

Daily Feast

MEDITATIONS FROM
FEASTING ON THE WORD®

✿ YEAR B ✿

EDITED BY
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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 the 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 watercolors 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, mission trips.
- **Beginning or concluding an adult class in the church school:** Read a selection and a prayer as a time of centering.
- **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 and Lib Caldwell

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 three-volume set of worship resources to complement the commentaries is now in development, as is a guide for preaching the children's sermon. 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, will be published, beginning in 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, Richard F. Ward; project manager Joan Murchison; and project compiler Mary Lynn Darden.

THE WEEK LEADING UP TO THE

✻ *First Sunday of Advent* ✻

Isaiah 64:1-9

From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him. (v. 4)

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
.....

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved. (vv. 4, 7)

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

God is faithful; by him you were called into the
fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (v. 9)

Mark 13:24-37

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words
will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one
knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but
only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not
know when the time will come. (vv. 31-33)

⇒ **MONDAY** ⇐

Isaiah 64:1-9

REFLECTION

The coming of Advent jolts the church out of Ordinary Time with the invasive news that it's time to think about fresh possibilities for deliverance and human wholeness.

PATRICIA E. DE JONG

We cannot create peace through selfishness, but by opening ourselves to hope. Hope is what is left when your worst fears have been realized and you are no longer optimistic about your future. Hope is what comes with a broken heart willing to be mended.

PATRICIA E. DE JONG

At Advent, God's people summon the courage and the spiritual strength to remember that the holy breaks into the daily. In tiny ways, we can open our broken hearts to the healing grace of God, who opens the way to peace.

PATRICIA E. DE JONG

RESPONSE

How has a broken heart brought you to a place of hope?

PRAYER

Grant me the hope I long for, so that the broken places in my heart might be healed. Amen.

⇒ TUESDAY ⇐

Isaiah 64:1-9

REFLECTION

“Waiting for God” is no passive endeavor; it involves painful longing and bold allegiance, in short, a passionate patience.

WILLIAM P. BROWN

The season of Advent has always held in tension the combination of God’s judgment and God’s promise.

DONALD BOOZ

Advent affords us the opportunity to look at how God interacts with humankind from ages past to the present day.

DONALD BOOZ

To hear the voice of Isaiah is to proclaim that Advent is more than a time to hear promises about God. Advent becomes a season of attentiveness to the presence of God already among us.

DONALD BOOZ

RESPONSE

Name one specific way in which you are waiting for God.

PRAYER

Startle me out of my complacency, God, this and every day. Amen.

→ WEDNESDAY ←

Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

REFLECTION

The NRSV’s “angry” is an interpretation of a metaphor; the Hebrew asks how long God will “fume” against the prayers of the people. Certainly to “fume” frequently means to be furious, and to show it outwardly. Perhaps our psalmist envisions the prayers of God’s people never quite penetrating through a thick haze of divine indifference to the suffering of God’s people. The psalmist calls for God to “shine forth” (v. 1), and to “let your face shine, that we may be saved” (vv. 3, 7, 19). This divine light, a symbol of transcendent power throughout the religions of the ancient Near East, cuts through the smoke, whether of anger or indifference, restoring God’s beneficent interest and unleashing power to save.

PAUL D. BRASSEY

RESPONSE

Do you think that God is indifferent to the suffering of the world? To your suffering?

PRAYER

If I have done something to anger you, bring me to awareness that I might seek your forgiveness. Amen.

⇒ THURSDAY ⇐

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

REFLECTION

There is a theological conviction at the heart of the apostle's gratitude: Paul trusts God to complete in the church what God has initiated in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

E. ELIZABETH JOHNSON

Paul's approach to thanksgiving, however, is carefully chosen. He does not simply celebrate the human efforts of the community. In fact, he does just the opposite. Everything for which Paul gives thanks is a gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ. His opening word of greeting in this text sets the tone: "grace" (v. 3).

CHARLES L. CAMPBELL

RESPONSE

What does "grace" mean to you?

PRAYER

I long to be a person who knows and shows grace. Amen.

➔ **FRIDAY** ◀

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

REFLECTION

The futurity of resurrection and the reality of death make right ethical relations essential in the church.

E. ELIZABETH JOHNSON

The grace of Jesus Christ encompasses the entirety of the community's life—past, present and future—not simply as the forgiveness of sins, but as the power for faithful living.

CHARLES L. CAMPBELL

Grace here has radical social implications; it is not simply a word spoken to individuals or a power at work in individuals. Grace creates a new kind of community—one in which the divisions and hierarchies of the world no longer function because the grace of Jesus Christ, not human accomplishment or status, is the source of the community's life.

CHARLES L. CAMPBELL

RESPONSE

Where have you seen grace in action this week?

PRAYER

O Christ, may your grace and peace truly be with us this Advent season! Amen.

➔ SATURDAY ◀

Mark 13:24–37

REFLECTION

By contrast, of course, those who lived before the birth of Jesus did not know the day or the hour of his arrival, so they needed to live in a continual state of watchfulness. The birth of the Messiah could only be celebrated as a surprise party that could take place on any day, at any moment. By anticipating the return of the Son of Man here, at the beginning of Advent, we wait in the same way those who lived before Jesus was born waited, not knowing the day or the hour when the Messiah would appear. We also join them in hearing—and needing—the same exhortation to be watchful and to keep awake.

MARTIN B. COPENHAVER

Jesus does not intend for us to predict when he will return. Rather, he is urging us to live as if his return were just around the corner.

MARTIN B. COPENHAVER

RESPONSE

If you knew for certain that Christ's return would happen within the next twenty-four hours, what would you do?

PRAYER

I pray, dear God, to be one who waits for you actively and with great joy! Amen.

→ SUNDAY ←

Isaiah 64:1-9

REFLECTION

God “hides” in order to deconstruct a distorted set of beliefs and practices, thereby opening Israel to receive again (as gift and event) their calling to be God’s people. Hiding is a form of divine judgment that ultimately serves divine mercy, a “No” that clears the ground for a more profound “Yes.”

SCOTT BADER-SAYE

This is not a season for passive waiting and watching. It is a season of wailing and weeping, of opening up our lives and our souls with active anticipation and renewed hope. . . . And so we do not lose heart; rather, we live with our hearts broken open so that compassion, caring, and God’s reckless love can find a way into our hearts and the heart of the world. PATRICIA E. DE JONG

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

REFLECTION

God’s energizing radiance brings not only illumination or the assurance of favor, but life itself.

CHARLES M. WOOD

Psalms 80 is an incredible confession, not of sin, but of faith. It confesses the people’s trust in a God who is big enough to hear their hurt, strong enough to handle their anger and pain. It also identifies the congregation as a people who, even in their suffering, have the courage to call on the Lord God of hosts to help them . . . while we may look back, God always looks ahead.

TALITHA ARNOLD

In lamentation the people and their leaders maintain a dialogue with God. That dialogue is always better than giving up on God.

CHARLES L. AARON JR.

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

REFLECTION

Unlike a tangent to a circle, the grace of God in and through Jesus Christ flows not only between God and the Christian community, but also in the Christian community's daily experience and history.

CARLOS F. CARDOZA-ORLANDI

When we tend to the task of blessing, to first words and last words, a benediction becomes so much more than familiar words intoned by rote. Such a moment is laden with possibility. God's presence can become palpably present.

MARTIN B. COPENHAVER

Mark 13:24–37

REFLECTION

While the world's busyness may seem to be pointed toward Christmas, it is seldom pointed toward the coming Christ child. As Advent progresses, the number of shopping days left before the big day offers a countdown that stresses us out and keeps us up late.

LILLIAN DANIEL

We may not be physically asleep; quite the opposite. But in our wakefulness to worldly ways, we fall asleep to the spiritual season, and so we need a wake-up call.

LILLIAN DANIEL

Jesus reminds us now, as he reminded them then, that he will come again. We need not get lost in the details. Better to concentrate on being ready.

JUDY YATES SIKER

RESPONSE

What resolution do you make as this year begins?

PRAYER

May I stay awake to the possibilities of this Advent. Amen.