

NBPCSC Summer Online Bible Study

LIVING THE LECTIONARY IN TROUBLING TIMES

But first – a bit of information about the Lectionary and how passages are selected.

A lectionary (Latin: *Lectionarium*) is a listing that contains a collection of scripture readings appointed for Christian or Judaic worship on a given day or occasion. There are sub-types such as a "gospel lectionary" or evangeliary, and an epistolary with the readings from the New Testament Epistles, as well as a text chosen from traditional Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and a Psalm.

Within Christianity, the use of pre-assigned, scheduled readings from the scriptures can be traced back to the early church and seems to have been inherited from Judaism. The earliest record of a special book (list) of readings dates back to AD452, though there are 3rd-century references to liturgical readers as a special role in the clergy. Not all of the Christian Church used the same lectionary, and throughout history, many varying lectionaries have been used in different parts of the Christian world. There are lectionaries that repeated on a one-year basis. In the PC(USA) we use a three-year cycle. This annual lectionary provides readings for Sundays and special church holy days. Early Reformed churches divided the Heidelberg Catechism into 52 weekly sections, and many churches preached or taught from a corresponding source scripture weekly. Lectionaries from before the invention of the printing press contributed to our understanding the textual history of the Bible.

The lectionary we use is organized into three-year cycles of readings. The years are designated A, B, or C. Each yearly cycle begins on the first Sunday of Advent (the Sunday between November 27 and December 3 inclusive). Year B follows year A, year C follows year B, then back again to A. With a few exceptions' scriptures are assigned thusly:

Year A: Gospel of Matthew (Advent 2019 through 2020 - current year)

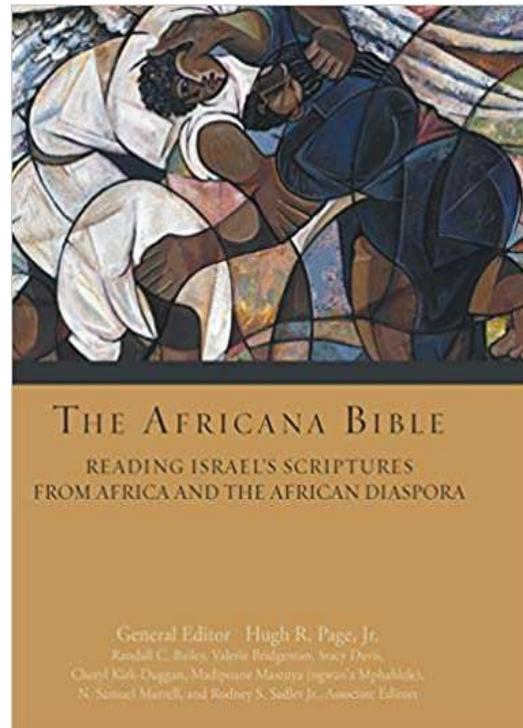
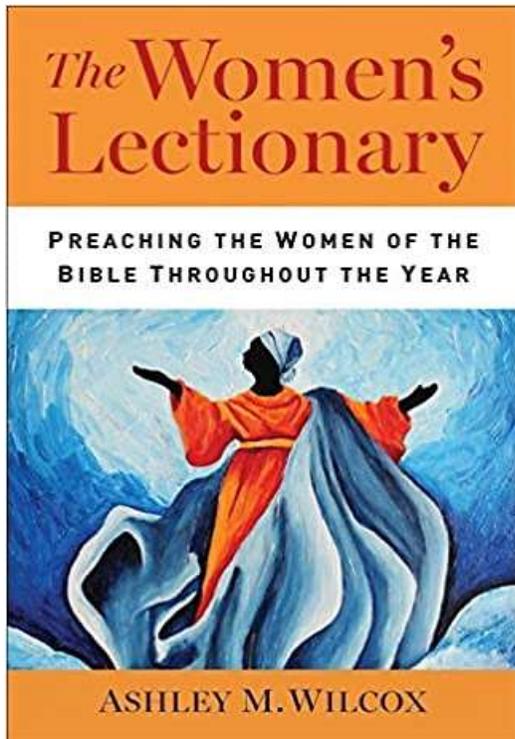
Year B: Gospel of Mark (Advent 2020 through 2021)

Year C: Gospel of Luke (Advent 2021 through 2022)

The Gospel of John is read throughout Easter, and is used for other liturgical seasons including Advent, Christmas, and Lent where appropriate.

In October 2013, *The Christian Century* featured a discussion of new, expanded lectionary proposals, including The One-Year Lectionary, The Year D Project, The Narrative Lectionary, and the online African-American Lectionary (<http://theafricanamericanlectionary.org/>), some of which call for more thorough exposure to the Gospel of John, but all of which are, in their own way, concerned with fostering greater biblical literacy.

There is a woman's lectionary which features exclusively texts about women and there is also The Americana Bible, a study Bible with an African American focus.



The three-year Revised Common Lectionary for Sundays and festivals was produced by the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada in 1992, and was included in the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); it may also be found in the Presbyterian Planning Calendar and the online Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study.

And now on to our study:

Weekly Prayer (Unison)

O God of Jacob, you speak in the light of day and in the dark of night when our sleeping is filled with dreams of heaven and earth. May Jacob's vision remind us to be open and watchful, ready to discover your presence in our midst. Amen.

The First Lesson in a Series of Three: July 15th

The texts for Sunday, July 19th (7th Sunday after Pentecost) are:

Genesis 28:10-19a; Jacob's dream of the ladder.

Psalms 139:1-12; 23-24; God, you have searched me and known me.

Romans 8:12-15; Creation groans with labor pain.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; The parable of the weeds scattered among good seed.

Something to Ponder: Consider a dream you have had that felt like a message to you from God. Apparently being sequestered and the specter of COVID-19 has created for us a dream phenomenon in 2020.

Jacob's dream encounter with God on his way from Beersheba to Haran is an opportunity to reflect on where we meet God along our own life's journey. One of the most startling aspects of Jacob's encounter is how intimate and personal it is. In the NRSV, it says that God "stood beside him" and then spoke the divine name, telling him that "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go." Although Jacob focuses on God being in "this place" when he wakes up from the dream, God's promise was not simply to be in Bethel; it was to have a covenantal relationship that would endure from generation to generation. As heirs to the promise, are we confident in the knowledge that "we are not alone" and that we journey with the One who will keep us wherever we go? Sometimes we start limiting our dreams and expectations, but if we dare to trust that God is always with us, then we do not have to live by those limits and can imagine new possibilities.

Focus Questions

1. Have you ever found yourself "in a limbo of [your] own making"?
2. When have you found God in "unexpected places"? How did that feel?
3. Do you ever make promises to God, in gratitude or perhaps for persuasion?
4. How do you think our scientific age deal with dreams and their spiritual meanings?
5. What dreams matter most to you, and to all of u



Weekly Prayer (Unison)

Seed-planting, fish-netting, bread-baking, pearl-hunting God, you shape us into living parables. Pray with your Spirit in us so that we may understand our experiences as healing metaphors and become creative and abundant stewards of the environment you entrusted to our love. Amen.

The Second Lesson in a Series of Three: July 22nd

The texts for Sunday, July 26th (8th Sunday after Pentecost) are:

Genesis 29:15–28; Jacob marries Leah and Rachel.

Psalms 128; It shall be well with you.

Romans 8:26–39; The Spirit intercedes for us when we cannot pray.

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52; Five parables: mustard seed, yeast, treasure, pearls, net.

Something to Ponder: Who first taught you to pray? What have you learned about prayer since?

This chapter of Matthew is filled with parables that begin with “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Jesus himself is at such a loss for words to adequately describe the kingdom that he keeps offering additional similes. What does it mean to hold up and to long for something that is so beyond our comprehension that words fail us? Yet, as humans, we would love to have our understanding of both the kingdom and God tied up nicely with a ribbon, without any hint of uncertainty or ambiguity. What images might we use today to describe the kingdom of God? Create your own kingdom parables and prepare to share it next week.

Focus Questions:

1. What do you think of the character of Jacob at this point in the story?
2. Why do you think this particular part of Jacob's story is important for us today?
3. How does the theme of "honor" arise in this text?
4. What do you think Leah and Rachel are thinking throughout this story?
5. When have you understood God's presence at different times in the story of your own life?



Focus Prayer

God beyond all seeing and knowing, we meet you in the night of change and crisis, and wrestle with you in the darkness of doubt. Give us the will and spirit to live faithfully and love as we are loved. Amen.

[Are there any parables from last week to share?]

The Third Lesson in a Series of Three: July 29th

The texts for Sunday, August 2nd (9th Sunday in Pentecost) are:

Genesis 32:22-31; Jacob wrestles with God.

Psalms 117: 1-7, 15; Guard me as the apple of your eye.

Romans 9:1-5; I am speaking the truth in Christ.

Matthew 14:13-21; Feeding more than five thousand.

Something to Ponder: What blessing has come to you out of a time of wrestling?

Wrestling with God is something many of us do: to get blessed, to be noticed or understood, or to hear God. This is often part of the discernment process for those of us who feel a calling into ministry and is perhaps ongoing for those in ministry for a long time. Do you have a story of wrestling with the angel as part of your coming to faith and/or ministry? Have you had to come to terms with your own perception of your faith journey as flawed, thin, or inadequate? Are you familiar with well-known people who have wrestled with their faith, e.g., Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., or others?

Focus Questions

1. What kind of God do you need: a consoling God, or one who struggles with you?
2. What are your most pressing questions for God?
3. Who is the "Esau" in your life?
4. How does the character of Jacob strike you?
5. What unexpected places of holiness have you encountered?

