

1 **Liturgy for Sunday:**
Reflections in Detail
Session 7: Word

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2 **Introduction**

- As Lutherans, we understand that the word of God is proclaimed in scripture reading.
- We value the public reading of scripture, often including an Old Testament reading, psalm, New Testament reading and Gospel in our Sunday assembly.
- The assembly stands as the Gospel is read to show the prominence in our midst of this testimony to the living Word, Jesus Christ.

3 **Introduction**

- We hear and participate in God's word as an active and living proclamation through preaching, as God's own voice speaking to us today to arouse faith, to confront sin and brokenness, and to strengthen us with the good news of our salvation.
- We also hear proclamation in the singing of scriptural texts and in the prayers and responses of the entire assembly.
- The singing of psalms is a practice that has been rediscovered in many places; we welcome the risen Christ by singing Alleluia at the gospel reading.

4 **Introduction**

- "The Use of the Means of Grace." "The public reading of the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable part of worship, constituting the basis for the proclamation of the Gospel."
- Use of "the lectionary," and Revised Common Lectionary is recommended by ELW.
- Lectionaries have been in use since at least the 8th century—originally a one-year cycle with two readings: NT epistle and Gospel

5 **Introduction**

- However, even before then there was a practice of reading from the Old Testament: Justin (2nd century) said that the Sunday assemblies in Rome read from both New and Old Testaments.
- For a variety of reasons during the middle ages, those readings from "the law and the prophets" were diminished or eliminated—at least on Sunday—which carried over to the Reformation

6 **Introduction**

- 20th century biblical and liturgical movements have brought about the more ancient Christian practice and have led most Christians to favor a 3-year cycle rather than a 1-year cycle.
- ELW recommends the Revised Common Lectionary, which has the widest ecumenical acceptance—all of the propers and prayers in the book are written assuming use of the RCL
- "The Use of the Means of Grace." "The use of ELCA approved lectionaries serves the unity of the Church, the hearing of the breadth of the Scriptures, and the evangelical meaning of the church year."

7 **The Scriptures: Place, Version, Responses**

- "The unity of the proclamation of God's word is reinforced when all the readings and the preaching are led from a single place of the word." (Notes on the Service)
- However, this is not meant to prevent the use of a gospel procession if desired. Some congregations do it every Sunday, some on festivals, some never.

- Luther: "We do both and require neither."
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8 **The Scriptures: Place, Version, Responses**

- Choice of translation used is purely a local matter, but ELW uses the versification of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- Exception is the Psalms, where a modern, Lutheran revision of the Coverdale Psalter of 1535 is used, the psalter long used in the Book of Common Prayer.
- Availability to congregation: pew bibles, bulletin, screens or none at all (reflecting that the reading is a communal oral/aural event rather than an occasion for individual reading)

9 **The Scriptures: Place, Version, Responses**

- The psalm is not a 4th reading, but a response by the congregation to the first reading, and so the congregation should be involved
- The gospel acclamation is exactly what its name says—it is not a song or a choral piece by itself, but a way for the congregation to stand and welcome the reading of the gospel as if they were welcoming the very presence of the risen Jesus Christ.
- "Alleluia" means "praise to the Lord."

10 **Word: First Reading**

- Focal point for Word is the place of reading (not the altar or some other place)
- The first reading read should be the first one listed in the lectionary: a passage from the Old Testament (except during Easter when Acts is the first reading).
- Developers of the lectionary have chosen this reading to complement the gospel reading of the day.

11 **Word: First Reading**

- Alternate OT reading in the RCL—semicontinuous series in which parts of the Hebrew scriptures are read in a relatively sequential way. (ELCA in Canada)
- One or the other should be used consistently, not back and forth.
- "A reading from _____" naming the biblical book (not chapter numbers or verses, which can be in printed materials).
- "The word of the Lord" or "Word of God, word of life"
- "Thanks be to God!"

12 **Word: Psalm**

- The psalter is filled with psalms of praise, thanksgiving, petition, penitence and lament.
- The biblical book of Psalms is the hymnal of ancient Israel, and many of the psalms were written for use in worship in the temple.
- When we sing the psalms we are joining our assembly with the praises of God's people from ancient Israel continued with Jesus and his disciples, and handed down to us today.
- We do well to sing them in our assemblies today.

13 **Word: Psalm**

- ELW includes sixteen psalm tones, and the psalm texts are pointed (use of short vertical bars to indicate the first change of pitch in each of the two halves of each verse) for ease in singing.
- May also use psalm-based hymns.
- May use a cantor with refrain sung by the congregation.
- The text remains primary; the music serves to bring the text clearly into the assembly.

14 Word: Second Reading

- It is appropriate for the reader for the second reading to be the same assisting minister who read the first reading.
- Toward the end of the singing of the psalm, the reader rises and approaches the place of reading to be ready when the psalm ends.
- Lutherans, of course, have found the witness of Paul to be of extraordinary importance for the life of the church. This second reading will frequently contain that witness.

15 Word: Second Reading

- But even if the 2nd reading is not from one of Paul's letters, it is usually an epistle which connects this assembly to the life of the earliest churches by bringing to us a letter that was sent among those churches, meant to be read aloud in them when they met as we do today.
- 3-year lectionary cycle gives us great variety in the 2nd reading....
- As with the 1st reading, at the conclusion of the 2nd reading, a dialogue of acclamation between the reader and the assembly may be used.

16 Word: Gospel Acclamation

- Is a high point of celebration in the assembly as it is the assembly's opportunity to welcome the reading of the gospel in its midst, to rejoice for the great gift of God's word, and to gather around the reading.
- Usually the gospel acclamation contains an "alleluia" (except during Lent).
- Gospel acclamations given in each setting in ELW as well as in the service music section, with tones for singing the proper verse.

17 Word: Gospel

- The reader of the gospel is usually the minister who is preaching at this service.
- We acclaim the gospel, not because it is always the "best" of the three readings—in fact sometimes Jesus' words can be quite harsh and the other two reading might have more news of God's grace—but because it is the story of Jesus Christ, the living heart of our readings.
- It may be wise for the presiding minister of the day to be the preacher of the day, but there may be reasons why this is not the case.

18 Word: Gospel

- "While other persons may sometimes preach, the called pastor of a congregation has responsibility for this preaching.... In congregations without a called pastor, the synodical bishop assumes this responsibility, often by providing an interim pastor." (Use of Means of Grace)
- When the gospel acclamation begins, the assembly stands. Whoever is the reader of the gospel also rises at this time and moves to the place of the word.

19 Word: Gospel

- Announce the reading without chapter and verse.
- Some Christians have the custom, during the announcement of the gospel, of using their thumb to inscribe a small cross on their forehead, lips and breast in turn saying, "May this gospel be in my head, on my lips, and in my heart."
- Practice that dates to medieval times and may be done (or not).
- People respond: "Glory to you, O Lord." (no longer set to music)

20 Word: Gospel

- The actual reading comes from one of the four gospel books of the New Testament.

- In any given year, the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and the Fourth Gospel are in a dialogue of witness to Jesus Christ.
- In places where a gospel procession is practiced, the procedure is slightly different from that described above.
- The gospel forms the heart of the readings--"We acclaim the living Word, Jesus Christ, present in the gospel reading."

21 Word: Sermon

- "Preaching brings God's word of law and gospel into our time and place to awaken and nourish faith." ("Use of Means of Grace")
- "Only under extraordinary circumstances would the sermon be omitted from the Sunday and festival service of Holy Communion." ("Use of Means of Grace")
- Faithful preacher will focus the message on one or more of the three texts—not from a text not read.

22 Word: Sermon

- Law: preacher speaks the truth about our sin, loss, failure and death—time for truth-telling about the human condition.
- Grace: but the preacher gives the very grace we need—not just about forgiveness and life, but the preacher forgives sins and gives the possibility of hope and life.
- Preacher should preach from where the word was read to show the importance of the symbolic continuity between the readings and the sermon.

23 Word: Sermon

- Practices at the end of the sermon vary: some congregations sit, some wait for a prayer from the preacher and wait to be instructed to sit. "All of these diversities are welcome. None are required."
- Children's sermon is not required
- The words "preaching" and "sermon" often have a negative, judgmental connotation. On the contrary, the Lutheran expectation is that preaching can speak about the truth of the world but equip us with the grace we need to reach out to our neighbor.
- Moment of silence is recommended.

24 Word: Hymn of the Day

- One of the few central elements that is distinctive to Lutherans in celebration of Holy Communion, dating back to Martin Luther.
- Allows the assembly to take its part in proclaiming God's word for the Sunday or festival.
- It needs to be substantial and durable enough to be up to the task.
- Suggestions are given in "Sundays and Seasons"

25 Word: Creed

- The Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed (rarely the Athanasian Creed).
- On the other hand, the creed might be omitted altogether.
- Creeds were originally teaching documents, used in the home and to prepare baptismal candidates, not on Sundays.
- Added to Sunday in the West (11th century), and for North American Lutherans (20th century).
- 1988 version prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation is recommended.

26 Word: Prayers of Intercessions

- From hearing about our faith in the readings and the sermon, to exercising our faith by praying for the needs of the world--"communal vocation of prayer."
- ELW recommends that these prayers should be locally prepared and be led by an assisting minister trained for this ministry.
- Not mini sermons or disguised parish announcements, but prayers for the church, the world, local needs and for those who have died

27 **Word: Peace**

- Conclusion of the Word and the transition to the Meal.
- The peace functions as a kind of seal on our prayers, a sign that we are serious about our praying.
- Not our peace, but Christ's peace: "The peace of Christ be with you always."
- It is a ministry—far greater than a sociable handshake or a ritual of friendship or a moment of informality.

28 **Word: Peace**

- Great variety in how congregation do this: length, how far people go to wish peace to each other, etc.
- Be careful of not just seeking out friends which makes newcomers feel left out.
- Helpful for pastors, from time to time, to instruct and remind congregations about the meaning and practice of the peace.

29 **Next week...Meal**

- Diverse Local Meal Practices
- Words at the Table
- Food, Vessels, Linens
- Offering and Setting the Table
- Great Thanksgiving
- Communion
- Communion Song
- Prayer after Communion