; Moses at the burning bush; the golden calf; Rahab and the spies; Joshua's commissioning and his farewell; Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel; Elisha raising the Shunammite woman's son; Satan putting Job to the test; and much more.

The Second Lesson

For specific festivals the Second Lesson in the *Christian Worship* lectionary reflects the theme established by the Gospel. On those occasions the worship leader can expect to find a strong link between all three lessons. During the seasons of Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost, however, such is not the case. Instead the *Christian Worship* lectionary employs *lectio continua*, that is, the practice of reading a series of lessons from a selected epistle. Whether the series is four lessons from James or sixteen lessons from Romans, the Second Lesson is usually a conspicuous departure from the theme of the day.

While there is value in hearing a series of lessons over a span of Sundays, the supplemental lectionary offers another option that God's people might also find to be valuable: a Second Lesson with an unmistakable connection to the Gospel of the Day.

- Epiphany 2, Year B As the church hears Jesus calling Philip and Nathaniel (John 1:43-51), she is reminded that all believers have been called through the gospel and admonished to stand firm in Jesus' teachings (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17).
- Easter 4, Year B Jesus is the good shepherd, the Gospel announces (John 10:11-18). Unlike the hired hand he cares so deeply for his sheep that he is willing to lay down his life for them. The Second Lesson (1 Peter 5:1-4) is his directive to his under-shepherds to serve the flock with the same willing humility.
- Pentecost 3, Year C The people were "filled with awe and praised God" when Jesus raised the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Likewise the apostle Paul confidently anticipates his own resurrection. "As always Christ will be exalted in my body," he rejoices, "whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:18b-26).
- Pentecost 6, Year C When the church reads that there is a demanding physical and emotional cost in following Jesus (Luke 9:51-62), she also hears St. Paul's litany of the price he personally paid to do so (2 Corinthians 11:21b-30).
- Pentecost 9, Year C Martha's sister Mary regards the word of the Lord as "the one thing needed" and listens attentively (Luke 10:38-42). From the Second Lesson (Colossians 3:12-17) the apostle urges all of us, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

Whether your congregation intends to acquire *Christian Worship: Supplement* or not, be aware that the supplemental lectionary is posted at the Commission on Worship's web site (www.wels.net/worship), available for immediate consideration and use. It's worth a look.



www.wels.net/worship

One of the reasons that the use of lectionaries has stood the test of time in the Christian church is because it provides God's people with a balanced approach to God's word. Another benefit, one we can appreciate in our increasingly fragmented society, is the lectionary's ability to serve as a rallying point. Coordinating the devotional life of our congregation with what happens in our Lutheran Elementary School classrooms, our church board meetings, and our homes is as simple as making the lectionary the foundation for worship and study in each place. What's more, the use of the lectionary facilitates the work of worship leaders, who sometimes struggle to coordinate their efforts when it comes to one of the most important of all worship tasks: planning.

In conjunction with the supplemental lectionary, an updated *Planning Christian Worship* (PCW) will be available from Northwestern Publishing House next year. The current edition of PCW dedicates a page for every Sunday in the church year. Each page contains a summary for the day, summaries for each reading, and suggested hymns to match the theme of the day. The updated version will provide a freshly written summary for each Sunday, new summaries for the three-year series of readings from *Christian Worship*, summaries for the readings from the supplemental lectionary, and an expanded list of hymn suggestions that includes hymns of the supplement. Professor Emeritus Daniel Deutschlander, Pastor Joel Gawrisch, and Pastor Jon Schroeder are the authors of these summaries. To assist your planning before the full version is released, we will provide before July on the Worship web site the first half of Year B. Watch for more information on the updated PCW. We'll keep you posted as to the date of publication.

Jon Zabell
CWS Intro Committee

