

Tips for Reading Scripture in Public Worship (April 2016)

In his book *Public Reading of Scripture: A Handbook*, Clay Schmit, a Lutheran pastor and Fuller Theological Seminary professor, offers practical tips and exercises for public reading of Scripture.

- **Acknowledge that public Scripture reading is an *important* ministry.** If this is not your thing, please decline. *If you accept, please prepare.*
- **Pray:** Begin with prayer when first reading the scripture passage at home and before worship begins. (God, help me speak your words aloud with reverence for all to hear and know you more. Amen.)
- **Comprehension:** Comprehending the entire reading is important. Ask the pastor about the meaning, if you're not sure.
 - *Try looking up the passage using a different version of the Bible (online).*
- **Interpretation:** Consider the words, "*Her name was Elizabeth.*" Say it aloud four times, each time emphasizing a different word. How does emphasizing each word differently change the meaning of that sentence?
- **Pronunciation:** Ask Pastor about pronouncing difficult names. Remember, most people won't know if you mispronounce a name (*say difficult names confidently*).
 - **Remember:** "Prophecy" can be a verb or a noun.
 - If it is a noun, it is pronounced prof-uh-see.
 - If it is a verb, it is pronounced prof-uh-si. (long I)
- **Prepare ahead of time by reading aloud.** Practicing reading the scripture passage aloud at home – before Sunday. Silently reading to yourself will not help you identify potential problems of pronunciation, pauses, and pacing, when reading aloud.
 - **Practice in front of people.** Ask for critique.
 - **Record yourself.** Critique yourself.
- **Eye Contact:** Look up from the reading *only to reinforce the message*. Avoid the bobbing-head effect. It's fine to look off into space as you're thinking of an image, say when the father looked up and saw the Prodigal Son at a great distance...or the Psalmist says *'I lift my eyes to the hills.'* If you do this, look far off, not at individual people." Other times to look at worshipers would be on a sentence such as Jesus asking his storm-tossed disciples, "*Where is your faith?*" (you may want to raise your eyebrows, or shrug your shoulders for emphasis, too)
- **Don't Rush:** Most people get nervous when reading aloud. That's normal. Adrenalin makes us rush. Be intentional about reading *slowly*. If you think you are reading slowly, slow yourself down even more. Right in the margins, "*SLOW DOWN! BREATHE! PAUSE!*"
- **Don't Fade Away:** Don't fade away at the ends of sentences when reading aloud. Project your voice to the back pew throughout *every* sentence.

- **Enunciate:** Move your mouth –carve out each word. No mumbling.
 - Stand straight
 - Take full breaths
 - Speak directly into the microphone, while projecting to the back pew.
- **Read; don't act:** People understand you're reading, so don't move your body or gesture a lot. Simply stand tall so your voice projects, use the microphone, and read the text.
- **Express vocal range:** Just for fun *-during practice-* go overboard with vocal style. Read the same sentence in different ways to suggest different emotions.
 - *Read some children's books aloud (seriously – try this). When you're reading to kids or talking to kids, you become *excessively expressive*. Back it off a bit and you'll have a good voice for reading Scripture in church.
 - **Record yourself.** It will be obvious if you're over doing it or if you're monotone.
- **Pauses matter:** Note the difference in these readings of Luke 2:16
 - They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.
 - They went with haste (*pause*) and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.
 - They went with haste (*pause*) and found Mary and Joseph (*pause*) and the child lying in a manger.
 - Mark **pauses** in your reading by making a *slash* in the part of the sentence that requires a pause.

"The reading is from John, chapter 5.

Later Jesus went to Jerusalem for a special feast. ² In Jerusalem there is a pool with five covered porches, which is called Bethesda in the Hebrew language. This pool is near the Sheep Gate. ³ Many sick people were lying on the porches beside the pool. Some were blind, some were crippled, and some were paralyzed, and they waited for the water to move.