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The Bishop Speaks Reading God's Word

Introduction

Sometimes in visiting parishes I am saddened to see people being asked to read the bible readings just before the service begins. Not only does it tell me that this part of the service has not really been planned, but it also seems to mean that the organizers of the service do not think that bible reading is something that needs to be prepared. Often I hear the reading of God's word very poorly done. They stumble over words and sometimes they do not even know how the word is pronounced. Sometimes in the hurried unprepared reading the meaning of the passage is changed. This is sad indeed. As Christian leaders we need to recognize that one of the most important parts of any worship service is the reading of God's Word. It is from God's Word that we learn what to believe, how to live and how to follow Jesus. Without a proper understanding of God's word we will never become the kind of people God wants us to be.

It is central to all Prayer-book services

It does not matter which Anglican prayer-book you pick up. In every service there is the reading of God's word. In the Articles of Religion, a statement of what Anglicans believe, it is written, "Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be requisite or necessary to salvation." This statement of faith shows how important God's word is to Anglican faith. We have always stressed the importance of preaching and receiving regularly Holy Communion. Yet throughout our history the frequency of Communion changes from monthly, to weekly, to daily for some. In isolated places, Holy Communion was given only when a priest was available which was yearly or less. In the prayer-books we read that in some services the sermon "may" be said which makes it optional. But in every service there is the necessary reading of God's Word. This tells us that the reading of God's word is vital to our worship and our growth as Christians.

If the reading of God's Word is so important, then it is also important to have God's word read clearly and accurately.

Who Can Read God's Word in Church?

There are different traditions or patterns that have developed in various churches regarding who reads God's Word in Church. Some churches have only the minister and lay-leaders read God's Word. Others say anyone can read. Some larger churches in the south say that Deacons or Priests should read the Gospel Reading and the other readings can be read by anyone. I have always allowed as many as possible to have the privilege of reading God's word in Church. This allows them to be part of the ministry of the Church. In the Anglican Church it is the minister who has final say over who reads God Word. He or she may or may not give this responsibility to someone else. Whoever has this responsibility should ensure that the people reading have the correct reading and that they have time to be prepared to read. This is where a reading schedule comes in handy.

Techniques of Reading

The following are some suggestions for readers.

1. Get the reading in plenty of time to be properly prepared. I would suggest that you begin to prepare to read by at least the Wednesday before the Sunday Service.
2. Read through the passage. Are there words you do not know the meaning of, or are not sure how to pronounce? Check these words out with someone who does know. There are many unusual words in the scriptures that we may not be familiar with. Many clergy and lay people have trouble pronouncing names that are in God's word. This is normal. If we are reading in Church we should get some help in order to read God's word clearly.
3. Read the passage over several times. This will help you to get used to the way the words are written.
4. Practice reading aloud. It is different then reading silently. Listen to yourself read, or better yet, have someone listen to you to ensure that you are reading clearly and can be heard by all.
5. Check where you will be reading. Is the lectern the right height? Is there a microphone? Where do you put your bible to read? Where will you walk to get there? Do you have to step over or walk around something? Checking things out will help us not to be surprised or nervous when we do read.

Using a Microphone

A microphone is often very helpful. When people have soft or quiet voices they are hard to hear even in a small church. Elders are often hard of hearing and a microphone is useful for them to hear. Also in a big church or a crowded church a microphone make it possible not only for everyone to hear, but also to hear clearly.

If you are speaking in a church that uses a microphone then try it out before service. See how it is positioned. If you are reading from the prayer book or a written sermon will

you still be able to be heard? Learn how close you need to be in order to be heard. Learn what happens when you move away from or closer to the microphone. Make sure you know if it is on or off. Many readers have been embarrassed when the congregation heard them say something that was not meant to be heard.

Using a Lectern Bible

Many churches have big bibles that they use for readers to read the lesson from. Check what version of the bible it is and make sure you practice your reading from the same version. Some versions are very different from others and could cause us to stumble when what we read is not what we are familiar with it. Remember to mark the Bible. Have a book mark at the page you are reading. I use sticky Post It Notes with the bible reference on it so I do not forget the passage I am reading.

Practice reading from the Lectern Bible. It is different then reading from a regular smaller bible.

Using a Reading Schedule

I strongly encourage the use of a reading schedule, even if only the ministers and lay leaders are doing the reading.

1. A schedule allows for one to see several weeks of reading at a glance and allows one to see any patterns in the readings which may help in preaching.
2. A schedule makes it easy to plan for many people to read and if each reader has a schedule it acts as a reminder to them.
3. Schedules could be made public so the people could also read the bible in advance.
- 4.

Someone should be in charge of making and distributing the list so that all readers have a copy. This person should give the readers for the following Sunday a call around Wednesday as a reminder.

Attached is a sample of a 3 month reading schedule.

Date	Time	Service	1st	Reader	2nd	Reader	Gospel	Reader
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