
Daily Feast

MEDITATIONS FROM
FEASTING ON THE WORD®

✻ YEAR A ✻

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Daily Feast

MEDITATIONS FROM
FEASTING ON THE WORD®

✿ YEAR A ✿

EDITED BY
Kathleen Long Bostrom
Elizabeth F. Caldwell
Jana K. Riess

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Introduction

When we opened the first volume of *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* and began reading, we knew that the contents were consistent with the title. As teachers and preachers, to have four perspectives on the lectionary in one volume truly satisfied our hunger for rich engagement with biblical texts. With the publication of each additional volume in the twelve-volume series, we became excited about the possibilities for the ways these essays could be resources for other spiritual practices.

This book is designed to give you a chance to step back and focus on a smaller piece from some of essays from the *Feasting on the Word* commentaries. Whether you are a pastor, educator, church member, or lay leader, let these reflections on biblical texts be a daily feast for your continuing formation in the life of the Christian faith.

Consider the ways that *Daily Feast* might be used:

- **Daily meditation:** Begin or end your day with a reading and reflection on one of the texts for the week.
- **Journaling:** As you read, think, and pray, journal in response to the thoughts that are evoked for you. Some find that journaling with words works best. Others find that using markers, crayons, or water colors invites a different kind of imaging in response to text.
- **Preparing for preaching or worship leadership:** Have a copy of this available to give to liturgists and choir directors, all those involved in worship leadership. As staff or worship teams work on liturgy and prepare for worship leadership, this book can become a resource for meditation and prayer, and may even be adapted for use in worship.
- **Preparing for teaching:** Use in your own meditation during the week as you prepare your heart and mind to teach all ages of God's children.

- **Reaching out beyond the church:** Use in a variety of settings where a pastoral presence is invited to participate, such as social agencies, health-care facilities, hospitals, prisons, and mission trips.
- **In committee meetings or staff meetings:** Use a *Daily Feast* selection as an opening meditation.

Note that portions of the texts for each Sunday are presented, beginning on the previous Monday, so that you can spend the week reflecting on the Scripture passages for the coming Sunday. Each weekday and Saturday will feature reflections on one of the four passages—Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel—along with a response and a prayer. Sundays and special days such as Christmas Eve and Holy Week will contain reflections on all four of the texts. (See “A Note from the Publisher” for more information about the Revised Common Lectionary and an explanation of how Feasting on the Word follows the lections during Ordinary Time.)

Included here are brief excerpts from each of the Scripture readings, but we encourage you to have a Bible handy so you can read the complete passage.

As we have read texts and the reflections on these texts from the four perspectives, we found ourselves slowing down, taking time to read Scripture, and connecting with these essays in new ways. We anticipate that the variety and depth of the perspectives on biblical texts of the authors of the essays will enrich your own spiritual practices.

We hope that our experience will be yours. So take some time. Read the text. Read the reflection. Consider your response, and be in prayer. May this resource be a daily feast for you.

Kathleen Bostrom, Elizabeth Caldwell, and Jana Riess

A Note from the Publisher

This devotional is a part of the series *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, a twelve-volume commentary series for preaching and teaching. The uniqueness of the approach in the *Feasting* commentaries is in providing four perspectives on each preaching occasion from the Revised Common Lectionary. The theological, pastoral, exegetical, and homiletical dimensions of each biblical passage are explored with the hope that preachers will find much to inform and stimulate their preparations for preaching from this rich “feast” of materials.

Feasting on the Word follows the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) as developed by the Consultation on Common Texts, an ecumenical consultation of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada. The RCL provides a collection of readings from Scripture to be used during worship in a schedule that follows the seasons of the church year. In addition, it provides for a uniform set of readings to be used across denominations or other church bodies.

The RCL provides a reading from the Old Testament, a Psalm response to that reading, a Gospel, and an Epistle for each preaching occasion of the year. It is presented in a three-year cycle, with each year centered around one of the Synoptic Gospels. Year A is the year of Matthew, Year B is the year of Mark, and Year C is the year of Luke. John is read each year, especially during Advent, Lent, and Easter. The RCL offers two tracks of Old Testament texts for the Season after Pentecost or Ordinary Time: a semicontinuous track, which moves through stories and characters in the Old Testament, and a complementary track, which ties the Old Testament texts to the theme of the Gospel texts for that day. Some denominational traditions favor one over the other. For instance, Presbyterians and Methodists generally follow the semicontinuous track, while Lutherans and Episcopalians generally follow the complementary track. To

appeal to an ecumenical audience, the readings in this devotional follow the complementary track for Year A, are split between the complementary and semicontinuous tracks for Year B, and cover the semicontinuous stream for Year C.

Because not all lectionary days are used in a given year, depending on how the calendar falls, you may not need some of the readings here until a subsequent lectionary cycle. Check the official RCL Web site at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu> for a list of readings for the current year.

Originally designed to be a twelve-volume set of preaching commentaries, the series has now grown to include several other related projects in addition to this devotional. A full church school curriculum program is now available at www.feastingontheword.net/curriculum. A six-volume set of worship resources to complement the commentaries is now being published, and a guide to children's sermons will soon follow. And a major new undertaking using the four-perspective approach, *Feasting on the Gospels*, a seven-volume series of commentaries on the entirety of the Gospels, began publishing in fall 2013. Information about these projects can be found on the *Feasting on the Word* Web site, www.feastingontheword.net.

Finally, we would like to thank all who were involved in the original *Feasting on the Word* series, including our partner, Columbia Theological Seminary; general editors David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor; editorial board members Charles L. Campbell, Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, Gary W. Charles, Allen Hilton, Cynthia A. Jarvis, E. Elizabeth Johnson, Thomas G. Long, Kathleen M. O'Connor, Marcia Y. Riggs, George W. Stroup, Emilie M. Townes, and Richard F. Ward; project manager Joan Murchison; and project compiler Mary Lynn Darden.

THE WEEK LEADING UP TO THE

❁ *First Sunday of Advent* ❁

Isaiah 2:1-5

In days to come
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths." (vv. 2-3)

Psalms 122

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers." (vv. 6-7)

Romans 13:11-14

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness
and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably
as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in
debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling
and jealousy. (vv. 12b-13)

Matthew 24:36-44

"Keep awake therefore, for you do not know
on what day your Lord is coming." (v. 42)

→ **MONDAY** ←

Isaiah 2:1–5

REFLECTION

Consumerist visions of the good life may seem to prevail in our culture at this time of year, but Isaiah's prophecy will stand up to any of them. This picture of unity, of justice, of shared openness to the divine way, and of peace speaks to some of our deepest hopes. The preacher would do well to find ways to build bridges between the listeners' culturally driven anticipation and the deeper yearnings that lie beneath. How might the many pictures of happy families and yuletide gatherings actually speak to something real, like the desire for harmony across many divisions? How might the nostalgia for Christmases past and the idolization of childhood wonder represent our desire to believe again in things that seem impossible to us as adults—like peace on earth and goodwill for all?

STACEY SIMPSON DUKE

RESPONSE

Which part of Isaiah's vision do you long for the most?

PRAYER

At the start of this Advent season, O God, teach me to see beyond the cultural pleasures of Christmas to the deeper joys of your justice and mercy. Amen.

➔ TUESDAY ⇐

Psalm 122

REFLECTION

Our purpose, then, is to become the peace with which we have been gifted and to return it to the world. When the psalmist writes that the people said, “Let us go to the house of the LORD,” it reminds us that the first act of the psalm is an act of worship—an act of going to the temple to encounter the Lord, pray, and give praise. We can see then how, when one praises God, one begins to care about others, pray for them, and work on their behalf. That work becomes the work of peace, work that will shape the world into the hope God has for it.

Each time we approach our Advent pilgrimage anew, we are different. The end of one journey positions us to begin the next. Our yearly pilgrimage gives us once again an opportunity to reconsider the way we are living our lives. Through pilgrimage, praise, prayer, and purpose, the psalmist reminds us that we are always waiting in hope, always called to be light in the world and to work on behalf of God’s reign of justice and peace. We are forever engaged in an act of new creation.

CAROL L. WADE

RESPONSE

How can Advent be for you a pilgrimage to the house of the Lord?

PRAYER

Let me be glad and rejoice in your presence, God. Amen.

→ WEDNESDAY ←

Psalm 122

REFLECTION

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’” I almost detect some ambivalence, here; the image is of people encouraging each other to go to worship, and the psalmist proclaims gladness at this—as opposed to some other prevalent emotions, perhaps? In my own context, people who proclaim an affinity for the church and for Christianity stay away from worship in droves. In the minds of some, it appears that “going to church” is indeed something that has been “decreed” (v. 4), an obligation that has been laid on us. We go to church not because we want to, but because we think we should. In the minds of many, also, are the images of a judgmental God and a judgmental church. Church can be the place where “thrones for judgment [are] set up” (v. 5)—where we expect to be judged and made to feel guilty.

Why would anyone be *glad* to worship? In what way could those “thrones for judgment” be positive and life-giving for us?

DAVID HOLMES

RESPONSE

When you were last in church, were you there because of joy, habit, or a sense of obligation?

PRAYER

Renew my sense of passion for you, God, and ignite my eagerness to serve your people. Amen.

⇒ THURSDAY ⇐

Romans 13:11–14

REFLECTION

In the early years of the Christian movement, believers lived with a sense of real anticipation. The promises they read in the Hebrew Scriptures seemed tangible; the reign of God and all that it meant for cosmic “regime change” seemed close at hand. When they prayed (daily), “Thy kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven,” they were looking forward to that happening within their own lifetimes.

Two thousand years later, the sense of anticipation has diminished. . . . To the extent that this is so, we may be the poorer for having lost this vision, because for Paul, this anticipation is not so much about circling a date on the calendar as it is about *hope*. Paul really believes that the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus is God’s sign that all of those promises about life and wholeness prevailing over brokenness and death are true, and that God can be trusted to do what God has promised. Paul *knows* what time it is: it is time to wake up and look forward to what God will do in the future and what God is beginning to do now in your life and mine.

CYNTHIA M. CAMPBELL

RESPONSE

Remember a moment when you felt that the kingdom of heaven was very near. What would it require to live in that state of constant anticipation?

PRAYER

O God of the now and the not yet, when I am caught up in the things of this world, keep my vision always focused on your divine future. Amen.

→ FRIDAY ←

Matthew 24:36–44

REFLECTION

The season of Advent usually begins with an eschatological text, as a way of framing Advent as the end of an old order and the birth of a new era. . . .

The theme of this section of Matthew's discourse is the necessity for watchfulness in light of the uncertainty surrounding the coming (Parousia) of Jesus. Verse 36 makes a startling claim: "neither the angels of heaven nor the Son" know when "that day" will occur. It is remarkable how many interpreters seem to believe that they can accomplish what the Son confesses he cannot do.

WILLIAM R. HERZOG II

RESPONSE

How do you respond when a fellow Christian claims to know the precise timing of Christ's return?

PRAYER

May I keep awake, Lord, and be watchful of your return even while understanding that I know neither the day nor the hour. Amen.

➔ SATURDAY ✦

Matthew 24:36–44

REFLECTION

Our text presents a splendid opportunity to show . . . that uncertainty is a condition of even the best biblical faith. This does not solve any of the unanswered questions, of course, but it may begin to bring our people a kind of rapture of relief because it takes the pressure off. It is a relief to know Christ does not expect us to know everything.

We are not expected to know everything, but we are expected to do something. The Jesus of the verses before us calls persons to a life of work in a spirit of wakefulness. Work in this sense means activity here and now. Biblical faith as Jesus envisions it is not so concerned with otherworldly matters that it neglects this world's affairs. Matthew's Jesus has an eye on what is to come and believes something decisive is going to happen in the future, but he keeps attention focused on the present day and the needs of the hour. We find this in the manner in which he directs people to the field, the mill, the daily grind, the ordinary places of human endeavor where life is lived. This region of the mundane is where faithfulness happens, and it is not to be neglected. Biblical faith knows it does not know everything, but it does know it is called to do something here and now.

MARK E. YURS

RESPONSE

What lingering questions do you have about faith and God? Right now, allow those questions to simply exist without requiring immediate answers.

PRAYER

God, I know you do not expect me to know everything there is to know about my beliefs. Help me to walk by faith and not by sight. Amen.

→ SUNDAY ←

Isaiah 2:1–5

REFLECTION

Light is a strong image in the prophecies of Isaiah. . . . Light is also, of course, one of the primary symbols of Advent. This First Sunday finds the Advent community brimming with confidence. The light of the world is coming in Jesus Christ, and the world will be transformed. We light the candles of Advent as a foretaste of the light that is to come in the Christ child. The darkness of the world will not prevail. Conflict is replaced by community, and those who would oppose the advent of God's reign will be judged and overcome. God's light will not be denied. The reign of God will come.

BRUCE C. BIRCH

Psalm 122

REFLECTION

Advent, the beginning of the church year, is a time to begin our journey of faith afresh. Today's psalm captures in miniature the movement in the life of faith, that all of life should be one continual act of praise for God and service of neighbor. The psalmist creates a roadmap for peace that begins and ends in God (vv. 1, 9). This divine cartography propels the pilgrim's journey in acts of praise and prayer and purpose. When we journey to the heart of God, we become God's peace in the world.

CAROL L. WADE

Romans 13:11–14

REFLECTION

During the Advent season, the church prepares for the coming of Christ. Even as we make ready for the baby to be born in

Bethlehem, the lectionary this First Sunday of Advent takes us beyond the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to a new moment of expectancy as the Day of Christ approaches and the reign of God is made fully manifest.

JOANNA M. ADAMS

Matthew 24:36–44

REFLECTION

The season of Advent invites us to consider again the character of Christian existence “between the times.” On the one hand, Advent reminds us of God’s promises to Israel of Immanuel. God comes in human flesh to deliver God’s people from sin and evil. On the other hand, Advent calls us to anticipate the day on which this Immanuel will return as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will put all that resists him, even death itself, under his feet. Living between the times, we give thanks to God for the Christ child, even as we plead with God to realize, once and for all, the kingdom that Jesus declared to be at hand.

JOHN P. BURGESS

RESPONSE

As the first Advent candle is lit today, imagine its light overcoming the darkness that surrounds it. How can you be a part of what God is doing to call the world toward the light?

PRAYER

Holy God, teach me to walk in the light of your love and to open my eyes to the promise of Immanuel—the good news that you are with us. Amen.