

# (Updated) Lector Notes from Pastor Dan

## Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church – 2012

### Introduction and a little history:

First of all, thank you for being willing to be a reader—a lector—here at SVLC! Lectors are the bear-ers of God’s Holy Word. This is **the most important job** in worship! While we Lutherans don’t take the Bible literally, we take it *very* seriously: These are the stories and words that we believe shape us, transform us and give us hope. They lift us up when we are down, they comfort us when we mourn, and they poke at us when we get too comfortable. These holy words even have the power to raise the dead! That’s how seriously we take them. So it is perfectly fine (even good) to be nervous, but please don’t be scared. Reading the Bible is an honor and a joy. And always remember: We’re human, we make mistakes, and grace abounds...thanks be to God.

The Bible was originally intended to be read aloud in the assembly. That’s the whole purpose for the book! (Personal bibles didn’t exist for hundreds of years.) The earliest Christians knew they wanted to follow the teachings of Jesus, they knew they wanted to worship Christ. But what to share when they gathered together? They certainly shared bread and wine. And for many years they shared stories of Jesus and God's love...by heart and *always* aloud. Finally, in the late part of the first century, the words and stories were written down and grouped together, and today we have that collection, called the Holy Bible. Today, worship for Lutherans consists of—at the core—1) the sharing of bread and wine, and 2) the reading aloud of the Bible. Everything else is extra.

Martin Luther called the Bible the “cradle of Christ.” The lectors, *you*, carry the “cradle” with utmost care and attention and joy to us grace-starved people.

### Before worship:

**You should receive your readings during the week in the mail.** With the readings and these notes, you should also receive a little slip of paper with specific “reading helps” for the upcoming lessons. Let those notes guide your preparation. And if you choose to go in a different direction (in terms of reading style), do so with conviction.

**Eye contact or not:** To *not* make eye contact is detrimental in most cases of public speaking, but lectoring is different. Make a decision early in your preparation about whether you’ll be looking up at the congregation or not. Two schools of thought to consider...

- 1) **No eye contact** – Eye contact has the potential of taking the focus off the Scripture and putting the attention and the focus on you, the reader. Some great lectors caution against ever making eye contact...so that the Word itself is the main event, not the reader. This obviously has some drawbacks: Not looking up can lead people to lose attention, or it can seem cold. If you choose to look down, make sure the words are read clearly and with definite life and meaning. Be affected by the words you read: Laugh when something is funny; slow down for emphasis; don’t be afraid to raise and lower your voice appropriately.
- 2) **Eye contact** has the potential of bringing the Word ever more to life. If you chose to look up and establish eye contact with the congregation, don't shy away from making it an absolute earth-shattering performance! Make it “about you” in a sense, only in that it becomes clear to the congregation that you are truly moved by these texts, so much so that you know some (at least) by heart! Draw us in. This second school of thought is more in line with how early Christians “experienced” scripture. But it is riskier and requires more preparation. Still, don’t be afraid to go for it! Remember: Grace abounds.

**Practice makes powerful:** Once you determine whether you’ll be making eye contact or not, become *very* familiar with it; you can’t over-prepare to read Scripture.

We use the **Revised Common Lectionary**, which pre-sets our readings (i.e. they're not chosen by the pastor or a local committee because we like them). The RCL ties us to Christians who are reading the same thing on the same day around the world! This forces us to deal with texts and stories that perhaps we'd rather avoid. If you have questions about how the readings are chosen, please don't hesitate to ask. It is a fascinating study!

**Suggestions:** 1) **Consider reading from the big, black, bound Bible** in the pulpit...as opposed to the worship folder or a print-out. There is a certain irony in a lector announcing "Word of God, Word of Life!" and then covering up the actual Bible to read from a little scrap of paper. People notice. But ultimately these are just aesthetics. Use whatever helps you make the best proclamation possible. 2) **Consider memorizing the texts!** There is no better Bible study than committing Scripture to memory. Something just happens. It's not impossible, and many have memorized entire books of the Bible. This is how the early Christians shared the stories.

**What should I wear when I lector?** Dress as though you will be the one to share the "Word of Life" for the day. Dress in a way that keeps the focus less about you and all about the Word of God.

In worship:

**Please do not say "Good morning"** or draw attention to yourself in any way with superfluous talking/joking. The lector is the servant of the Word, and in a way, "Good morning" or other comments can make the Word a servant of you. The time for morning greetings is before the service, during the Welcome, and after worship. Plus, if our congregation doesn't feel welcomed and greeted up to this point, we've got bigger issues. Sometimes, I think, readers offer extra words more for themselves (subconsciously), to get themselves more at ease up front. This makes sense, but please try to resist any talk that is not "Scripture talk." Remember: less is more...more attention to the Word of God.

First, **please read the italicized descriptions** in the bulletin preceding the actual readings. These intros can help the assembly both "get their bearings" and understand a bit more what they are about to hear.

Then **simply say, "A Reading from [book]."** No need to say the chapter and verses. Less is more. We can read them for ourselves. But most importantly, they really don't matter for worship: chapters and verses don't say anything about God. And they weren't even part of the original texts.

**Read well.** (see Before worship section) Vary speed and inflection appropriately. Think about it like this: How would you like to be read to so that you don't feel the need to read along? In other words, make it interesting, not over the top (it's not about you), but make it interesting. Note: there's tons of humor/sorrow/joy/pain in the Bible, don't be afraid to help us see it. Bring the text alive for this assembly of faithful listeners.

**If you make a mistake** simply pause and continue on. No apologies or jokes needed. Don't worry: we love you, and God loves you. But the more attention that is drawn to you or your mistakes, the less attention on the text and its impact.

When you are finished, **please do not say, "Here ends the reading."** People aren't always sure how to respond to that. "Thanks be to God" can then sound like "Thank God, you're done reading." **Please say, "Word of God, Word of Life."**

Thank you for taking on this most important responsibility, for your time, and for your willingness to speak the very words of God.

