

Two Cheers for the Lectionary... and One for Sermon Series

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In recent years I have become a “two cheers for the lectionary” kind of preacher. After preaching regularly from the lectionary for some time, I now depart from it rather liberally. The biggest reason is that I have been preaching in my current congregation for over sixteen years, which translates into the sixth go-round with the lectionary texts. Certain texts may give rise to a fresh take every three years. But after reading some of the lectionary texts, I found myself saying, “I kind of like what I said about this text three [or six, or nine, or twelve, or fifteen] years ago.” Other preachers may have something important and engaging to say about the Gerasene demoniac every time he comes around in the cycle (Mark 5:1-20, Proper 7C), but they are probably more imaginative preachers than I am. As for me, I am relieved to see him ride the lectionary carousel and, for once, not get off.

These days I preach more sermon series. The two sermons which follow, “The Faces of Greed,” and “Reveling in Romance” are both from a series of sermons I preached during Lent 2010 on the Seven Deadly Sins. The series provided me and my congregation with a helpful (and, dare I say, fun?) way to talk about sin during that season of penance.

There are dangers in preaching too many sermon series, of course. One danger is that such an approach can take us out of earshot of the biblical text. But that is not necessarily the case. One year, when our church building was undergoing a complete reconstruction, we could not use our sanctuary and had to worship in the diaspora of our church building. During that time, I preached a nine-month-long series on the Sermon on the Mount. I figured that, while we were building on the very foundations of the church building, it made sense to focus on such a foundational text. Besides, in that time, when so much else was in upheaval, I thought it might increase the congregation’s sense of dislocation if they were summarily plunked down in Lamentations one week and then introduced to 2 Timothy the next. The Sermon on the Mount seemed to serve as a kind of plumb line for us during that time of construction. As challenging as that sermon is, returning to it each week kept us properly oriented and aligned.