

Laity—are You Ready for Sunday Morning?

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.
John 5:39, KJV

Laity, do you prepare for the Sunday morning divine service?

You ask, why should I prepare for Sunday morning? Isn't that the pastor's job? Isn't it enough that I show up for church? What would I do to prepare? Even if I wanted to prepare, when would I find the time?

Below are three reasons (there are many more!) why you want to prepare for Sunday by reading the day's scriptures before church on Sunday morning; not 15 minutes before the service begins but several days in advance. Then I will tell you how you can do this and finally I will give some suggestions about when to prepare.

Why Prepare for Sunday Morning.

1. **You are to Ponder His Word in Your Heart:** "I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways." Psalm 119:15, NKJV.

If you read and think about the lessons before Sunday morning, you will enter church anticipating how your pastor will expound on God's Word for the day. You will look forward to hearing more about the passages you have been reflecting on during the past few days. If you have questions that the sermon does not address, ask your pastor. He will be happy you have given thought to the lessons and that you listened closely and expectantly.

2. **You are in a Battle:** "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." I Peter 5:8, KJV.

You are in a daily spiritual battle with Satan; today and tomorrow and for the rest of your life. Ephesians 6:10-18 (KJV) describes how we fight this spiritual battle. Verse 12 tells who we are wrestling with: "...not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The passage also tells us how to do battle: "...take unto you the whole armor of God ... having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness...your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace...taking the shield of faith...take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit..."

Did you get the part about the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"? Do you think you can go into battle without the word of God? When you read and learn God's word you are arming yourself with the same weapon that Jesus used during His temptation in the wilderness.

Today, more than ever, as society goes berserk, we need to be armed for battle by having God's word chiseled on our hearts and minds. With His word deeply planted in us we will be "...ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..." 1 Peter 3:15, NKJV. We will also be ready to comfort each other, our families and our neighbor.

3. **God Commands It:** "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." I John 4:1, KJV.

When Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but

inwardly they are ravening wolves. ..." (Matthew 7:15) he was talking to the crowds that had gathered to hear him. That means you and I, dear brothers and sisters of the laity.

In Acts 17, Saint Paul commends the Berean Christians because they compared what they were hearing with the word of God:

"...who [Paul and Silas] coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."
Acts 17:10b-11, KJV.

After the people heard their pastor's preaching, they went home and searched the scriptures to see whether what he said was in sync with God's word. As the Bereans did, we also go home after church and check the sermon against God's word.

Now that you know why you want to read the Sunday scriptures ahead of time, we will consider how to do it.

How to Prepare for Sunday Morning.

The readings (pericope) for each Sunday are at the front of *Lutheran Service Book*. If your church uses the 3-Year Lectionary, the readings are on pages xiv-xix. If you use the 1-Year Lectionary, the readings are on pages xx – xxi. Next Sunday's readings might also be listed in your church bulletin. If not, ask your Pastor to put them there. Many churches not only list the readings for the upcoming Sunday but provide other helps for keeping you in God's word during the week.

You can also find the lessons online at www.yaag.org. Select "1-Year Series" or "3-Year Series," find the appropriate date and all the readings are clickable so you can read online. The 3-year series is currently in year C.

The Bible translation at www.yaag.org is the English Standard Version.

This will get you through the readings; the most important part of your responsibility.

If you want even more blessings, do some study on the readings. There are many online opportunities. My church is on the 3-year lectionary so most of my resources are for that series. However, I have found some excellent resources for the 1-year series. [I am including my email address below so that you 1-year people can send me more resources and the 3-year people can give me things I missed.]

1. Each week *Issues Etc.* (<https://issuesetc.org/>) has two programs: "Looking Forward to Sunday Morning (1-Year Lectionary)" with Rev. David Petersen (Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN) and "Looking Forward to Sunday Morning (3-Year Lectionary)" with Dr. Carl Fickenscher (a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN). Both are excellent teachers and these programs are taught at the laity level. You can download the programs or listen online or with your favorite podcast provider. They are usually available by Thursday.
2. The web site *1517 Christ for You* has resources for the 3-year lectionary. Go to www.1517.org and click on the three bar menu at the upper left. Then click [Craft of Preaching]. The introduction says the resources are "for pastors engaged in the typical weekly routine of preparing a sermon." However, there is nothing to prevent us laity from listening in.

At the top is a video of pastors ("Talking Shop...") led by Rev. Paul Koch, pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Ventura, CA. They hash out the upcoming Sunday Gospel reading for

the 3-year series. It is informal and they don't get too Greeky, so there is no chance you will get lost. The program lasts about 20 minutes. I have noticed the podcasts are ready early in the week. You can scroll down a bit and click on the Old Testament, the Epistle or the Gospel for further study.

3. An excellent resource for the 1-year lessons is *Gottesdienst* at <https://www.gottesdienst.org/podcast>. There you will find audios where each week the host, Rev. Jason Braaten (pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Tuscola, IL) and Rev. David Peterson discuss the upcoming lessons for Sunday. The podcast you are looking for will be preceded by a number such as "TGC *nn*" and then "Trinity *nn* Sermon Prep." I have noticed that the podcast is available right away on Monday morning!
These pastors cover the Gospel lesson in detail. The session is about an hour and it is worth every minute! Even if your church is on the 3-year lectionary, consider listening in for some extra Bible time during the week. They put the lessons in the context of past and future readings.
4. Concordia Seminary Saint Louis has resources for both the 1-year and 3-year readings. Go to <https://concordiatheology.org/lalp/> and click on the appropriate Sunday on the calendar. You will be given a choice of which lectionary you want and then you can click on any of the readings (including the Psalm for the day!) and you will get everything you could possibly want (video, audio and text) including chapel sermons from the past and "Lectionary at Lunch" sessions when the professors talk with the students about a particular reading; they do get into Greek and Hebrew here.
5. A young Pastor from Lee's Summit, MO (Rev. Steve Andrews, Jr.) has a program on the 3-year readings called "The Layman's Guide to the Lectionary." Rev. Andrews spends about an hour each week reading and explaining the three lessons. As the title implies, his teaching is at the laity level; he is good at explaining the background of each reading; this is important if you are a little rusty on the Old Testament. He also ties the readings together from week to week. You can listen to Rev. Andrews at <https://anchor.fm/rev-steve-andrews-jr0>. That site will give several options for how to listen.
6. A few years ago, Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne recorded videos on each of the Gospel readings for the 3-year lessons. In the search box at media.ctsfw.edu type what you want to find. For example, if you are looking for the third Sunday in Advent, you would type "Advent 3" + "Series C". Scroll down a bit and on the left you can select the Media Format "Video" and you should find what you are looking for. Sometimes you will get videos for each of the three lessons—a bonus blessing! These videos are each about 20 minutes and most of the professors get into Greek and Hebrew but you will still benefit from listening. Since these podcasts were done several years ago, they are always ready for you.

When to Prepare for Sunday Morning.

Begin early in the week so you have the maximum amount of time to think about the lessons during the week.

Do you have family devotions? Can you include the Sunday readings in your family devotions? Do you have a time of the day for personal Bible study? See if you can fit the lessons into that time.

Do you spend any part of your day doing mindless things that you do so well you don't have to think about what you are doing? Such as walking or exercising or working jigsaw puzzles or driving to work or sewing or milking the cows? Use that time to listen to a video or audio that

teaches God's word.

Are you stuck in any wasteful habits you struggle to overcome but find you just cannot do so? Are you spending time on things that may be causing you harm? Obsessing on Facebook or Twitter or TV talking-heads? TV dramas and sitcoms; TV sports? Make a conscious effort to substitute God's word for that time and habit! You will be richer after you immerse yourself in God's word.

Laity brothers and sisters, if you make time to get ready for Sunday morning you will notice the difference right away; that is a promise! You have a head start before the service even begins!

One last thing—don't neglect to pray for your pastor as he also considers the scripture that God has given him to preach on for the day. Another last thing—attend Bible study at your church!

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