

Daily Feast

MEDITATIONS FROM
FEASTING ON THE WORD®

✿ YEAR A ✿

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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.

✿ *Ash Wednesday* ✿

Isaiah 58:1–12

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (vv. 6–7)

Psalm 51:1–17

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me. (vv. 10–11)

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true;
as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—
we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet
always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having
nothing, and yet possessing everything. (6:8–10)

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (vv. 19–21)

Isaiah 58:1–12

REFLECTION

Authentic worship is not a matter of elegant ritual or self-congratulating piety. It is a matter of both social justice and costly personal concern for the bruised and battered of the world.

ALLEN C. MCSWEEN JR.

Psalm 51:1–17

REFLECTION

As we begin the season of self-examination and repentance, we follow the psalmist's example by focusing on how we are failing to live as God calls us to live and how we are in need of the salvation and redemption that comes from God alone.

ANDREA WIGODSKY

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

REFLECTION

Being reconciled with God is the agenda of the Christian life at all times, especially during Lent, as we undertake a concentrated period of penance and renewal. As in Paul's own case, reconciliation with God always causes us to have "a ministry of reconciliation" (5:18) toward others.

CHRISTOPHER A. BEELEY

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

REFLECTION

Lent can be a dangerous time. People come to the church looking for discipline and a new way to live; they come to be challenged—prepared for the heartache and joy of the cross to come. The problem with Lent, however, is a direct outgrowth

of this urgency: we contain the season to six weeks of doing good, rather than *building a Lent that becomes a life*. This, very simply, is what Jesus asks his disciples to do at this climax in the Sermon on the Mount. Do not be holy because it is what the world expects of you; rather, learn to live holy lives because a closer relationship to the God who sees in secret will be reward enough.

MARYETTA ANSCHUTZ

RESPONSE

Take out your journal today and reflect on other Lenten seasons and recall the practices in which you have engaged. Which of these have helped you “build a Lent that becomes a life”?

PRAYER

God of my life, may the ashes remind me this Lenten season of your renewing spirit in me. Amen.

⇒ THURSDAY ⇐

Romans 5:12–19

REFLECTION

If sin is original to our condition and therefore unavoidable, it is also deeper and more insidious than we may think. By turning against God, our neighbor, and ourselves, we bring about the ruin of all that is good in the world: the consequence of sin is death in the fullest sense of the word. Sin and death are not mere annoyances or particular flaws of human life; they are the central and ultimately destructive problem of our existence, in which human society is catastrophically trapped.

CHRISTOPHER A. BEELEY

RESPONSE

As you move out and about today, what examples do you see of the reality of sin in our world?

PRAYER

Help me, O God, to turn toward you, toward my neighbor, with hands that bring good into your world. Amen.

⇒ **FRIDAY** ⇐

Matthew 4:1-11

REFLECTION

Temptation comes to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgments we make about strangers or friends who make choices we do not understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease. Temptation rages in moments when we allow our temper to define our lives or when addiction to wealth, power, influence over others, vanity, or an inordinate need for control defines who we are.

MARYETTA ANSCHUTZ

RESPONSE

As you journal today with words or images, what temptations rule you?

PRAYER

In human condition, God of life, I often allow temptations to take over. Help me. Amen.

➤ SATURDAY ◀

Matthew 4:1-11

REFLECTION

Temptation wins when we engage in the justification of little lies, small sins: a racist joke, a questionable business practice for the greater good, a criticism of a spouse or partner when he or she is not around. Temptation wins when we get so caught up in the trappings of life that we lose sight of life itself. These are the faceless moments of evil that, while mundane, lurk in the recesses of our lives and our souls.

MARYETTA ANSCHUTZ

RESPONSE

Recall a time when you experienced temptation winning.

PRAYER

Evil abounds, O God, in thoughtless words, in actions that harm another. Help me name this evil and be cleansed. Amen.

➔ SUNDAY ◀

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7

REFLECTION

The garden is no small responsibility, and we are not to be lords of leisure over the garden, but to be its servants and slaves. We are responsible for the garden, now and into the future, so we must preserve and protect it.

JON L. BERQUIST

Psalm 32

REFLECTION

The psalmist embraces the joy of forgiveness but remains painfully aware of the power of sin, which had so recently infected his body and soul. This honest admission makes this a wonderful text to guide us as we embark on the journey of Lent, a journey of self-reflection, confession, and, ultimately, joyful redemption.

JOHN D. ROHRS

Romans 5:12–19

REFLECTION

Our sin is deep, unavoidable, and devastating, but the grace of Christ far exceeds the power of sin and death. God is on our side against sin and death, and nothing can separate us from his abundant grace and love in Christ Jesus (5:17, 20; 8:38–39).

CHRISTOPHER A. BEELEY

Matthew 4:1-11

REFLECTION

Lenten penitence engages the dark places in our lives that we may come face to face with them, name them, understand them, and seek forgiveness for them. It is not about guilt. It is about freedom from the control that our fears and insecurities have over us all, about the amendment of life and new beginnings.

MARYETTA ANSCHUTZ

RESPONSE

What is your confession to God this first week of Lent?

PRAYER

On this Lenten journey I pray, sustaining God, that you will help me see the places where my life needs amending. Amen.