

Preparing to read

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Over time I have come to believe that the reading of scripture in public worship is as important as expounding on scripture (i.e., preaching). As a friend says, “A good reading *is* expounding.”

I am appalled at the way some traditions and congregations take such a casual attitude toward the reading of scripture in worship. It’s treated sometimes as the role “anybody can do.” Not anybody can do it, and it takes practice. I get the sense sometimes that people are reading the assigned text for the first time when they read it in worship.

Whenever I’m asked to read, I read the lectionary texts beforehand repeatedly, both quietly and aloud. If there are particular phrases or words I’m apt to stumble over, I go back over these even more, just like I would when practicing a hard part in a piano solo.

What works best for me is getting so acquainted with the text that I can actually make eye contact with the congregation while reading, instead of being tied to the text. I also find it best to read in a conversational tone, rather than trying to be dramatic, although some texts (especially narrative ones) lend themselves to a more dramatic reading. In any case, the reading of scripture should be about the text, not the reader.

I appreciate the practice of assigning lectors who have actually had training in reading scripture in public. I'm not opposed to asking children and youth to do it; some are quite good at it, or at least have the potential. But they should be coached at the beginning.

In my congregation, the reading of scripture is preceded with this liturgical touch:

Reader: Listen for the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Our ears are open.

And it's followed by this exchange:

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

Readers need to assume they are, in fact, speaking the word of the Lord. They should read scripture in a way that makes it heard.