SOFTWARE & TECH

Presbyterian Lectionary 2015

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Understanding the Presbyterian Lectionary 2015: A Guide for Worship and Preaching

The rhythm of worship in many Presbyterian congregations is guided by a carefully structured schedule of Scripture readings known as the lectionary. For pastors, worship planners, and lay leaders, understanding the specific resources available for a given year is essential for crafting meaningful services. The term **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** often refers to the application of the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) within Presbyterian contexts during Year B of the liturgical cycle, which began in Advent 2014 and concluded in November 2015. While the RCL itself is an ecumenical resource, Presbyterian churches have historically embraced it with particular emphases and supplementary materials. This article explores the origins, structure, and practical use of the lectionary in Presbyterian worship, with a special focus on the 2015 cycle and its enduring significance.

The Foundation: The Revised Common Lectionary and Presbyterian Adoption

The lectionary is not a new concept. Christians have used prescribed readings for centuries to ensure that congregations encounter the breadth of Scripture over time. The modern **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** is rooted in the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of readings developed after the Second Vatican Council. The RCL was finalized in 1992 and has since been adopted by the Presbyterian Church (USA), as well as many Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican, and other Protestant denominations. By 2015, the RCL had become the standard for most mainline Presbyterian congregations in North America.

What makes the Presbyterian use of the lectionary distinctive is its integration with Presbyterian theology and polity. The emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the priesthood of all believers, and the centrality of preaching shapes how the readings are selected and interpreted. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** reflects these values by ensuring that the congregation hears from both the Old and New Testaments each week, with a psalm providing a congregational response.

The Structure of the Lectionary Year: Why 2015 Matters

To understand the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**, one must grasp the structure of the liturgical year. The RCL follows a three-year cycle: Year A focuses on the Gospel of Matthew, Year B on Mark, and Year C on Luke. The Gospel of John is interspersed throughout all three years, particularly during the seasons of Lent and Easter. The year 2015 corresponds to Year B, which heavily features the Gospel of Mark, the shortest and most urgent of the synoptic Gospels.

Year B, as observed in the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**, also includes distinctive readings from the Hebrew Scriptures. During the season after Pentecost, also known as Ordinary Time, the Old Testament readings often follow a semi-continuous pattern. In 2015, this meant a deep dive into the stories of David from 2 Samuel, which provided rich material for preaching on leadership, sin, repentance, and God's covenant faithfulness. The

Psalms for Year B include beloved texts such as Psalm 23, Psalm 24, and Psalm 98, which continue to resonate deeply in Presbyterian worship.

Key Seasons in the Presbyterian Lectionary 2015

The liturgical year is divided into seasons, each with its own character and emphasis. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** guided congregations through Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. Each season presents unique opportunities for theological reflection and spiritual formation.

While the 2015 calendar year began in January, the liturgical year for 2015 actually started with Advent in late 2014. The readings for Advent in Year B focused on themes of hope, preparation, and the coming of the Messiah. The Gospel readings from Mark emphasize the urgency of John the Baptist's call to repentance. Presbyterian churches using the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** often paired these readings with hymns and prayers that reflect the Reformed tradition's emphasis on covenant expectation.

Christmas and Epiphany in early 2015 followed with readings from Luke and John, highlighting the incarnation and the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles. The Presbyterian emphasis on the sovereignty of God was particularly evident in the Epiphany readings, which stress that God's salvation is for all people.

Lent in 2015 began on February 18 with Ash Wednesday. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** provided readings that invited congregations into a season of self-examination and repentance. The Gospel of Mark is notably terse in its passion narrative, but the lectionary supplements it with readings from John during Holy Week. Presbyterian worship planners often used these readings to create services of Tenebrae, Maundy Thursday communion, and Good Friday reflection.

Easter 2015 fell on April 5. The resurrection narratives from Mark 16, along with other resurrection accounts, filled the Great Fifty Days of Eastertide. During this season, the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** included readings from the Acts of the Apostles, emphasizing the birth and mission of the church. This was a powerful time for Presbyterian congregations to reflect on their own role in God's redemptive work.

The longest season of the liturgical year is Ordinary Time, which follows Pentecost. In 2015, Ordinary Time extended from late May through November. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** featured a semi-continuous reading of the David narrative from 2 Samuel. Preachers had the opportunity to explore the complexities of David's life: his rise to power, his sin with Bathsheba, the rebellion of Absalom, and his final years. These stories provided rich material for sermons on grace, judgment, and the human condition.

The Gospel readings for Ordinary Time in Year B come primarily from Mark 1 through 13. This includes the calling of the disciples, the parables of the kingdom, Peter's confession, the transfiguration, and the journey to Jerusalem. Presbyterian preachers found in Mark's fast-paced narrative a powerful call to discipleship and faith.

Practical Use of the Presbyterian Lectionary 2015

For pastors and worship leaders, the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** was more than a list of Scripture references. It was a tool for discipleship and community formation. Many Presbyterian churches used the lectionary to guide their weekly worship services, adult education classes, and small group studies. The common readings allowed members of the congregation to prepare for worship by reading the texts in advance, fostering deeper engagement with Scripture.

In addition, the lectionary provided a framework for ecumenical unity. In 2015, Presbyterian congregations around the world were reading the same Scriptures as their Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Catholic neighbors. This shared foundation fostered a sense of connection across denominational lines, even as each tradition brought its own liturgical and theological distinctives.

Several resources were available to support the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**. The Presbyterian Church

(USA) published liturgical calendars and worship resources, including suggestions for hymns, prayers, and visual arts. Online tools allowed pastors to access commentaries, sermon illustrations, and children's curriculum based on the weekly readings. Many congregations also used the lectionary as a guide for their year-round Christian education programs.

The Role of the Psalms in the Presbyterian Lectionary 2015

One of the distinctive features of the Reformed tradition is its emphasis on the singing of Psalms. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** included a psalm for each Sunday and festival day, often chosen to complement the other readings. These psalms were not merely read responsively but were frequently sung in metrical versions. Presbyterian hymnals such as *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990) and *Glory to God*(2013) contain psalm settings that align with the lectionary.

In 2015, the appointed psalms included some of the most beloved in the Psalter. Psalm 23, the Shepherd's Psalm, appeared during Lent, offering comfort and assurance. Psalm 150, with its call to praise God with music and dance, was a fitting conclusion to the Easter season. The use of the psalms in worship helped congregations connect with the devotional life of ancient Israel and the early church.

Challenges and Adaptations

While the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**was widely used, it was not without its challenges. Some pastors found the semi-continuous Old Testament readings during Ordinary Time to be difficult to preach, particularly the lengthy narrative sections from 2 Samuel. Others felt that the lectionary omitted important passages, such as the story of Ruth or portions of the prophets. To address these concerns, some congregations supplemented the lectionary with additional readings during special services or seasonal emphases.

Another challenge was the occasional mismatch between the lectionary readings and the pastoral needs of a congregation. For example, a community grieving a tragedy might find the appointed readings for a given Sunday to be less directly relevant than other passages. In such cases, many Presbyterian pastors exercised pastoral discretion, using the lectionary as a guide rather than a rigid requirement. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** was designed to be a tool, not a straitjacket.

Additionally, the 2015 cycle of Year B included some of the more difficult passages of Mark's Gospel, including the so-called "hard sayings" of Jesus about divorce, wealth, and suffering. These texts required careful exposition and pastoral sensitivity. Presbyterian preachers were encouraged to interpret these passages in light of the broader biblical narrative and the Reformed tradition's emphasis on grace.

Educational Opportunities and Small Group Study

Beyond the pulpit, the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**provided rich material for adult education. Many churches organized weekday Bible studies that followed the lectionary, allowing participants to go deeper with the texts they would hear on Sunday. In 2015, these studies often focused on the Gospel of Mark, exploring its themes of discipleship, suffering, and the kingdom of God. The David narratives from 2 Samuel also provided fertile ground for discussion about leadership, repentance, and God's faithfulness.

Sunday school classes for children and youth also used the lectionary as a guide, with curriculum materials that introduced young people to the same Scriptures their parents were hearing in worship. This created a sense of intergenerational unity and shared faith formation. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**thus functioned as a backbone for the entire educational ministry of the congregation.

Liturgical Arts and the Lectionary

Visually, the **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015**inspired the use of banners, paraments, and other liturgical arts. The colors of the liturgical year—purple for Advent and Lent, white for Christmas and Easter, green for Ordinary Time, and red for Pentecost—provided a visual rhythm that reinforced the lectionary readings. Many Presbyterian churches employed artists and designers to create seasonal installations that reflected the

themes of the day's readings.

Music also played a crucial role. Choirs and musicians selected anthems and offertories that corresponded to the lectionary texts. Organists chose preludes and postludes that evoked the mood of the season. The **Presbyterian Lectionary 2015** thus integrated worship, education, and the arts into a cohesive whole.

Conclusion

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