

## Preaching Workshop

### Intro to Narrative lectionary – handout

- Posted on Bethlehem's website
- Navigable – each one has both scriptures, the prayers, some preaching notes and some things like skits, dramatic reading and kids' message – I rarely use those.
- Working Preacher ([workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)) has commentaries on the different readings. I will also put links on the website to the various other sources I've recommended. Share other sites you find helpful and I can post them
- Old Testament until the Sunday before Christmas
- Less centered on the Church Year, but the major seasons and holidays are still observed

### Old Testament

- Two common reactions – why so much Old Testament? And the common view that the God in the Old Testament is somehow different from the God of the New Testament – a God of wrath vs. the God of love and mercy. That is false. But it is true the Old Testament has difficult passages.
- One of the most often repeated phrases in the OT - God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- The Old Testament in fact describes a God who over and over refuses to give up on humanity, no matter what. It shows the very real gritty relationship between God and Israel and God's desire to bless the whole world through Israel.
- When we rightly read the Old Testament, we can grasp Jesus and his death and resurrection as the culmination of God's project to bless and save the earth, not a Plan B.
- And, The Old Testament was the scripture that shaped Jesus and the early disciples who were all Jewish
- The Hebrew Bible remains a source of hope and comfort for Jewish people. The tendency to equate the God of the Old Testament with only a vengeful angry God also can lead us to misunderstand the Jewish people and their faith.
- It's very important to understand as best we can scripture in its own time and then discern what is timebound and what comes forward. Israel was patriarchal and patrilineal. It was one way to structure society, and it had its benefits. The Bible reflects that structure. To take that as the part that should come forward into our time isn't faithful. It's simply the culture they lived in. And to be honest, the Bible itself sometimes critiques that.

### Video

#### Questions, comments

John – written with the goal that readers will come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and king promised in the Old Testament and so would have life in his name. Seven signs that help to show that. When we get to John we'll try to do a little more in depth overview. In John's gospel is the most explicit statement that God didn't just send a new kind of king...God actually came...in the person of Jesus. The signs, the teachings, the I Am statements in John are very much about the Word – the heart and mind of God...made flesh

**A caveat.** John's gospel repeatedly sets up conflict between Jesus and "the Jews." It's the gospel that most lends itself to antisemitism. When I preach, I use "Jewish religious authorities" in place of the Jews because that's who really was in opposition – and by that, it's not even really the Pharisees in John's gospel. It was the Temple authorities – the priests and scribes.

## **Preaching in General**

After 7 months of this, what has come up for you? What would make it easier?

Suggestions – text study, at least read the text early in the week and let it sit with you before you sit down to write.

Jot down anything that comes to mind before you start looking at commentaries. How does the passage hit you?

If you quote a commentator verbatim, give credit.

The most effective preaching is more a profession of faith rather than trying to teach, although teaching sermons are occasionally helpful. When you can connect the passage to your own life, it's often very effective for listeners.

Preaching difficult topics – politics. I don't agree that politics don't belong in the pulpit because the Bible is inherently political. Politics is about the structure and rule of human society and the entire story of God and God's people is just that. But, there are also incendiary topics. You may choose to simply avoid those – that's OK. I don't necessarily completely avoid them, but I do try to be a bit measured. And there are a couple that are so sticky I avoid them. But most preachers at one time or another feel a real need to speak up about something. If you broach one, remember there are people in the pews you love who feel very differently. Nonetheless, yours can be an important witness – a prophetic witness even. Keep the God of mercy and love as your center. I usually try to say something to the effect of "everything I understand about God's love and mercy leads me to believe...." Or my understanding of Jesus and his mission leads me to feel \_\_\_\_\_ is very wrong."

And honestly, sometimes the passage just speaks for itself.