# LECTIONARY HOMILETICS

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## INSTRUCTIONS: PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

**CONTENT**

1) You have been invited to participate because of your special background in both theology and pastoral care/counseling. Basically, you are to write on what the lesson says about the human condition. This is an opportunity to suggest the personal dimensions of biblical material. You might also want to write on what the lesson says about human pain, suffering and the search for wholeness and reconciliation, etc.
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, so 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 to explicate the pastoral implications of the lesson). 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.
7) Keep in mind the **liturgical season**.
8) 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.
9) Be parsimonious in your use of footnotes and quotations. Readers are interested in your thoughts and analysis.
10) 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.
11) Use active verbs whenever you can. Active verbs energize the reader and the listener.
12) Do not begin sentences with “And” and rarely begin a sentence with “But.”
13) Use complete sentences (subject + verb).
14) 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.

# SAMPLE ESSAY #1

This piece originally appeared in the February-March 2003 issue of *Lectionary Homiletics* (February 23, 2002: Seventh Sunday after Epiphany, pp. 24-5).

## Pastoral Implications

### Isaiah 43:18-25

**I am struck, in reading this passage,** by the power of language and the power of story. If we can assume that the prophet is writing to a late exilic audience of Jews who have been making a new life for themselves in this new land, then it appears that the writer is trying to help the people re-find and re-claim their identity and purpose as God's people. Just prior to verse 18, the prophet uses the rich imagery of the Exodus traditions, the heart of Israelite identity, to help them remember and re-member who they are and, more importantly, who God is. The rich imagery from scripture, with which they would have been deeply familiar, helps them re-enter their narrative of God's faithful and persistent relationship with them and to find the symbols that anchor them to their religious beliefs and practices—to the core of their spirituality. They are invited to find their way back to this active identity as God's people and then they are immediately jarred by a command to let that go in favor of preparing themselves for the next chapter in their story with God. The prophet mediates God's message, which might be understood to say, "Now that you remember who you are and Whose you are, open your minds and spirits to the possibility of a new direction. You need to remember your identity, not for nostalgia's sake, but because it will prepare you to actively be My people for the next things that we will accomplish together."

Pastorally, I think that there are two important issues here for us to notice. First, we tend to be a rather a-historical culture. We tend to think of ourselves in this country very much in the present tense. There's something very powerful about remembering our ancestors and their lives and work that have been bequeathed to us. In remembering them, their values and commitments, we are better helped to understand what has gone into making us who we are. And, in learning more about who we are and how we got that way, we are able to find ourselves in community differently. We recognize how much of our lives and histories are interwoven with the lives and histories of others and the mutual blessings and debts we have with each other. We also have the opportunity to remember how God has moved with us, as a people, over time and to re-vision how God will continue to move with us. Since we tend to think of ourselves as individually in relationship with God rather than communally related to God, learning and telling the stories of our histories as people and as a people (who form and re-form continually) will help break through the isolation we so often find ourselves in. It is our isolation, our inability to see our interwovenness with each other, that feeds some of the most significant problems we have–problems like violence, racism, ecological crisis, and even world hunger. I wonder what it would mean for those of us who gather in churches and hear these words of Deutero-Isaiah to remember God's relationship with us and our ancestors over time and to reclaim the shared history that binds us both to God and to one another in our very roots. In remembering the story/ies, we are called to remember our triumphs and heroic moments, and we are called to remember our failures and the harm we have done to each other. Ultimately, we are called to remember the words spoken by God in verse 25 "I, I am God, who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." We are loved and forgiven by God even as we are called to make amends for the harm we have done to our communal self and to be ready to receive the new thing that God is doing.

The other pastoral point that might be addressed is the power of shifting a narrative. The author here uses rhetorical/literary devises to help the readers to change their narratives of identity and meaning. This is done in several ways—through rich imagery and metaphor, through the temporal shifts, and by the profound message of hope in the midst of probable complacency and/or despair. It is commonly understood in the world of mental health that the opposite of depression is not happiness or even contentment. The opposite of depression is hope. The prophet here makes a profound statement of hope, in God's name, for the exiled people of Israel. The lens of meaning we carry in our lives about the events we encounter and the experiences we have deeply shape the responses we make to those events and experiences and the future we envision. If the perspective we bring to bear on our lives is one of self-sufficiency, autonomy and mistrust of others, then we will respond to life events as if those perspectives are true. However, it's not truth at stake here. It's one framework of meaning out of many. If we brought to those same events a perspective of relatedness, solidarity, and trust our response would be entirely different because of our assumption of the truth of those perspectives. The responses of others to us are built out of the sense they make of our actions within their own frameworks of meaning. Deutero-Isaiah is attempting to shift the framework of meaning for those in exile from a sense of God's abandonment or absence or irrelevance to one of God's active and enduring commitment to God's people. This is potentially a shift from despair to hope and, if the shift in narrative is embraced, then their response will change accordingly. These folks will live as though God is persistently in love with them. What narrative do we carry about who we are in relationship to God and who God is in relationship to us? What difference does it make that we are living that particular narrative? What is the divine-human narrative that God is inviting us to live and what would it mean for our lives if we accepted that invitation? What would it take for us to "sing a new song" with God and one another?

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# Pastoral Implications

## Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

**Those who are sent out by Jesus as his** front-runners are given specific work to do. The pastoral work identified in this passage involves giving the sign of peace, curing the sick, judgment against those who reject the preaching of the gospel, and power over the forces of evil in the name of Jesus. We will look at each in turn.

1. Giving the sign of peace has become quite common during the liturgy of many congregations today. But in what way is it more than a polite "Good morning?" Paul, for example, often combines grace and peace in his introductory greetings (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3, etc). The connection with grace renders peace as something weighty, as a significant gospel indicative.

The peace of the gospel is the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the announcement and affirmation that the person greeted stands in the reality of Christ's redemption. That person has peace with God through Jesus Christ. Whatever has separated him or her from God is now past. It has been dealt with and done away. It carries the full weight of the blessing of new life in Christ. As an expression of God's *shalom*, it is restoration to wholeness in and through relationship with God. In the passage under consideration the peace that is announced means that the kingdom of God has come near (10:9).

2. Curing the sick has long been recognized as a Christian pastoral responsibility. Yet in modern times it has slipped away from the church to the medical profession. While modern medicine is an astonishing success story, the question still arises: what role does the church have in healing the sick?

Five pastoral responsibilities may be suggested. First, Christians visit the sick. This is a major part of every Christian leader's work. Especially those in hospital should be visited (regularly but briefly!). Second, the sick should be brought the word of God. As appropriate, with sensitivity, the Bible should be read and, as helpfully as possible, a short comment may be made. On a personal note: I recently had a fairly long hospitalization. Many pastors visited me, and most did not read scripture to me! Perhaps too much today pastoral work is still under the sway of listening and talking therapies and has lost its kerygmatic imperative. Third, careful use may be made of the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. These pastoral acts signify the impartation of the Holy Spirit, who comes as the empowerer and comforter. Four, we should pray for the sick. We do so not only in their presence, but we re-member them in the Sunday liturgy, bringing them before God for healing and blessing, as they are thereby joined to the worship of the gathered community. Certainly there should be respect for privacy; but too, as part of the community, they are prayed for by name and circumstance, rather than generically and anonymously. Five, again as appropriate, Holy Communion may be brought to the sick. John Knox, the Scottish reformer, used to refer to the Lord's Supper as Godly medicine for sick souls. This pastoral sacrament is probably something that the so-called non-liturgical churches may be invited to reconsider in their ministries to the sick.

SAMPLE ESSAY #2

**This piece originally appeared in the June-July 2004 issue of *Lectionary Homiletics* (July 4, 2004: 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, p. 46).**

3. Declaring that there is a consequence when one rejects the gospel may hardly be considered 'pastoral' today, when pastoral care is largely construed in terms that are affirming and positive. Yet the fullness of the gospel contains consequences of our acts and decisions. A review of pastoral work in the classical tradition amply illustrates that for most of the church's history pastors understood pastoral work primarily in terms of concern for people's relationship with God.[1] Under the impact of the modern pastoral care movement there has been a marked move away from such a center to an emphasis on psychological and contextual concerns. Much has been learned; but much too has been lost; especially lost has been the specifically christological framing of pastoral work, which the passage under review stresses.

A brief citation from Gregory of Nazianzus, the fourth century pastor and theologian, sums up the point: "The scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, or restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and, in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host."[2]

4. Pastoral power over the forces of evil is markedly absent from most contemporary mainstream pastoral literature. As we have demythologized our metaphysical perception of experience through most of the twentieth century, the new age and self-help movements have reintroduced a metaphysical awareness, which while not Christian, suggests a sense of loss of transcendence and a longing for things more spiritual. Perhaps it is time again for pastors, Christian leaders and theologians to revisit the question of principalities and powers.

A theology of evil and a practice for dealing with it have long been a part of pastoral wisdom. At the very least, one should attend to the fact that the Bible is replete with stories and accounts of an agency that stands and acts contrary to the purpose of God. Christians, according to verse 19 of this week's gospel lesson, have authority over the powers of evil—powers, seemingly, that are out to do us in. Quite what such an authority looks like in practice is beyond this scope of these reflections; but that they should be in view is a concern that is thrust before pastors on a very regular basis. This passage under consideration raises the issue directly, challenging us to have a deeper perception of spiritual reality, good and evil.

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## NOTES

1. Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

2. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 2.22. The Greek text is found in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Volume 35: 4408-512. This citation is from Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Volume 7 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark and Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1989).

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