

*Crafting a Sermon Series: Contemporary Approaches to Structuring Preaching Over Time**

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*How should contemporary clergy organize their preaching over the long haul?
Is the lectionary still the best bet, or is it growing tired? Is it possible to design
a sermon series that has both theological integrity and cultural relevance?*

One of the great joys and burdens of preaching is Monday morning. Completing another turn in the pulpit brings a sense of fulfillment and respite. Worshipping together as a community of faith immerses us again in God's profound grace. And yet, the stone that the preacher rolled up the hill is once again at the bottom. On Monday mornings, preachers face the inevitable return of Sunday, and with it the question: "What next?" What biblical text will I study this week? What congregational concerns will I attempt to address? What am I going to preach about now?

These questions have been around for thousands of years. In response, communities of faith have developed calendars of readings. They have sub-divided the witness of Scripture so as to structure time in a liturgical manner. These calendars provide a clear answer to the question "What's next?" We can see this practice on display in the Gospel of Luke. When Jesus walks into the synagogue in Nazareth, he is handed the scroll of Isaiah.¹ He does not request Isaiah but participates in the custom of teaching from the text appointed for the day. You might even say that on this occasion, Jesus preached from a lectionary—a calendar of readings.

In North America, many Christian traditions do not prescribe or follow a lectionary. For those that do, the most popular calendar structuring weekly preaching over the last forty years has been the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). This essay explores an alternative to the RCL: the locally designed sermon series. While the RCL will remain a valued homiletical option for many preachers, the use of clergy-devised local sermon series can provide a healthy alternative to (or occasional supplement for) the RCL in organizing preaching over the long haul.

The Revised Common Lectionary

The popularity of the RCL is well deserved. In existence in various forms since 1969, the RCL offers a set of readings (Gospel, Epistle, Old Testament, and Psalm) that follows the liturgical year. These texts expose preachers and congregations to the breadth of Scripture while building a sturdy liturgical scaffold for preaching over time.

The primary logic of the RCL is Christological.² It provides an annual, cyclical framework for exploring the life and teachings of Jesus with a congregation. As such, the RCL often uses a passage from one of the four gospels as the focal text and then chooses other biblical texts as evocative conversation partners for this central passage.³ In the RCL, this Christological pattern is most clearly evident in the Advent-

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Christmas-Epiphany cycle and the Lent-Holy Week-Easter cycle.

While primary, Christology is not the only theological impulse guiding the RCL. The RCL also provides texts for doctrinal feast days (e.g., Trinity Sunday) and other liturgical observances (e.g., Ash Wednesday). Throughout most of the year (Ordinary Time), the RCL offers a schedule of continuous reading (*lectio continua*) that leads congregations and preachers on an uninterrupted trip through various Epistles and Old Testament books without trying to forge a connection between these passages and the Gospel text for the day.

Preachers working with the RCL realize numerous benefits:

- It streamlines the process of text selection.
- It leads preachers and congregations to encounter portions of Scripture they might otherwise miss or avoid.
- It follows the contours of the liturgical year—the Christian calendar.
- Its recognized framework facilitates communal study of biblical texts with colleagues.
- It can provide a sense of Christian unity across a wider community. When preachers in various churches within a locality address the same set of texts, they plant the seeds for (and equip parishioners to have) engaging conversations about the faith in the broader public square.
- Finally, the RCL is extremely well resourced by periodicals, commentaries, hymnals and an ever-expanding menu of helpful websites and blogs.

Despite these many benefits, the format of the RCL leaves it open to legitimate and important criticisms. In selecting biblical texts based on a narrow set of theological criteria, in cutting passages down to a “readable” size, and in deciding what texts are best set in conversation with other “parallel” texts and liturgical days, the lectionary inevitably ignores a hefty chunk of Scripture. The choices made by the RCL, in the words of Thomas G. Long, result in “the practical constriction of the full canon of Scripture in the preaching of the church.”⁴

To combat this “constriction,” Long urges preachers to read both before and after the passages assigned by the RCL in order to get a sense of the assigned text in the larger flow of Scripture in which it is found.⁵ Seeking to address related concerns, Timothy Matthew Slemmons has authored *Year D: A Quadrennial Supplement to the Revised Common Lectionary*. This helpful addition to the RCL exposes preachers and congregations to portions of Scripture (like the psalms of lament and apocalyptic material) that are sorely under-represented in the RCL.⁶

Although good faith attempts have been made to fix the RCL’s selective engagement with Scripture by expanding the current set of passages and providing alternative reading tracks, three persistent criticisms continue to be voiced by contemporary clergy.

First, preachers complain that when they return for the third or fourth time to the same set of lectionary texts, the creative process can feel forced. I recently heard a preacher confess that she began to study the familiar RCL passages for the upcoming Advent season with a sense of weariness. In response to such comments, RCL proponents often assert that biblical texts have a surplus of meaning, and as such, no one sermon (or series of sermons) can exhaust a particular passage.

This is of course true. Yet it provides little relief to preachers who report a growing sense of tedium after following the RCL for repeated cycles. The above-mentioned

preacher felt that her options were either a) plowing the same ground again, or b) trying to develop obscure interpretations for her listeners. Exasperated, she asked a group of colleagues, “Does anybody have a viable alternative for Advent that will keep both me and the congregation engaged?” We will return to her important question.

A second criticism of the RCL is that the Sunday-to-Sunday flow of texts can, during certain key seasons, feel bewildering to those who have less grounding in the overall biblical narrative. For example, in Advent, the RCL hopscoches from predictions of Christ’s return in Revelation back to Old Testament messianic texts and then forward to John the Baptist before finally getting to Mary and Joseph. At times, the RCL requires that preachers spend significant time connecting the dots—explaining why this particular text has been chosen for this particular day and how it relates to the texts being used in previous and subsequent Sundays. This energy can be time well spent. While it may seem confusing to listeners, there are blessings to be had in exploring the contours of Advent hope as laid out in the RCL. At other times, however, preachers can feel that this is second-order homiletical work. In other words, there are times when the lectionary seems to depend on listeners who have a fairly intimate knowledge of Scripture. Increasingly, this is not the case. As such, preachers argue that before they can unpack the theological logic of an Advent journey through the RCL, they need to assist the congregation to find a solid footing in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke.

A third persistent criticism of the RCL is that the liturgical assumptions forming the backbone of the lectionary pay little heed to local realities. Yes, an interesting conversation can almost always be cultivated between any random biblical text and a preacher’s local context. More often than not, however, the hermeneutical gymnastics necessary to forge such a connection prove distracting to listeners. There are times that call for a biblical text with a clear and more direct connection to issues being faced by a local community than is provided by the RCL.

Preachers know this in their bones. Every day, clergy think about how their sermons can faithfully support and advance things like a community-wide conversation on race and faith, a building campaign to renovate a sanctuary, or a new youth ministry initiative. These concerns lead us back to our core question: How can a preacher craft a short-term, locally focused preaching plan that will speak with relevance and truth? How does one go about designing a faithful sermon series?

Sermon Series Design

Designing a cohesive and engaging sermon series takes time. Many contemporary preachers report that they regularly dedicate blocks of time during the summer and after major holidays to draft upcoming sermon series. This investment in homiletical research and design is crucial to pulling together a blueprint that will 1) embody a clear goal for the series, 2) provide a logical progression of ideas (or at least help avoid redundancy), and 3) provide a jumping off place for the preacher over the coming weeks in preparing each of the sermons.

As a preacher begins the design process, the following questions may prove helpful:

- What type of series am I designing? What approach is best suited for the subject matter I have in mind and the congregational context in which I am embedded?

- When should I schedule it? How long will the series be?
- How do I select the biblical texts that will undergird the series? How do I pair biblical texts with topics?
- What other congregation events or activities might help support or might grow out of the sermon series?
- How do I publicize the series?

To start answering these questions, let's survey the types of localized sermon series being offered by contemporary preachers.⁷

The "Hot" Topic

There are times in ministry when pressing issues and questions in the wider culture warrant more concentrated homiletical attention than a single sermon. In these moments, taking our cues from educators who are adept at curriculum design, preachers may decide to design a sermon series that will unpack the various theological and cultural facets of a complicated and contentious issue for listeners. Engaging in pedagogy with a purpose, these preachers seek to equip people in faith communities for graceful, theologically informed dialogue with each other and with their neighbors in the public square.

Given our natural interest in "hot" topics (e.g., income inequality, race and criminal justice, or same-sex marriage), it is no surprise when they quickly become fodder for countless news programs, editorials, and water cooler conversations. These omnipresent conversations mean that these issues are often at the forefront of people's minds when they arrive for weekly worship. What is a preacher to do with this potentially volatile combination of conviction and curiosity? Should I preach on this subject? And if so, how?

In recent years, some preachers have chosen to dial down their prophetic voice, citing recent surveys by The Pew Foundation in which congregants state that they disapprove of preachers who take overly "political" positions in the pulpit.⁸ These surveys warrant close study. What exactly do parishioners mean by "political" sermons? According to Pew, listeners are most distressed when preachers identify a particular political party or political movement as being "righteous" while assessing another party or candidate as "unrighteous."

Savvy participants in the wider culture, sermon listeners see religious endorsement for a politician, a platform, or a party as unwise. Over the years, congregants have watched parties and politicians exploit voters' passions in unscrupulous ways. They do not want their clergy to be lured into a tainted relationship with the powers and principalities. This does not mean, however, that listeners want their preachers to fall silent on controversial issues. On the contrary, Pew reports that the faithful are deeply interested in hearing preachers grapple with the issues of the day. They yearn to be equipped to think about these topics through the lens of their faith.

With that in mind, preachers bold enough to address a controversial issue in a sermon series are not simply offering theological and cultural analysis; they are also modeling the ethics of Christian communication for their congregation. They demonstrate courage in breaking the silence. At their best, they show forth grace and love even as they pursue justice. They lift up the values of diversity by honoring differing points of view and refusing to offer caricatures. Even as these preachers present what is theologically at stake with clarity and passion, they provide powerful models for

how Christians can engage each other (and their neighbors) in difficult issues.

The Expository Series

All sermon series do not necessarily use a contemporary topic as a point of departure. Today, some of the most common (and most popular) series take their cues from the expository *lectio continua* tradition practiced by such ancient luminaries as St. Augustine.

The expository series focuses on a particular biblical book (e.g., Exodus) or a section of a book, (e.g., patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis 12-50). An expository series may also focus on a genre (e.g., the parables of Jesus) or multiple genres grouped under a larger literary category (e.g., psalms).

When sketching the blueprint for an expository sermon series, the overall design is strengthened when a preacher establishes a clear goal for the series. Is the purpose pedagogical? Does the preacher plan to do a close reading of a biblical text to better acquaint listeners with a discrete portion of Scripture? (Augustine famously preached thirteen sermons on John 16!) Or is the goal to assist listeners in adopting a particular genre (like the psalms) for use in their devotional lives? Or is there some other purpose?

In an expository series, preachers often seek to expose congregants to the depth and variety manifest by such texts. Again, taking the book of Psalms as an example, the preacher might consider using psalms that are representative of various sub-genres (e.g., an individual lament, a communal lament, a psalm of ascent, a psalm of deliverance, a psalm of thanksgiving, and so on). A sermon series on the parables would, in a similar fashion, do well to present a variety of different types of parables, thus exposing listeners to the rich landscape of this literary form.

The Topical/Expository Hybrid

Another common series format results when a preacher places a local theological question or issue in conversation with a particularly well-suited biblical conversation partner. Imagine a congregation grappling with a set of questions related to ecclesial identity: What is the church? What is our relationship to the surrounding culture? What ethics should govern our interactions with each other and the world around us? Using an expository/topical hybrid model, the preacher might decide to preach a sermon series that wrestles with these critical questions while journeying through the Bible's account of the early church—The Acts of the Apostles.

Or, imagine a church that is struggling with a loss of influence and prestige in relation to the culture, while at the same time expressing concerns about fragmentation in the social fabric and the plight of the poor. This pastor may well decide that a journey through the book of Jeremiah might afford her with an opportunity to address some of the community's questions while at the same time equipping congregants with a crucial resource from our tradition.

The Congregational Response Series

Increasingly, preachers use a sermon series to respond to topics, texts, or concerns that are directly submitted by congregation members. Contemporary clergy have constructed sermon series based on "Your Favorite Biblical Passages," "Ten Questions Our Youth Have for the Church," and "Our Eight Favorite Hymns." Obviously, series

like this work best when the congregation is broadly solicited for input and provided with accessible avenues for submitting responses.

The congregational response sermon series provides clergy with a concrete way of accomplishing something that Thomas G. Long encourages preachers to pursue with intentionality. We must not forget, he writes, “that we rise to the pulpit from the pew”—bringing with us listeners’ questions and concerns so that they might be placed in conversation with the Christian tradition.⁹ Thomas Are, Jr., pastor of Village Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, observes that this approach to preaching embodies the “incarnational impulse” that produced the New Testament. The biblical writers all saw that word as becoming flesh in unique ways in their context of ministry. Matthew edits Mark because he has different people in his pews and needs to respond to their particular questions and concerns. Paul’s letters are theological responses to very concrete issues in very different communities. A series that begins with the congregation as a starting point is an extension of our tradition’s deep belief that we must always be responding theologically to the concerns on the street and in the pews.

The Doctrinal Series

Seeing both classic and contemporary formulations of Christian doctrine as guiding expressions of people’s faith and ethical lives, today’s preachers are also developing sermon series framed around doctrinal issues. Some have worked their way, clause by clause, through classic documents like The Apostles’ Creed and The Nicene Creed. Others have taken a more contemporary document like The Belhar Confession (a statement written by churches resisting the apartheid regime in South Africa) as an opportunity to preach about the circumstances giving rise to the faith statement as well as an exposition of the theological themes contained in the document. Still others have taken a doctrine like the Trinity and framed a series that walks with listeners on a journey from the earliest formulations of this core doctrine all the way to contemporary understandings of God’s inherently relational nature. Finally, some contemporary preachers have once again embraced classic creeds like The Heidelberg Catechism, recognizing that confessions like this were structured with preaching over the long term in mind. The Heidelberg Catechism provides a set of doctrinal sermon topics meant to last a preacher one calendar year.

The Liturgical Series

While the RCL has a wonderful track record connecting listeners with the rhythms of the liturgical year, there are sermon series that emphasize elements of communal worship that do not have a natural home in the RCL. Earlier, we took note of a question posed by a preacher who felt weary as she contemplated one more pass through a rather familiar set of Advent texts: “Is there another way to do this creatively and faithfully?” There is good news for this preacher to be found in locally developed sermon series; for it turns out, there are actually numerous faithful ways to walk through Advent.

Jon Walton, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, developed an innovative Advent sermon series after hearing Tom Long describe the Gospel writers as people living at the four corners of the same intersection, but in very different types of houses. Running with this, Walton designed a series that looks sequentially

at the incarnation from the perspectives of each of the four Gospels. Instead of sticking with one Gospel throughout Advent (as the RCL tends to do), Walton imagined what Christmas might look like first at Mark's house, then at Matthew's house, then at Luke's house, and finally at John's house. In each case, Walton pictures a home festooned and populated in a way that reflects the incarnational theology espoused by that particular gospel.

Mark's house is austere and focuses on the adult Jesus and his crucifixion. Luke's house is open to all sorts of people—boisterous low-income shepherds and singing women. Matthew hosts a massive family reunion; everyone is gathered around a table, poring over a genealogy. And so on. Throughout the series, Walton's creative twist proves engaging, but it is also theologically eye-opening. Listeners are given a chance to contemplate how each Gospel anticipates the arrival of Jesus in a unique way. The implicit question undergirding the series is this: What house feels like home to you? What is your incarnational theology? Walton's approach to Advent has been adopted and customized by numerous other clergy around the country.

Other preachers seeking a liturgically focused approach to structuring their preaching over time have developed sermon series focused on the elements of worship. In other words, they have preached a sermon on "The Call to Worship," a sermon on "Hymn Singing," a sermon on "The Prayer of Confession," a sermon on "The Offering" (Stewardship Sunday?), and so on. Another popular approach involves a series of sermons that exegetes the furniture and architecture of worship: a sermon on the baptismal font, the communion table, the pulpit, the nave, and on around the space of worship.

The Historical Series

The history of God's people is another field providing fertile ground for preachers contemplating sermon series. At Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Dr. Otis Moss III has developed a powerful annual series that coincides with Black History Month. Over four weeks, Moss traces the route of the *Maaafa*. *Maaafa* is a Swahili word meaning "disaster" or "holocaust." The term has come to refer to the history of the slave trade and the long legacy of atrocities against the African diaspora that has happened in its wake.

On the first Sunday of Black History Month, Moss begins his sermon series in West Africa—in a country from which people were abducted into slavery. Using the language and music of the chosen country to set the liturgical context, Moss preaches a sermon that tells the story of a specific West African culture that was afflicted by violent marauders who kidnapped its children. On the second Sunday of the month, Moss follows the enslaved persons as they cross the ocean in chains and arrive in the West Indies. On the third Sunday, the sermon and the liturgy follow the enslaved people to a location in the American South. On the fourth Sunday, the sermon follows African Americans on the Great Migration (1910-1970)—moving from the rural South to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West. On each Sunday, the music used in worship mirrors the context of the journey, beginning with traditional African, moving to Caribbean, then turning to the roots of American Gospel, and finally considering the Blues. In each sermon in the series, says Moss, "I seek to connect listeners to an ancestral heritage in which God has stood by us through one of the most horrific events in human history."

Other Options

Some preachers have designed sermon series that are ecclesial in nature: a series on the “Marks of the Church,” a series on Reformation figures, a series on the founding of a church with subsequent sermons on milestone events and challenging moments in that church’s history. Preachers have constructed sermon series that address questions facing religion and science. Others have preached multiple sermons on stewardship during that season of the church year.

I recently developed a series on idolatry. Citing Paul Tillich’s observation that God is the name we give to our “ultimate concern,” I asked the congregation to think about the ultimate concerns that shaped their own ethics and the ethics of those with whom they worked, went to school, and lived. The congregation’s thoughtful responses were paired with classic biblical texts on idolatry. The result was a series entitled “New York Gods.”

Other preachers have modeled local sermon series on the oft-revived and popular *Christian Century* articles entitled “How My Mind Has Changed.” In this series, editors have asked famous theologians and scholars to reflect on the courses of their careers and to lift up places where their thoughts have changed on a matter of some significance. One preacher remarked that his congregation found that this particular series served to both humanize the church’s clergy and liberate their own faith. Truly, the possibilities for creative and faithful sermon series are limited only by a preacher’s imagination.

How many weeks and when?

I suggest that the maximum length for a sermon series is twelve weeks. This span of time is proposed as sufficient to giving the preacher and the congregation time to adequately explore a topic or set of biblical texts before (hopefully) either party becomes fatigued with the subject. The framers of the RCL (and even further back, the Christian liturgical year) had their own sense of the Church’s communal attention span when they set seven-week periods for Advent/Christmas, Lent, and Eastertide.

There is wisdom in keeping homegrown series at least as focused as the RCL. Indeed, sermon series do not need to be multiple-month endeavors. Some series are best suited to laser-beam focus. I once preached a two-week series on the religious freedom clause in the First Amendment of the US Constitution. At the time it was a hot topic in the news, and people appreciated a quick faith-based perspective on the issue.

All in all, when determining the length of a sermon series, it is the preacher’s responsibility to consider the complexity of the subject matter, to gauge the congregation’s level of interest in the topic, and to think strategically about the church’s wider calendar.

When is the best time in the church year to preach a sermon series? Some preachers choose to work out of the RCL during Lent/Holy Week/Easter and preach sermon series during the Ordinary Time of summer and fall, during Epiphany, and during Eastertide. Others develop sermon series exclusively for the summer months. Still others organize their entire annual worship schedule around a progression of sermon series of various lengths. Deciding on the timing and frequency of sermon series in a local context, preachers should keep in mind that each series requires advanced

planning and study.

How do I connect texts and topics?

Connecting the topics of a series to texts for the sermons is one of the most challenging aspects in designing a sermon series. In theory, preachers search for texts that will speak in an inspiring and relevant way to the issue at hand. In practice—facing the entire corpus of Scripture—preachers often default to their own favorite texts when seeking a conversation partner for a contemporary issue. In some cases, a familiar text that pops to mind may be the preacher’s best option; yet, we shouldn’t be too quick to step back from one of the clear strengths of the old RCL. Namely, there are many powerful, enlightening texts that fall outside our personal canons. These passages can bless the preacher and the congregation in untold ways if we have the mettle to engage them.

So, how do preachers go about finding relevant passages outside our standard catalogue of texts? Again, I think we can take our cues from Tom Long.¹⁰ Read broadly! Imagine that you are preparing a sermon on stem cell research. Where might you find a biblical text to inform this conversation? If you do an online search for “biblical passages on stem cell research,” you will discover sites that identify a “definitive passage”—a text that someone believes makes clear God’s will on the matter. Sometimes these searches are helpful. More often than not, though, the Internet’s “definitive” guidance comes freighted with its own set of peculiar hermeneutical contortions.

How else might we read broadly? Otis Moss III advocates that preachers adopt an old-school pastoral discipline that will regularly take us into unfamiliar territory and give the Spirit a chance to enter into the homiletical process: read the Bible devotionally, read it regularly, read it sequentially, read it cover to cover, and then start over again. This practice, Moss contends, has resulted in him regularly finding fresh (and often uncommon) texts that speak in surprisingly relevant ways to God’s people and the issues of the day.

Another way to find relevant passages of Scripture is to solicit advice from experts in your own congregation. Ask a doctor what her perspective is on stem cell research and inquire if she has reflected on it from a faith stance. See if there is a particular biblical passage that comes to mind when she thinks about the issue. This is also a good time to email clergy friends and former professors. I find, more often than not, that the most interesting and challenging suggestions for connecting a topic and a text come from thoughtful friends and personal devotional reading and not from Internet searches or biblical concordances.

What do you do when the Bible seems to offer conflicting testimony about a subject? Honestly, I advise that you highlight this fact. Listeners either know or should be reminded that the biblical corpus is a complex tapestry—the product of faithful people from vastly different communities and cultures over the course of thousands of years. When we avoid biblical texts that already hold a place in people’s minds in regard to a particular subject (e.g., human sexuality), these texts will be quoted to us by congregants on their way out the church door. Why not allow the sermon to recognize with candor the fact that these texts frequently come to mind in regard to this issue? Then, the preacher can begin to deepen people’s understanding of these texts too.

What other congregation events/activities might help support or might grow out of the sermon series?

Sermon series present great opportunities for preachers to think creatively about ways to tie in to events in education, interfaith dialogue, outreach, service, and conversations/interactions with neighboring churches and with the local community.

Again, when it comes to controversial issues, preachers are encouraged to remember that a sermon is primarily a one-way mode of communication. It is a monologue. The more controversial the topic, the more important it is for the church to provide a time of ongoing conversation for all members of the community immediately after worship. In advance of a sermon on a “hot” topic, it can be very helpful to schedule a meal and to train table hosts who will be prepared to draw listeners into a space of candid, safe, and gracious dialogue about the issue.

How do I publicize the series?

Convey your excitement about the series to listeners, and they will respond! Preachers should begin publicizing an upcoming sermon series at least two weeks before it begins. Using church newsletters, website banners, emails, and social media, the preacher should craft a short paragraph explaining why he or she chose this sermon series for this moment in time. Preachers should also, throughout the research process, keep their eyes peeled for an image, or series of images, that captures and illustrates the series’ focus. Finally, clergy may even want to recommend some advance reading—like an accessible article—to whet the congregation’s spiritual appetite for the subject matter and to begin the larger conversation that the series will nurture.

In Sum

The locally crafted sermon series can provide an exciting, theologically relevant, culturally-and-contextually aware alternative to the Revised Common Lectionary. Yes, creating a series is labor intensive, but—done well—these series can 1) engage preachers in fresh textual study, 2) give congregational questions and concerns new status, and 3) help all participate in conversations of consequence regarding God’s activity and claim on our lives.

Notes

1 Luke 4:17.

2 The RCL was developed by an ecumenical council, *The Consultation on Common Texts* (CCL). The CCL’s introductory article, “The Revised Common Lectionary” (1992), remains one of the most helpful explanations of the theological logic of the RCL. It can be found on their website: commontexts.org.

3 “The Revised Common Lectionary,” IV. 20. “The Old Testament passage is perceived as a parallel, a contrast, or as a type leading to its fulfillment in the gospel.”

4 Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 72.

5 Long, *Witness*, p 73.

6 Timothy Matthew Slemmons, *Year D: A Quadrennial Supplement to the Revised Common Lectionary* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012). Others have assembled *lectio continua* alternatives to the RCL, a wonderful example of which is Luther Seminary’s *Narrative Lectionary*.

7 In the section that follows I survey a number of different types of sermon series that I have heard described by colleagues in ministry over the last ten years. I am especially indebted to Thomas Are, Jr. at Village Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Kansas; Otis Moss III at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois; Agnes Norfleet at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania; and Jon Walton at First Presbyterian Church in New York City for sharing their creative ideas.

8 Pew Research Center, “Public Sees Religion’s Influence Waning: Growing Appetite for Religion in Politics,” Sept. 22, 2014 (<http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/09/Religion-Politics-09-24-PDF-for-web.pdf>). In this poll of over 2,000 Americans, a majority indicated that they were interested in hearing their clergy speak out on controversial social issues; while 63% stated that they did not want their clergy to endorse a particular candidate or party.

9 Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 12.

10 Ibid., 63-64.