

Resources

The following are a sample of the resources that may help you. Remember to check these with your incumbent.

Batchelor, Mary, *The Lion Christian Poetry Collection* (Lion Books, 1995). An example of a collection of Christian poetry to read.

Foster, Richard and James B. Smith, *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*, rev edn (HarperOne, 2005)
An example of writings from saints past and present.

Wright Tom, *Matthew/Mark etc for Everyone* (London: SPCK). An example of short meditations on a gospel passage to read out.

Giles, Gordon, *The Music of Praise: Through the Church Year with the Great Hymns* (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002). An example of the story of a hymn.

Internet Resources are plentiful but of variable quality. The Diocese lists its recommended sites on the LWA hub:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/lwa-hub/>



Reflecting on Scripture

Acknowledgements

Material in this leaflet has been based on:

Diocese of Salisbury, *Training Course for Lay Worship Leaders* (Diocese of Salisbury)

Diocese of Bath and Wells and Steve Annandale *A Compendium of Resources: Alternatives to addressing the congregation*

Exploring Worship

18th February 2019

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Image from: <https://pixabay.com/en/bible-blur-book-candles-1850905/>

When is a Sermon not a Sermon?

You may be wondering if some of these are 'sermons' by another name. Indeed they could be. From "talk" to "sermon" is a sliding scale with no clear cut boundary. Short of only allowing those with a licence to speak, there will always be a grey area. We want everyone to be able to tell their own story but this is different from preaching.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Will it look like I am giving a definitive interpretation of the scriptures as a representative of the church?
- Has the material on scripture been prepared by a theologically trained person and approved by someone with the Bishop's licence (i.e. the incumbent or delegated Reader/clergy)?
- If what you do is offer humbly your own personal experience of God, allow others to share and help the congregation find their own application of scripture, then it is less likely to be a sermon.

If in doubt, check. The key to being a non-licenced worship leader is a strong collaborative working relationship with your incumbent.

To help indicate that this is not a sermon you might move your chosen reflection to the end of the service. Outside of the service, and perhaps with a drink in hand, the congregation may feel more relaxed to participate in any discussion. The order for BCP Morning and Evening Prayer always placed the sermon at the end of the service.

If you feel you want to go further, maybe God is calling you to study (e.g. Exploring Christianity) or to licenced ministry (Reader or ordained ministry). Take a look at the vocation and training pages of the Diocesan website.

Readings

It is fine to read another reading, meditation or poem alongside scripture in a service. See the website for more suggestions:

- **Readings from the Saints.** A suitable portion on your theme, possibly with a discussion question from e.g. St Francis, St Benedict, Mother Julian etc. See *Devotional Classics*.
- **The Story of a Hymn.** Read out the story of a hymn relevant to your theme. Do sing it too! See *The Music of Praise*
- **Other People's Sermons.** Reading someone else's sermon is not ideal as it will sound "read". But at times it may be appropriate.
- **Film clips.** If you have the technology use films or videos from church groups, mission societies or secular cinema and YouTube.

Active Reflections

Many adults learn by doing which is why a sermon is not always helpful. Can you do something active? Always finish with a prayer or Collect that offers what has been done to God.

- **Church Architecture** most churches are built to tell the Story. Gather round and reflect on a relevant stained glass window. Or walk round the church (inside or out - discussing the significance of the font (baptism), the porch gate, the altar rail, the nave, the cross shape of the church. Have you a church expert to help?
- **Crafts** Adults too enjoy crafts for we are all made in the image of our creator God. Give everyone the opportunity to make something simple to symbolise the theme of the readings using origami, drawing on a stone, writing a prayer...
- **Prayer Walk** Send everyone for a short prayer walk to find something that symbolises the readings, to find God in God's creation or to pray for the neighbourhood.

Reflecting on the Word

Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. (1 Tim 4:13)

The letter to Timothy, encourages this young minister to regularly read out scriptures (probably our Old Testament). Scriptures are one of the key ways God speaks to us. The Ministry of the Word lets us hear and reflect on what God may be saying, through Israel's experiences, the stories of the evangelists and the letters of the apostles.

Scripture can be life giving but misused it is destructive. Explaining and applying scripture through preaching is, thus, a privilege and a huge responsibility. Even from the beginning, Scripture speaks of the damage of false teaching (2 Peter 3:14-16, 1 Tim 1:6-7) and history demonstrates the harm done by persuasive but erroneous preachers.

The Church of England rules (canons), therefore, require that people who preach should have substantial theological training and a Bishop's licence (Clergy and Readers) or permission from the Bishop. This is the policy in Bath and Wells Diocese although there are ways for someone to test a gift for preaching under the supervision and presence of the incumbent. Others who lead services will not, therefore, be expected to give a sermon during their services.

However, a service does not need a sermon. There are many ways to engage with the Bible in order to help people better live and tell the Story of God and God's people. Becoming a Lay Worship Assistant, does not involve preaching but will involve helping the congregation reflect on scripture.

Not many of you should become teachers..., for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (James 3:1)

Bible Study and Reflection

There are many ways in which you can encourage people to reflect on the Readings without giving a sermon. Why not try:

- **A time of silence** for personal reflection. It helps if people have a Bible or copy of the passage(s) and maybe a question or two and let them know how long the silence will be.
- **Sharing thoughts** - encourage the congregation to share one thing that particularly struck them in the passage, after a time for reflection. If it's easier they could just speak with their neighbour.
- A **participative Bible Study**, goes further in encouraging the congregation to discuss the passage using some guided questions. There are many small group bible studies available, some of which are lectionary based.
- **Lectio Divina** is an ancient way of reflecting on scripture. The passage is read reflectively 2-3 times with a question for silent reflection each time. The LWA hub website has links to prepared readings or podcasts that you could play.
- **Ignatian Imaginative Meditations** encourage people to imagine themselves in the biblical story where they can encounter Jesus for themselves. Leading or writing Ignatian meditations requires some skill, but again the website contains prepared meditations you could read.
- **Art or Music Meditation**. Is there a piece of art or music based on your readings or themes. Project or print a copy of art and/or play the music. Make sure everyone can see and hear.
- Do a **dramatized reading** or more dramatic re-enactment. Can you involve everyone (avoid embarrassing people)

Telling Our Stories

Everyone is permitted to tell their own story. What does their faith mean to them and how do they live their faith at home, work and in the community. This is inspiring and encouraging for all. Could you:

- **Faith Monday-Saturday** Ask a different people each week to talk about their Monday- Saturday lives and what God means to them. If it's easier interview them with prepared questions. The intercessions could include a prayer for the speaker and the people and places they have spoken about.
- **Show and Tell**. Ask the congregation to bring something on a theme (e.g. pet service!) or that signifies their faith... a picture, a piece of pottery, a book, a photo. The objects might be brought to the altar during the offertory. At the end as people collect their item they might show and maybe say something about it.
- **Local Events** After a local event or at a time of community concern, Ask people to talk to their neighbour about the event. Invite three or four individuals to share with everyone, in about a minute, what happened or the key issues. Discuss in groups 'What does this mean to us in the light of faith or the gospel?' and to name something for prayer. Share back and then pray.
- **Newspaper/Magazine Article**. Find an article that speaks to you about what is happening in the world, perhaps suffering, injustice or another human need. Read or summarise it and hand out copies. In small groups discuss the article, how it speaks of our human condition and how today's readings might relate to the situation. Allow each group to feedback.
- **Discussion Panels or Debates** Get a small group to prepare a discussion or debate on the theme which they present to the congregation.