SOFTWARE & TECH

United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary

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Understanding the United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary: A Guide for Worship and Reflection

For many congregations within the United Methodist tradition, the rhythm of worship is deeply tied to a structured cycle of Scripture readings. The **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary** is not a standalone book but rather a specific application of the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) for the liturgical year that began in Advent 2013 and continued through the end of 2014. This three-year cycle of readings (Year A, B, and C) provides a disciplined yet flexible framework for preaching, teaching, and personal devotion. In 2014, churches following this lectionary journeyed through Year A (the Gospel of Matthew) during the first part of the year, transitioning to Year B (the Gospel of Mark) with the start of Advent on November 30, 2014.

Understanding how this lectionary works, why it matters, and how it can enrich both corporate worship and individual spiritual life is essential for pastors, worship leaders, and lay members alike. This comprehensive guide explores the significance of the United Methodist Church's use of the lectionary during the year 2014, offering insights into its structure, themes, and practical applications.

What Is the United Methodist Church Lectionary?

The lectionary is a systematic selection of Scripture passages assigned for each Sunday and major holy day of the Christian year. The United Methodist Church officially endorses the Revised Common Lectionary, which was developed by the Consultation on Common Texts and adopted by many Protestant denominations, including Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans. The **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary** follows this ecumenical standard, promoting unity across traditions while allowing for local adaptation.

Each week, the lectionary provides four readings: an Old Testament text, a Psalm (often used responsively), a New Testament epistle or Acts passage, and a Gospel reading. This fourfold pattern ensures that congregations hear from a wide range of biblical genres and voices over time. The 2014 cycle specifically highlights the distinctive perspectives of Matthew and Mark, with transitional seasons like Lent and Easter offering rich narrative arcs.

The Structure of the Lectionary Year

The Christian liturgical year begins with Advent, the four weeks of preparation before Christmas. In 2014, Advent started on November 30, marking the shift from Year A to Year B. Prior to that, from January through late November, the church remained in Year A. This means that the calendar year 2014 actually spans parts of two lectionary years:

- January – November 2014: Year A, primarily reading the Gospel of Matthew.
- Advent 2014 – November 2015: Year B, focusing on the Gospel of Mark.

This dual coverage gives preachers and worshippers a unique opportunity to compare the emphases of Matthew and Mark within the same calendar year. The lectionary also includes feast days such as Epiphany (January 6), Ash Wednesday (March 5 in 2014), Easter Sunday (April 20), Pentecost (June 8), and All Saints' Day (November 1). Each of these special days has its own set of readings, often drawn from multiple biblical books.

The Revised Common Lectionary and the 2014 Cycle

The Revised Common Lectionary is the most widely used lectionary in the English-speaking world. The **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary** is simply the application of the RCL readings for that specific year. The lectionary's design ensures that over three years, congregations cover the major themes of Scripture. Year A features Matthew, Year B features Mark, and Year C features Luke. John's Gospel is used throughout all three years, especially during the Easter season and on special festivals.

In 2014, the readings from Year A (through November) include some of the most memorable passages in the New Testament: the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6), the Great Commission (Matthew 28), and the parables of the Kingdom. Old Testament readings complement these Gospel passages, often linking to prophecies or types fulfilled in Christ. The Psalms provide a liturgical backbone, giving the congregation a rich tradition of sung or spoken prayer.

Key Themes in the 2014 Lectionary Year

Each season of the liturgical year carries distinct theological emphases. For the **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary**, several key themes stand out:

- Ordinary Time after Epiphany (January – February): Readings focus on the beginnings of Jesus' ministry, his baptism, and the calling of the first disciples. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes Jesus as the teacher and fulfillment of the Law.
- Lent (March – April): The Gospel readings move toward the passion narrative. In Year A, the temptations of Jesus, the Transfiguration, and the raising of Lazarus (John 11) are featured. Lent calls the church to repentance, prayer, and preparation for Easter.
- Easter Season (April – May): The resurrection accounts in Matthew, along with appearances in John and Luke, dominate. Themes of new life, discipleship, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit are central.
- Ordinary Time after Pentecost (June – November): A long stretch of "green" Sundays focusing on discipleship and ethical teaching. Matthew's parables (the sower, the wheat and tares, the talents) challenge the church to live faithfully in the world.
- Advent (December 2014): The transition to Year B begins. Mark's Gospel starts abruptly with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, emphasizing urgency and expectation.

How the Lectionary Shapes Worship in the United Methodist Church

The **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary** provided a cohesive structure for worship services throughout the year. Pastors often use the lectionary to choose the sermon text, but its influence extends beyond the pulpit. Many congregations integrate the lectionary readings into prayers, hymns, and children's messages. The Psalm of the day is frequently used as a call to worship or a responsive reading.

One of the strengths of the lectionary is that it prevents pastors from preaching only on their favorite passages. The discipline of following the lectionary ensures that the congregation hears the full breadth of Scripture, including difficult texts. For example, in 2014, churches encountered Matthew's challenging call to forgive repeatedly (Matthew 18) and the stern warnings about false prophets (Matthew 7). These passages, when read in sequence, build spiritual maturity.

Furthermore, the lectionary promotes unity within the denomination. When multiple United Methodist churches across the country (and around the world) read the same Scriptures on the same Sunday, there is a tangible

sense of connection. In 2014, this ecumenical and denominational coherence was especially meaningful as the UMC navigated internal discussions about mission, identity, and social issues.

Using the Lectionary for Bible Study and Sermon Preparation

For pastors and lay leaders, the **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary**served as a valuable planning tool. Many preachers use commentaries, lectionary resources, and online tools that provide exegetical insights and sermon illustrations tailored to each week's texts. The lectionary also encouraged small group Bible studies to follow the same rhythm. A study group meeting on Wednesday could discuss the coming Sunday's Gospel, allowing members to come to worship already familiar with the text.

In 2014, several popular resources were available, including *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (which contains lectionary readings), *Feasting on the Word*, and other commentary series. The lectionary itself is free online, and many church websites posted the weekly readings in their bulletins or newsletters.

For personal devotion, individuals could read the four daily lectionary passages (if following a daily reading plan). The 2014 cycle included notable passages such as the story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15), which challenges ethnic boundaries, and the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20), which speaks to God's generous grace.

The Role of the Lectionary in United Methodist Identity

United Methodism has a long history of using lectionaries. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was a lifelong Anglican and used the Book of Common Prayer, which included a lectionary. The modern United Methodist Church officially adopted the Revised Common Lectionary in 1992, though many congregations had used earlier versions. The **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary**continues this tradition, emphasizing the connection between Scripture, sacraments, and the liturgical calendar.

The lectionary also reflects the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. By following an ecumenical lectionary, the UMC affirms the shared tradition of the universal church. The readings are chosen by a committee representing multiple denominations, ensuring that no single theological perspective dominates. This ecumenical spirit is central to Methodist identity.

Moreover, the lectionary encourages a focus on the life of Christ. The church year is structured around Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This Christocentric emphasis aligns with Methodism's core message of salvation and sanctification.

Practical Tips for Engaging with the 2014 Lectionary

Whether you are a pastor preparing sermons or a layperson hoping to deepen your faith, the **United Methodist Church 2014 Lectionary** offers a rich spiritual discipline. Here are a few practical suggestions:

- Preview the week's readings in advance. Spend time reading all four passages, not just the Gospel. Notice how they connect or contrast. The Old Testament reading often sets a theme that the Gospel fulfills.
- Use a lectionary journal. Write reflections on how the texts speak to your life, your community, and the world. In 2014, many churches used the "Lectionary Reflection" series published by the General Board of Discipleship.
- Incorporate the Psalm into prayer. The Psalm for each Sunday is meant to be prayed. Try praying it slowly, perhaps with a paraphrase, to internalize the emotions of praise, lament, or trust.
- Explore the context of the readings. Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to understand historical and cultural background. For example, in 2014, the reading from Matthew 2 (the visit of the Magi) on Epiphany gains depth when we know the Magi were likely Persian astrologers.
- Discuss with others. Form a lectionary study group. Share how the Sunday texts challenge or comfort you.

This communal engagement mirrors the early Methodist class meetings.

Conclusion

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