

Introduction to the Revised Common Lectionary

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) is a three year cycle of Bible readings. It follows the seasons of the Christian year and begins each year with the first Sunday in Advent (which usually falls on the last Sunday in November). The lectionary offers congregations a balanced diet of readings and is used by many churches around the world. There are readings for each Sunday of the year from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Psalms, the Epistles and the Gospels. Each year MediaCom publishes the Calendar and Lectionary for the subsequent year. It is available in a handy card form for a small fee. It provides dates for each Sunday and the readings for that day. It also suggests other resources to use with the lectionary. To contact Mediacom, go to: www.mediacom.org.au or phone 1800 811 311.

The front page of the yearly “Calendar and Lectionary” of the Uniting Church each year quotes those words from paragraph 5 of the ‘Basis of Union’ – “The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the Books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated..... The Uniting Church lays upon its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, and commits its ministers to preach from there...”.

It is in using the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) regularly in worship which helps us as a church to take the above injunction from the ‘Basis of Union’ seriously. The RCL provides readings each week from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament and Psalms), the Epistles and the Gospels. Over the three-year cycle, the RCL covers every major biblical theme of our faith.

The lectionary intends that the people of God hear the Old Testament reading (during the Easter season the Old Testament of replaced by readings from Acts), followed by the Psalm, which is chosen as a response to the first lesson. This may be read as a responsive reading or sung in song form or another. The epistle and gospel readings follow. From Advent to Pentecost the four readings are chosen to correspond to the season of the Christian year. There will be a link in the message of each of the four readings during this period. The preacher may link these reading within the sermon for the day or the sermon may focus on one of the readings. In the period “After Pentecost” the readings take a continuous approach for each of the readings. Any link in theme between readings during this time is not intentional. The preacher may chose to follow the continuous readings from either the gospel lesson, or the epistle or the Old Testament.

For example, in Year A the Old Testament has a major proportion of time devoted to patriarchal material, which deals with stories from Noah to Joshua, Deborah and Barak. The Psalm is linked to the Old Testament still. The gospel lessons follow Matthews’s gospel primarily with a sprinkling of reading from John in Advent, Lent, and Easter. There is a continuous approach to the epistle readings, especially “After Pentecost” – Romans, Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.

In Year B, the major Old Testament emphasis ‘After Pentecost’ follows the Davidic-Solomon narratives, followed by some wisdom literature. The main gospel readings are Mark

and portions of John's gospel not covered in Year A. "After Pentecost" there is continuous epistle readings from 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, James, and Hebrews.

In Year C, the Old Testament emphasis "After Pentecost is shared between the Elijah/Elisha narratives and readings from the major and minor prophets. The gospel for this year is Luke with more of John's gospel covered in Advent and Easter. The epistles for this year are Galatians, Colossians, more of Hebrews, Philemon 1 & 2 Timothy and 2 Thessalonians. Each year the last couple of weeks deal with eschatological material and concludes with "Christ the King" (or "The Reign of Christ").

The selections of verses in the RCL are based on the NRSV. Readings are chosen in manageable sizes in length. This is not to limit the preacher, but to give readings that are not too long for the average service of worship. There is richness in having all readings read in worship, even if the preacher is focusing on only one passage. God may speak to some people through a reading read, even if that reading is not preacher upon that day.

The question is sometimes asked, "Why are some Psalms a number of times over the three years and other Psalms not used at all". The answer is that Psalms are chosen to respond to the emphasis of the first lesson, normally the Old Testament.

We are reminded in "Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary" that while the lectionary may be the primary source for worship and preaching, the lectionary was made for preachers and worship leaders and not they for the lectionary. [1]

The lectionary provides a healthy diet nourish and regulate the faith and life of the People of God.

Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1993