LECTIONARY HOMILETICS

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INSTRUCTIONS: **LESSON & THE ARTS**

CONTENT

1) You have been invited to participate because of your special background in literature, the arts, and theology. Basically, you are free examine any kind of intersection between the featured lectionary text and the arts. You might want to write on how the themes of the lesson *cohere with* artistic themes. You might want to *compare and/or contrast* the lesson with specific artworks. Or if the lesson itself *has had an influence upon* the arts, including such information would be helpful. The purpose is to give preachers material that they can draw upon in the preparation of their sermons.
2) You are asked to concentrate on one of the four lessons. It may be helpful to draw connections and parallels (if possible) between the gospel lesson(s) and the non-gospel lessons. Exegetical material on the lesson will addressed by another writer, please do not include this in your material. Neither should you include summaries or outlines of the biblical text; we are looking for new information that will help in illuminating the text.
3) Although there will be a homiletical section, please share analogies, stories, illustrations and ways you might want to preach the lesson (though your main purpose is the lesson and arts material). The majority of readers are preachers preparing sermons.
4) You might want to use the other lectionary readings for the day as resources.
5) Remember that you are writing to an **ecumenical** audience. You may certainly reference movements within particular traditions, but be aware that your readership is broad-ranging.
6) Please use your unique background; however, avoid professional jargon. Draw on your knowledge of recent trends in scholarship, but make it accessible to the pastor in the pulpit. In addition, try not to depend on overly-used artistic illustrations (particularly Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece!), unless you can supply a fresh perspective on the work in question.
7) If you have an electronic image of artwork described in the essay that you would like printed alongside the essay, feel free to send it as an email attachment (no copyright infringement, please). We often print images from Art Resource (www.artres.com), so you may submit to us their catalog number and we may acquire the image directly from them. If you have any questions regarding copyright infringement, please contact us.
8) Keep in mind the **liturgical season**.
9) Provide **proper documentation** for your sources (author, publisher, year, etc.). Do not submit copyrighted material; when quoting another source, be careful not to quote more than fifty words from any particular source. However, this "fifty-word rule" does not apply to smaller works (such as poems). In that case, only quote a *relatively small portion.* Also remember that *hymns are copyrighted;* quoting verses of hymns requires us to pay the copyright holder (which we are willing to do if a really good point is being made).Be *particularly careful* to provide full URLs (website addresses) when referring to online material.
10) Be parsimonious in your use of footnotes and quotations. Readers are interested in your thoughts and analysis.
11) Try to use language that reflects the value of all persons. Avoid the awkward constructions him/her, he/she, etc. Instead, consider using single gender examples or illustrations from real life, which include a multi-gendered presentation. If you are using a "clinical example," please use a fictitious name.
12) Use active verbs whenever you can. Active verbs energize the reader and the listener.
13) Do not begin sentences with "And" and rarely begin a sentence with "But."
14) Use complete sentences (subject + verb).
15) Essay length: 800 to 1000 words.

FORMAT

1) Please send your essays on diskette along with a hard copy, or send as an e-mail attachment. If you cannot send an electronic version, your essays will be scanned which requires a **quality, double-spaced** hard (paper) copy.
2) The preferred word processing program is *MSWord* although *WordPerfect* is acceptable.
3) Page numbering can be used but do not use headers or footers.
4) Use an em-dash — not double hyphens — for emphasis. No space between words and—dash (In *Word* the em-dash is Ctrl [key] + Alt [key] + - [minus sign on numeric keypad]).
5) Italicize the titles of books, plays, magazines, etc. Do not underline. Songs, poems, and articles take quotation marks.
6) Use **one** space after a period, question mark, and colon.
7) Quotation marks go **after** punctuation at the end of a sentence, but inverted commas (single quotation marks) go **before** punctuation. "For instance, when 'quoting within a quote**'.**" In notes and between parentheses, use brief abbreviations for books of the Bible with no periods. Example: Mk 2:1-17. In the text of your essay, spell out books of the Bible.
8) Use the following format for citing verses within parentheses. For a single verse: v. 18. For multiple verses: vv. 5-11.
9) Place all notes at end of each essay and *not* at the bottom of each page. Follow the basic format of these examples for books, plays, and magazines. Note p. for one page and pp. for multiple pages.

NOTES
1. Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 45.
2. Thomas War, "Openness to All," *Weavings*, Vol. XI, No. 4, pp. 21-25.

Please contact the office if you have any further questions.

Lesson & the Arts

2 Kings 5:1-14

I am as nonplussed as the next when it comes to saying what makes for a great story. I can't even begin to think what *The Iliad*, Genesis, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Great Gatsby* have in common. I am willing to say that what makes for a memorable story is memorable characters. Moreover, there are two ways of making characters memorable. One is to make them different—extraordinarily large, inordinately small, exceedingly eccentric—or, true individuals. The other is to make them types. Dostoyevsky, to give an example, creates memorable individuals, as does Chekhov. On the other hand, even the best of the Restoration comedies—Etheridge's *Man of Mode*, Congreve's *The Way of the World*, Wycherly's *The Country Wife*—depend on stock characters: the rake, the fop, the jealous husband, the innocently flirtatious wife, and so on.[2]

The story of Naaman, the man of valor—and the king of Aram and the king of Israel and Elisha the prophet and Gehazi the servant—is one of the memorable stories of the Hebrew scriptures. It is not memorable because its characters are individuals.

Naaman, for example, is not only Naaman. He is *Miles Gloriosus*, the swaggering soldier, the hero of Plautus' comedy of the same name, or the villain of Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. (The 1966 movie with Zero Mostel, Phil Silvers, Jack Gilford, and Buster Keaton, among others, is still worth watching, even 35 years later.) He (Naaman) is "a great man with his master," the writer of Kings tells us, "in high favor," because of his military success, "a mighty man of valor." He may be "humanized" by the fact that he is also a leper. Still, he swaggers. (We get no sense from the story that his leprosy is any more than an inconvenience for him. It clearly does not set him outside his society. He is a great man in it!). Indeed, Naaman's sense of entitlement—his being miffed at Elisha because the prophet doesn't treat him as he expects—is central to the way the story moves.

Naaman is served by his wife, we infer, who is served by "a little maid" (RSV) captured on a raid on Israel. This "girl" (NIV) is a wonderful character. And *we* know how wonderful, because we know what *type* of character she is. Actually, she is two types. With regard to the plot, she is a *ficelle* character; that is, she is in the story simply to move the story along. How would Naaman come to know of Elisha, and come to meet the prophet, if there weren't in his house this girl captured from among the prophet's people? She is also the servant or slave who, because she keeps an eye out, manages things—sometimes for the benefit of the master, sometimes, as we shall see, for the servant's own benefit.

There is the king of Aram, a conqueror, used to issuing orders, expecting those orders to be obeyed. He is King Mongkut of *The King and I*; he is "she who is to be obeyed" in the Rumpole series. A simple letter will do the trick, and his man Naaman will be healed. The king of Aram is why the king of Israel, the conquered, is so afraid. He (Israel) is a comic figure—instantly in a dither: bug-eyed, his hair standing on end, pawing at himself. Imagine Curly of The Three Stooges, when he meets Lupe the Wolf Man in *Idle Roomers*. (Whooo-boo-boo-boo-boo-boo-boo-boo!)

Elisha the prophet is also used to being obeyed. Is it heresy to suggest that he is also a stock character, not only in this story but in the story that ends 2 Kings 2, where he calls down the she-bear on the 42 boys who taunt him for being bald? Is Elisha perhaps *Propheta Gloriosus*?[3]

He *is* the picture of Theophrastan "arrogance,"[4] as far as Naaman is concerned. It is the character of Arrogance that he does not speak before another speaks to him; indeed, unless absolutely necessary, he doesn't speak at all but sends (v. 8, 10). To give Elisha proper dignity, we may need to remember that he is a prophet of the LORD. Then we may say that his short temper with the king, with Naaman, and, later, with Gehazi stems from a *righteous* anger. Perhaps even his anger with those nasty boys is (somehow) righteous.

This Elisha and Naaman are bound to clash. The great and grand soldier, with the letter of his king in his pocket, arrives with certain expectations. The prophet, aware of his power—and prickly about his stature[5]—makes certain he disappoints him. And, again, a keen servant must intervene—for the sake of his master (*and* the plot): "If the prophet had commanded you to do something great, wouldn't you have done it? So this little thing…?" And Naaman huffs down to the Jordan.

The most fully developed of these clever servants is Gehazi, who is also, in contrast to his master, a practical man. He is a Sancho Panza to Elisha's Quixote. But Gehazi is not only practical, he is disobedient and dishonest. He is not looking out for his master; he is looking out for himself. He is in the great tradition of Palestrio, the tricky slave in *Miles Gloriosus*, or (his counterpart) Pseudolis in *A Funny Thing Happened*. If those slaves advance the causes of their masters, it is only to advance their own interests as well. But Gehazi cares nothing at all for Elisha, only for himself.

There may be good reason for that. There is a brilliantly comic section in Manil Suri's recent novel, *The Death of Vishnu*,[6] in which Vishnu—not the god but the man who lives on the landing of a small block of flats in Bombay—convinces Mr. Jalal, one of the tenants of the building, that he needs a driver, though Mr. Jalal owns nothing but a small Fiat. The episode climaxes, of course, when Vishnu appropriates the car to take his prostitute/woman friend Padmini to the shore. This has been his purpose from the beginning. He drives Mr. Jalal in order to gain temporary possession of the key to the Fiat. A copy can be made, and *voilà*, he and Padmini are on vacation. Vishnu is only one of a great number of hangers-on working in and around this small block of flats. And all are aware, as Gehazi is, that if the masters do not look after themselves, there is a good chance their servants will. But if the servants don't look out for themselves, no one will.

Gehazi also ends up serving the plot. As Richard Nelson has pointed out, such an orderly story must have an orderly ending. Greed has no place in it. It must be banished. "Naaman was a leper at the start," but through no fault of his own. "Gehazi is deservedly a leper at the end. [Thus,] the leprosy has found a new home, and no one need fear it will return to Naaman."[7] Amen. So be it. So it should be.

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SAMPLE ESSAY #1
This piece originally appeared in the February-March 2003 issue of *Lectionary Homiletics* (February 16, 2003: 6th Sunday after Epiphany, pp. 19-20).

NOTES

2. These are occasionally called "Theophrastan" characters after Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle who wrote a series of caricatures of Athenian social types: the Boor, the Talker, the Parasite, the Miser, the Buffoon, and two dozen more. For an excellent modern example, as well as a description of the Theophrastan character, go to http://community. middlebury.edu/~harris/Classics/theo.html. This is part of the desktop edition of *Humanities and the Liberal Arts* by Middlebury Professor Emeritus William Harris.

3. The Latin for prophet is first declension masculine.

4. ʽΥπερηφανιας, *The Characters of Theophrastus*, edited and translated by J. M. Edmonds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 103-104.

5. Read the story of the taunting boys next to the story of Elisha's "call," particularly his use of Elijah's mantle, taking it immediately to strike the water with it to make sure he can now do what Elijah could (2:12b-14). And the sons of the prophet come out to meet him and bow down to him (2:15).

6. Manil Suri, *The Death of Vishnu* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

7. Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), pp. 180-181.

SAMPLE ESSAY #2

This piece originally appeared in the
December 2003-January 2004 issue of *Lectionary Homiletics*
(December 14, 2003: 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, pp. 11-12).

Lesson & the Arts

Philippians 4:4-7 (8-9)

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he tells them to rejoice always, to be gentle, and not to worry. God is near, he says, and the peace of God will surround their hearts and minds in ways that will astonish them. This is not a text that is frequently taken up by artists. There is no narrative, no dramatic moment, no concrete detail to fire the imagination of a painter or sculptor.

Nonetheless, an artist may suggest what it looks like to rejoice. In his 1939-40 painting, *Harriet Tubman Series* #4,[4] Jacob Lawrence shows brightly-clad children leaping, running, and tumbling at full stretch. There is only a suggestion of earth and sky; an undulating, infinitely distant horizon; and a hint of a tree branch, reaching into the picture plane as though coming in from off stage. As if alluding to God's protective gesture, the branch resembles an outstretched arm, sheltering the joyful moment of play in an otherwise difficult life. The drawing is simple, almost childish, and the uneven application of the tempera paint reveals the artist's quick, decisive brushstrokes. The painting is one of a series of 31 included in Lawrence's book, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, portraying the life of Harriet Tubman, escaped slave, abolitionist, and conductor on the Underground Railway. According to the caption that Lawrence provided, it refers to a day in 1820, when Harriet Tubman and some other slave children were playing outdoors. In a few broad lines, Lawrence conveys their carefree sense of joy in the moment, the visceral physicality inherent in the word "rejoice."

John Stuart Curry's 1929 oil *Gospel Train*,[5] painted in 1929, suggests another vision of joy. Curry depicts a crowded room, in which some people sit with upraised arms, others lean forward intently, and others seem to clap their hands and tap their toes as a middle-aged woman and several children dance to the music of a fiddler and a piano player. Both the dancers and many of the people sitting on rough benches have their eyes closed, as though in prayer or even religious ecstasy. On the wall, a banner shows a drawing of a train, with the words "The Gospel Train" above, placing the action in the context of worship or a revival meeting. Two intersecting cones of light descend on the gathering from an unseen source. While the light may come from something as mundane as two bare light bulbs, there is the suggestion that it is from heaven, washing over these plainly-dressed, ordinary folk who have left their worries behind in order to rejoice in God's holy presence.

A similar scene is depicted in Thomas Hart Benton's *Lord Heal the Child*, painted in 1934.[6] Again, the scene is a small, rough-hewn room, with some people sitting on simple benches, while others move to the music of fiddle, banjo, guitar, and harmonica. Just as in Curry's painting, the people are dressed as ordinary working folk, the women mostly in wash-dresses, the men with open collars and rolled-up sleeves. Here, however, the center of the space contains only a small child, seated on a stool, while a woman leans towards her, hand outstretched in supplication. The mood is quieter, as expectant faces look upward and relaxed arms drape over the backs of benches. A sign on the back wall proclaims "Jesus Saves," and it is clear that those who are present believe in the saving power of prayer. Like the ecstatic dancers and toe-tappers in the Curry work, these hard-working men and women are bathed in the golden light of the joy that passes all human understanding, even in the midst of their concern for an ailing little girl.

Sometimes we may sense the rejoicing of an artist through completely abstract, decorative designs. One example of this is in the *Book of Durrow*, an early eighth century illuminated manuscript containing the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as a letter from St. Jerome to Pope Damasus, a number of canon tables noting the sections common to the various Gospels, and other explanatory material. Like its more-famous cousins, the *Book of Kells* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, the *Book of Durrow* has highly-decorated initial letters, symbols of the evangelists, and border decorations on many of its pages. The page facing the opening words of St. Jerome's letter is referred to as a "carpet page."[7] That is, it is fully covered, from edge to edge, with swirling circles, spirals, and interlaced ribbons of color, as a carpet covers a bare floor. The brilliant green, red, gold, and black inks intensify one another, leading the eye around and under and through this joy-filled dance of color and pattern. While it is always dangerous to speculate about the emotional state of an artist, especially one at so great a remove in time and space, this complex yet completely controlled design may be seen as a visual metaphor for the joy that passes all understanding that was surely the theological grounding for such a time-consuming, painstaking work.

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NOTES

4. In *Imaging the Word*, edited by Kenneth T. Lawrence (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994), 86-87.

5. Robert L. Gambone, *Art and Popular Religion in Evangelical America, 1915-1940* (Knoxville, TN: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1989), plate 6.

6. Gambone, plate 2.

7. Bernard Meehan, *The Book of Durrow: A Medieval Masterpiece at Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin: Roberts Rinehart, 1996), folio 3v, 18.

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