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Playing in Luke's Gospel

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Playing in Luke's Gospel

Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence & Scripture Team from Hinsdale Covenant Church (Illinois)
Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Symposium 2017
Thursday, January 26
Seminar A7

Though we often think of Bible study as serious business, adding an element of play into our exploration of scripture deepens our emotional connection to the text and can invite our congregations to experience God's Word in a new way. In this hands-on seminar, we will explore and consider contextualized ways to present portions of Luke's gospel in worship.

Why Play?

The capacity to play is an achievement in the emotional development of every human child.

D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, quoted in *Becoming a Pastor* by Jaco J. Hamman

Play . . . is of a higher order than seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, while play can very well include seriousness.

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, quoted in *Becoming a Pastor* by Jaco J. Hamman

Playing is a bridge between the inner and the outer, between self and other, between sense and non-sense, between you and a life to be lived. It is the dramatization of the landscape of your soul, even as it brings possibilities and rearranges current understandings.

Jaco J. Hamman, *Becoming a Pastor*

Become like a child, [Jesus] said, if you want to mature as an adult. To play the ultimate game, don't rely on will, belief, denial, or reason alone. Play. Play in a Godly way. Play with the Creator. Enter the existential game with imagination, wonder, and laughter if you want to become new without end. . . . Play makes us young when we are old and matures us when we are young.

Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education*

I am constantly struck by the proximity of "play" and "pray"; this is brought home to me in serendipitous messages from my word processor, when my fingers take on a life of their own and I find myself writing, "It will be necessary to play about this."

Margaret Guenther, quoted by Karen Mains in *The God Hunt*

Some Considerations. . . .

What are our logistics?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How do I cast?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How do I select the Scripture to perform?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Principles of Tableaux

1. The picture is in the _____ of the action!
2. Engage the _____ to provide _____.
3. Don't be afraid of _____.
4. Ask: "What is the _____" or "What do the characters _____?"
5. _____ is necessary!
6. Strive for _____ without _____.

Notes

Appendix A

Responses to the Reading of Scripture

Congregational responses to scripture reading add a strong component of embodied response to the Word of God. Using the same simple response week-after-week allow everyone to actively participate in the dialogical act of hearing and responding to God. Even informal contexts can benefit from affirming God's word together through the responses below. (Feel free to add your own to the list!)

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew/Mark/Luke/John.
Glory to you, O Lord.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.
Amen. (from 1 Peter 1:24-25, NRSV) *This one is particularly useful after more troubling texts.*

God's Word is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.
Thanks be to God! (based on Psalm 119:105, NIV)

May God bless to our understanding this reading from the Word.

Herein is wisdom. **Thanks be to God.**

God's Word is full of grace and truth! **Thank you, loving God!**

God has spoken to us. **Thank you, God, for your Word.**

God, we thank you for your Word, **the story of your grace.**¹

God did it once! **He/God will do it again!**

This is God's Word. **Amen!**

The story of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

¹ These first eleven responses are reprinted by permission from *The Worship Sourcebook, Second Edition*, © 2013, Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Appendix B Recommended Resources

If you'd like to learn more about Scripture in worship, there are so many wonderful resources available. Many are online, though there are at least eight books that have been published. I have read many (all?) of them, and offer my recommendations here. May God bless you as you explore this field of teaching!

Arthurs, Jeffrey. *Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture: The Transforming Power of the Well-Spoken Word*. Kregel, 2012. (This resource includes a DVD and is particularly good for training lay readers.)

Anima: the Forum for Worship and the Arts, anima.samford.edu

- Resources / The Studio / “Reading Scripture in Worship” by McKinney McClain (video)

Barker, Jeff. *The Storytelling Church: Adventures in Reclaiming the Role of Story in Worship*. Parson's Porch Books, 2011.

Based on Barker's work in theatre and worship, this book focuses on story beyond the narrative of scripture. Barker's focus on scripture in worship includes his work with the Ancient Hebrew Drama Project (in collaboration with Thomas Boogaart at Western Seminary) and the enacted scripture he has prepared with theatre students at Northwestern. Barker uses story to communicate the importance of story and image in worship, as well as focusing on more practical considerations, such as the challenge of responsive readings. This book is an aesthetic meditation on the possibilities of story (and scripture) within worship, and would be helpful to any theatre artist in the church, as well as worship committees and pastors who wish to expand their artistic and narrative horizons.

Boomershine, Tom. *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*. Abingdon Press, 1988.

Boomershine's passion for communicating the Gospel as story is and the role of the communicator as storyteller is evident in this book. Boomershine focuses on several gospel stories, and he teaches how to learn them by heart, listen and connect to them, and tell them. Though this volume is primarily about telling the stories (in contrast to reading them), the techniques and connections Boomershine teaches can be beneficial for those who want to read these Gospel stories in a more engaging manner.

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Resource Library

www.worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library

- Friends of the Groom, Enacted Word: Using Theater to Present Scripture, 27 January 2012, video.
- Huyser-Honig, Joan, “Biblical Storytelling: Learning Scripture By Heart,” 9 February 2007.
- Search the resource library for many choral reading scripts I have developed. Clicking “drama scripts” will bring up quite a few.
- Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence, “Speech Communication in Worship Showcase”

Cardiphonia, “Helps for Reading Scripture in Worship, cardiphonia.org/2010/11/25/helps-for-reading-scripture-in-worship/

This is a helpful checklist to help you create a scripture reading team.

Childers, Jana, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Abingdon Press, 1998)

What can the preacher learn from the actor? A lot, according to Childers. In this volume (mostly addressing preaching, but also including a chapter on the public reading of scripture), Childers claims what many fear to claim: that preaching is performance. It’s an event centered on the action of God. Action, as any playwright and preacher knows, is what drives “the disequilibrium to equilibrium.” (Or, for those schooled in the Four Page Sermon, the trouble to the grace.) This delightfully-written book will inspire preachers and homiletics students to consider the art and skill involved in preaching and to effectively use their embodied presence to connect with their hearers.

Fitzgerald, Rev. Casey, www.faithandwonder.com. (This blog is a record of storytelling at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, VA, and has many creative ideas and techniques for learning stories.)

Giftedforleadership.com (*Christianity Today International* blog for women in ministry)

I have written the following blog posts on the topic of scripture in worship.

- “Playing with Scripture,” July 23, 2015
- “Playing with Scripture Helps Us Remember,” July 27, 2015
- “How to Playfully Remember God’s Story,” July 30, 2015

Hearon, Holly E. and Philip Ruge-Jones, eds. *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*. Cascade Books, 2009.

Miller, George, “Proclaiming the Word: Does Your Parish Need to Raise the Bar for Lectors?” Catholic Online, www.catholic.org/news, May 31, 2012.

The Network of Biblical Storytelling, International, www.nbsint.org

- YouTube Resources including “Top Five Things to Remember When Telling Bible Stories” and “Things to Avoid when Telling Bible Stories” (#BibleStoriesRock)
- 2017 Festival Gathering, August 3-5, Washington, DC

Reformed Worship, www.reformedworship.org

- Baker, Kenneth, “When You Read Scripture: Suggestions for Helping Lay Readers be More Effective,” September 1991.
- Beeners, W.J., “Getting the Story Off the Page: Advice on Putting Life into Scripture Reading,” September 1990.
- Lawrence, Joy-Elizabeth, “A Word to the Wise: A Series on James’ Letter to the Church,” March 2016; “Scripture and Poetic Imagination,” July 15, 2016 (Reformed Worship blog)

Ward, Richard F. and David J. Trobisch. *Bringing the Word to Life: Engaging the New Testament through Performing It*. Eerdmans, 2013.

This volume focuses on the opportunity for people to hear the New Testament “again for the first time” as it is performed. The authors examine how, in ancient times, manuscripts were a vehicle for sound, not objects to stand alone, comparing the New Testament manuscript to a piece of music; to fully experience music, you play it. This book explains how performance criticism (studying a text by performing it) can guide our understanding and experience of scripture and ends with techniques for practicing this. This would be a helpful resource for churches that want to dig deeper into the riches of biblical storytelling and performance, and for those who want to discover an historic apologetic for the practice.

Postscript . . .

A Blessing for Scripture Speakers and Hearers

Blessed are the ones who invest their time and talent
into reading and telling God's story to believers and unbelievers.
And blessed are the ones who hear and take to heart what is heard.²

² Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence, in the spirit of “Worshipping the Triune God” (Worship Sourcebook, 2nd ed. page 769)