

Year A, Volume 2

Season after Pentecost



Connections

Worship Companion

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Introduction

This is not a book of prayers—
at least not yet.

These words will not become prayers
until the Holy Spirit breathes them,
until the body of Christ speaks and hears them,
until the people of God live them
in acts of service and love.

These words come from different people
in different places of ministry—
pastors and poets,
students and scholars,
activists and artists,
evangelists and educators,
bakers and baristas,
mission workers and musicians.

They have different voices,
and those voices will resonate
with different worshipers
in different ways.

It will be up to you,
as a planner and leader of worship,
to make these words sing:

to pray them
among the beloved people of God
with honesty, passion, wonder, and grace;

to enact them
as the whole body of Christ
with heart, mind, soul, and strength;

to transform them
through the gifts of the Spirit,
with rhythm, color, texture, and taste.

You are encouraged, then,
even challenged,
even required
to find your own voice,
to inhabit these texts,
to adapt them as needed,
so that these words
may become the prayers
of your people
in your place
for the sake of the world,
all people,
in every place.

Only then
will these words become prayers.

Only then
will they rise like incense before God,
joining the intercession
of our great high priest,
Christ Jesus,
who still teaches us to pray.

David Gambrell

How to Use This Book

Three kinds of materials are provided in this volume. First, at the beginning of each major section is a short essay titled “Making Connections.” These brief passages of commentary have several purposes:

- they introduce the primary theological themes of a given time in the Christian year;
- they highlight a particular biblical text, drawn from the lectionary, that may be used as a kind of lens for magnifying and examining the themes of the season;
- they point to distinctive features of the lectionary cycle included in this volume; and

- they offer practical and pastoral guidance for leaders as they seek to prepare faithful, thoughtful, creative, and engaging worship for the people of God.

These essays can be used in discussion with worship committees, planning teams, or church staff groups to promote biblical study, inspire theological reflection, and inform liturgical action.

Second, each section includes a collection of seasonal/repeating resources. These are liturgical texts intended for use during a certain span of time in the Christian year, whether occasionally or for several weeks in a row. Specifically, these resources include the following acts of worship:

Confession and Pardon
 Prayer for Illumination
 Thanksgiving for Baptism
 Great Thanksgiving
 Prayer after Communion
 Prayer of Thanksgiving (for the dedication of the offering when the Eucharist is not celebrated)
 Blessing

These texts are somewhat broader and more general in their theological content and liturgical language, and they are designed for multiple uses within a liturgical season or period of Ordinary Time. They promote diachronic (meaning “through time”) connections from one Sunday to the next, deriving their benefit from regular engagement with the church’s tradition as people return to worship from week to week. They emphasize central convictions of Christian faith and life, supporting the kind of faith formation that takes place through sustained, long-term participation in worship. These texts are especially connected with the celebration of the sacraments.

Third, there is a set of resources for each Sunday or festival in the Christian year. Specifically, these resources include the following elements of the service:

Opening Sentences (or Call to Worship)
 Prayer of the Day (or Gathering Prayer)
 Invitation to Discipleship
 Prayers of Intercession
 Invitation to Offering
 Invitation to the Table
 Charge

These texts are somewhat narrower and more specific in their theological content and liturgical language, and they are designed for use on a given Sunday

or festival in the Christian year. They promote synchronic (meaning “same time”) connections between the liturgy and the lectionary, deriving their benefit from flashes of insight that collect around a common word, image, or phrase from the biblical texts for the day. They emphasize particular practices of Christian faith and life, supporting the kind of faith formation that takes place in more concentrated, short-term experiences of worship. These texts are especially connected with the proclamation of the word.

By combining the **seasonal/repeating resources (in bold type)** with the *Sunday/festival elements (in italics)*, as well as other elements not provided in this resource (in regular type), as indicated below, worship planners will be able to assemble complete orders of worship for the Lord’s Day.

GATHERING

Opening Sentences

Hymn, Psalm, or Spiritual Song

Prayer of the Day

Confession and Pardon

WORD

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Sermon

Hymn, Psalm, or Spiritual Song

Affirmation of Faith

Invitation to Discipleship

Thanksgiving for Baptism

Prayers of Intercession

EUCCHARIST

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Invitation to the Table

Great Thanksgiving

Communion

Prayer after Communion

[IF THE EUCCHARIST IS OMITTED]

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Prayer of Thanksgiving

SENDING

Hymn, Psalm, or Spiritual Song

Blessing and *Charge*

This order of worship is offered as one example. The actions and elements of worship may of course be arranged in a variety of other ways according

to denominational patterns and congregational practices. This resource is also available in ebook format, from which users can copy and paste liturgies for use in bulletins and other worship materials.

Lectionary Readings

This resource is designed to support and equip users of the three-year Revised Common Lectionary (1992), developed by the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts as an adaptation and expansion of the Common Lectionary (1983). The contents and composition of this volume reflect that emphasis, consistent with the Connections commentary series.

However, this resource also includes supplemental liturgical materials for the four-year Narrative Lectionary (2010), designed by faculty at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Taking advantage of overlap between the two systems, with these supplemental materials, this resource will address (at least obliquely) all of the primary texts of the Narrative Lectionary over the course of its six volumes.

See the Scripture index for the list of the lectionary readings supported in this volume (in canonical order). A comprehensive biblical index for both lectionaries will be published when all six volumes of the *Connections Worship Companion* have been completed.

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Key to Symbols and Abbreviations

Regular	Leader
Bold	People
<i>Italics</i>	Rubric describing liturgical action or identifying options
. . .	Time for individual prayers, spoken or silent
<i>or</i>	Alternate readings or responses

**Resources for the Revised
Common Lectionary**



SEASON AFTER PENTECOST



Making Connections

In the time after Pentecost, Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary follows the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew. The lectionary sets the stage for this journey on Trinity Sunday with the Great Commission, Jesus' final words in Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Then through the rest of Year A, it presents the example of Jesus' own travels from Galilee to Jerusalem, making disciples and teaching them the ways of the realm of God. Depending on the date of Easter (and the subsequent dates of Pentecost and Trinity Sunday), we join the Gospel narrative at some point between Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–7:29) and his instructions for the mission of the Twelve (Matt. 9:35–11:1). Significant and distinctive passages include the parable of the house built on rock (Matt. 7:21–29), an invitation to take up the yoke of Christ (Matt. 11:16–19, 25–30), stories about seeds and soil (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23), the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:31–33, 44–52), Jesus and Peter walking on the water (Matt. 14:22–33), the call to forgive seventy-seven times (Matt. 18:21–35), laborers in a vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16), and a lesson about the coin used for taxes (Matt. 22:15–22). Worship planners might find creative ways to use these visual symbols in the time after Pentecost. In the final weeks of the Christian year, the lectionary readings anticipate Advent by highlighting eschatological concerns: a call for vigilance (Matt. 25:1–13), a parable about faithful stewardship (Matt. 25:14–30), and an account of final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). This presents an opportunity to preach and pray about the nature of Christian hope as we watch for Christ's coming again in glory.

There are two tracks of readings from the Old Testament in the time after Pentecost: the *semicontinuous* readings, which move in sequence through major stories and themes of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the *complementary* readings, which are connected with the events and images of the Gospel readings. The semicontinuous readings in Year A focus on the earliest accounts of the people of God, from the five books of the *Torah* (Genesis through Deuteronomy) through the entry into the land of Canaan (Joshua and Judges). Roughly half of these readings (thirteen weeks) feature the ancestral narratives of Genesis, including the stories of Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and

Rebekah; Jacob, Esau, Leah, and Rachel; and Joseph and his siblings. Prominent themes include promise, providence, faith, sacrifice, betrayal, sibling rivalry, liberation, law, and covenant. In this time after Pentecost, worship planners might find imaginative ways to review the “family album” of our forebears in the faith. The complementary readings in Year A, selected in coordination with the Gospel readings, come from a great array of Old Testament books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. These intertextual connections demonstrate how the whole canon of Scripture bears witness to Jesus as God’s Word made flesh.

In the design of the Revised Common Lectionary, psalms and canticles (other biblical songs) are intended to be musical and prayerful responses to the first reading (typically Hebrew Scripture, or Acts during the season of Easter). Preachers will find strong connections between the first reading and the psalm or canticle; however, remember that the psalms and canticles are specific to their Old Testament track (semicontinuous or complementary) and thus not interchangeable. Worship planners might use the lectionary psalms and canticles in guiding the choice of hymns for the day, drawing on metrical settings of the psalms, for example.

The second readings present a series of sequential selections from New Testament epistles, featuring Romans (sixteen weeks), Philippians (four weeks), and 1 Thessalonians (five weeks). The extended use of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome offers leaders a chance to highlight the important theological themes of sin and salvation, justification by grace through faith, the nature of Christian hope, the relationship between Israel and the church, and the transforming work of God in the lives of believers. Worship planners might be attentive for ways to accent these topics in the second half of the Christian year.

At the beginning of the time after Pentecost, on Trinity Sunday of Year A, we hear the promise of Jesus: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). On the Reign of Christ Sunday, as we come to the conclusion of Year A and the time after Pentecost, Jesus reveals that he has indeed been with us all along, but in a surprising way—whenever we care for those who are hungry and thirsty, strangers or naked, sick or in prison. “Truly I tell you,” Jesus says, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). Through our year with Matthew we have come to know, trust, and worship the living God who dwells among us in humble human form—the one we call Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Seasonal/Repeating Resources

These resources are intended for regular use throughout the time after Pentecost.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

1 **Based on Genesis; especially appropriate for Trinity Sunday through Proper 15**

The confession and pardon may be led from the baptismal font.

We are dust,
and to dust we shall return.
Yet into this dust
God has breathed the Spirit of life.
Into this dust
God pours out the gift of grace.

Trusting in God's grace, let us confess our sin.

The confession may begin with a time of silence for personal prayer.

**God of our ancestors,
you have remained faithful to us
from generation to generation.
But we have broken our promises.
We hear your plans for us
and we laugh in disbelief.
We test your patience
and question your providence.
We bargain away our birthright
and grasp at what is not ours.
We succumb to jealous rivalry
and betray those we love.**

**Forgive us, we pray.
Recreate us as your people,
and restore us to your image.
Continue to bless us,
and let us be a blessing for others.
Keep us in your mercy,
and cover us with your grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Water may be poured or lifted from the baptismal font.

God has made an everlasting covenant with us:
to preserve us from destruction, despite our sin.
When the clouds come and the rain falls
we see the rainbow and remember God's promise—
the gift of overflowing mercy and abundant grace.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

2 Based on Matthew 18; especially appropriate for Propers 18–19

The confession and pardon may be led from the baptismal font.

Jesus calls us,
as members of the church,
to be accountable to God and to one another:
confessing our sin,
repairing the damage done,
and working together for reconciliation.
And Jesus promises
that he will be with us in this work,
whenever two or three gather in his name.

Trusting in God's grace, let us confess our sin.

The confession may begin with a time of silence for personal prayer.

**Gracious God, in Jesus Christ
you have taught us to pray,
“Forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors.”**

**Yet even as we depend on your mercy,
we fail to extend such mercy to others.
We hold onto old grudges,
count up the sins of others,
and seek to settle the score.**

**Gracious God, forgive us,
and open our hearts to forgive one another.
Pour out your grace upon us,
and let it overflow into the lives of others.
Let your church be a living sign
of your reconciling love for all the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Water may be poured or lifted from the baptismal font.

We are forgiven,
we are forgiven,
we are forgiven—
for the things we have done
and the things we have failed to do.

We are forgiven,
we are forgiven,
we are forgiven—
for our sins against God
and our sins against one another.

We are forgiven—
not just seven times,
or seventy-seven times,
or even seventy times seven,
but over and over and always.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.