

KIRKRIDGE Readings and Intentions 1987

WEEK-BASE DAILY LECTIIONS

for individual and group meditation and prayer



This 45th year of our guide for daily Bible reading combines (1) the Sunday texts of the Protestant-and-Catholic "Common Lectionary" and (2) Willis Elliott's personal **invitations** to enter "the Rule of God," day by day, through the doors of these Scriptures. The invitations are as tightly, but also as loosely, related to the four lections, week by week and day by day, as the lections are to each other. Each one does try, as we hope you do, to touch all four bases.

A former Kirkridge trustee, Dr. Elliott is Craigville Conference Center (MA) biblical scholar-in-residence and a New York Theological Seminary professor-at-large. In broken sequence since 1975, this is the seventh time he has written our lectionary invitations.

JANUARY

12-16

4--(Epiphany): Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 24:1-4; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18; John 1:1-18 Communion with the Eternal delivers us from darkness, freeing us to be **friends of time**, all time. The wonder of the Word and of the world persuades us that we need not take up yesterday's or tomorrow's stick to beat today, or today's stick to beat yesterday or tomorrow. All time is ours as God is **yes** for us and we are **yes** for God.

11--Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10: 34-43; Matthew 3:13-17 "The news" is about the **love of power**. The Good News is about the **power of love** over the depravations of the principalities and powers, the lusts of the body, the greed of the spirit, the pride of the mind. We know which pleases God.

18--Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; I Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-34 The Lamb of God, gentle in power and strong in tenderness, is the final mercy for my misery in sin and shame. In loving me toward what I should be, the Son of God begins by loving me **as I am** and asking me so to love my neighbor. This is the true unity, and peace.

25--Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1-6; I Corinthians 1:10-17; Matthew 4:12-23 When we sit in darkness because of spiritual burnout, the undivided Christ calls us from our lonely glooms, "**Come with me**, I'll teach you to care again." There, in mission together, we find again the light, the liberation, the joy.

FEBRUARY

1--Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 37:1-11; I Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12 What is required of us is what we'd require of ourselves had we the wisdom and the courage. For the One who requires of us desires for us all blessings, "beatitudes," shalom (our peace and prosperity among our fellows and fellow-creatures on the good earth). We are ordained to **walk with God**, who qualifies the called.

8--Isaiah 58:3-9a; Psalm 112:4-9; I Corinthians 2:1-11; Matthew 5:13-16 Pining to live in a different world is a cop-out from living in this world **differently** -- living God's secret wisdom of the Cross. Salt. Light. Heads up to confront the lie, instead of heads down to keep a low profile. It's good news to the oppressed, and improves God's reputation.

15--Deuteronomy 30:15-20 or Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 15:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; I Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:17-26 Obeying God is the relational mode of being true to the best we know. But the proposition is only partly reversible, for only God can teach us what the best is. The **always** best. The best **this day**. The best **this moment**. God, who calls us to seek the best together, to choose it, then do it. This is the only success, or failure.

22--Isaiah 49:8-13; Psalm 62:5-12; I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23; Matthew 5:27-37 For us Christians, Jesus is **God's visible answer** to the question humanity perpetually addresses to God, "Who are You and what do You want?" We practice the steady refusal to lay any other foundation for devotion and life. This is our way of living, in joyful adventure, through the tragedy and sadness of earthly existence. And it is no cheap way.

MARCH

1--Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2:6-11; II Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9 The Bible's story is both epic and intimate, both about history and about our hearts. When we read it with our full being, it astonishes us with its claims, its promises, its warnings, its revelation that mercy is the depth of justice and sacrifice the depth of freedom. It tells us the worst of earth and the best of heaven--and the best of earth through the will of heaven. And, through the Spirit, we become eyewitness-participants with Moses and Jesus and all the faithful of the ages. The Word is **about** us, and it is **for** us.

8--(Lent) Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17, 25-3:7; Psalm 130; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11 Lent invites us to repent of our failures in the **adventure of freedom**, to remember the One who did not fail, and to rejoice that God in forgiving love opens to us the gates of new life. The last word about temptation is not disobedience, the Law saying "Guilty!" It is the obedience of faith, Grace saying "Not guilty!"

15--Genesis 12:1-4a (4b-8); Psalm 33:18-22; Romans 4:1-5 (6-12), 13-17; John 3:1-7 or Matthew 17:1-9 Because we are made in **God's image**, we cannot sin against God without violating ourselves--our true nature, our deepest being and yearning. Nor can any sin be private, for all of us neighbors in society are kin in our nature. But God's promise through Abraham predates all our blasphemies and betrayals, and God yearns to gift us with new birth through "the Son of man lifted up."

22--Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-26 (27-43) Our stubborn, impenitent selves judge God by our **disappointments**, other human beings by their **actions**, and ourselves by our **ideals and intentions**. Lent asks us to reverse the generosity--to be harder on ourselves than on our neighbor, and to see God as not to be blamed for our troubles but to be thanked for the ever-offered Living Water. The Love that transcends time and space annihilates our animosity and wins us to be friends of God and neighbor. Christ died for us sinners.

29--I Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41 **How are we to live**, we God-forgiven sinners, here and now? Try asking the question of each of these four scriptures--about (respectively) ruling and guiding and teaching and healing.

APRIL

5--Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 116:1-9; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:(1-16)17-45 Each of these four lections merges divine and human **desiring**. The Kingdom of God would soon arrive, wouldn't it, if you could pray the Lord's Prayer the way your dog looks at meat? (Analogy from Luther, who here named his own dog.)

12--(Palm Sunday) Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 118:19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 21:1-11 Holy Week: astonishing contrast, conflicts, overturnings. The Servant was obedient but things got out of control and on Friday Jesus' movement came to a dead end. The Judge was judged, the Lord was mastered, the King was overruled. But the Servant seemed to say "Your living is worth my dying." The mystery of human suffering met the mystery of faith and love--and then of power.

19--(Easter) Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 Easter turns the **inside out**, emptying the grave. It's Exodus from the last Egypt, return from the last Babylon, victory over "the last enemy." The Kingdom of God comes **outside in**--into heart and history; but the Gospel teaches us to welcome it **inside out**, in sorrowful repentance and joyful faith.

26--Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16:5-11; I Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31 **Reversal**: We killed him, God raised him. **Transformation**: The proclaimer becomes the proclaimed, the parabler becomes the parable. **Conversion**: The killers become preachers of the divine mercy, the doubter becomes a believer. And **reconciliation**: the world's relationship to God undergoes radical change (the meaning of the N.T. Greek word).

MAY

3--Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:12-19; I Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35 Into the family of the immortal Parent, we are "born again" by "the living and eternal Word of God." The parental Word is about who's in charge, what each of us is to contribute for the good of the whole and the whole earth, how we are to celebrate, and what we are to hope for. When true to itself, this family is home, congregation, revolutionary party, universal spiritual nation.

10--Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; I Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10 Our dream of the ideal home, community, world conjoins **religious loyalty** ("following in His steps"), **moral integrity**, and **great art**. Without the others, each of the three becomes a corrupting idol. Art becomes privatistic hedonism; morality becomes moralism and legalism; and religion becomes bad faith and false piety. That we need the shepherd does not flatter our egos, but it does save our souls and society.

17--Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-18; I Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14 Individually and communally, **our profoundest business** is with God, our Source and Destiny; and the art of holy living is learned by the conscious daily practice of opening our immediate business to the profoundest business. To this end the Bible describes the cost and characteristics of spiritual community and directs our attention to Jesus, "the true and living Way."

24--Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; I Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21 Unlike God's other creatures, we have no direct line between biology and behavior. We need the Spirit's help if we are to be **good news to one another and to the fragile earth**, and so please God. Here the Christian hope as "not yet" stands over against despair as "already"--the hope we are to be "ready to explain" between Jesus resurrected and Jesus returned.

31--Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10; I Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17: 1-11 Jesus taught us how to do what he did, to make known the caring, fellow-suffering, liberating God and "be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings" toward "joy when his glory is revealed." Here mission and message are one: doing the mission is itself the truth of the message. **The message is the words about the mission.**

JUNE

7--(Pentecost) Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23 Pentecost people are **gift-aware**, thrice-blessed with God-given gifts: life itself, the charisms (abilities-assignments), and the Spirit (God's presence and power). Nothing we need to pray and live the Lord's Prayer is withheld from us, including the will and courage to confess "Jesus is Lord!" Jesus, who sends us out in peace and joy.

14--(Trinity) Deuteronomy 4:32-40; Psalm 33:1-11; II Corinthians 13:5-13; Matthew 28:16-20 In contrast to the God-amnesiac society we live in, these four readings are God-saturated. And they tell us to be God-activated: Remember! Obey! Shout for joy! Honor the Creator! Strive for perfection! Live in peace! Go teach and baptize! Face to face with all this, we affirm the Trinity as the nearest we Christians have come to saying who God is--and this as the core of our comfort and strength: "I will be with you always."

21--Genesis 28:10-17; Psalm 91:1-10; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 10:24-33 God-snubbing Adam found the gate of Eden closed to him, but God-dreaming Jacob saw "the gate that opens into heaven." Jesus, like Jacob's visionary angels, passed both ways through that gate: **God's mode of being human** and **humanity's mode of being divine**. No wonder the New Testament's emphasis on witnessing to the One through whom we are "put right with God."

28--Genesis 32: 22-32; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 10:34-42 Does "Israel" mean Jacob the God-wrestler or God the Jacob-wrestler? Either translation is correct and true; the former represents the old **self-centered** Jacob, the latter the new **God-centered** Jacob who turns away from his old betrayals of kin and covenant and now "sees God face-to-face." Our second reading is in the spirit of the new Jacob, and the final two readings represent the divide as baptism's burial/resurrection and Jesus' challenge to lose/gain life.

JULY

5--Exodus 1:6-14, 22 - 2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 7:14-25a; Matthew 11:25-30 **Liberation** is a common concern of these texts. Moses, political Liberator under divine guidance and power. God (in our Psalm), military liberator. "Jesus Christ our Lord" (in Paul's letter), liberator from "sin which dwells within me." And Jesus (in the first Gospel), liberator from spiritual ignorance and burdenedness when we take his yoke (that is, becomes his disciples). The Bible has no narrow, idolatrous definition of "liberation."

12--Exodus 2:11-22; Psalm 118:9-18; Romans 8:9-17; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 **Guidance** is not what the people could expect from Moses, that self-exiled murderer--but then we're not to trust in human leaders. Rather, we are called to "hear the Word and understand," "the spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" and, with Christ "in" us, "fellow heirs with Christ," our inner guide in the Spirit.

19--Exodus 3:1-12; Psalm 103:1-13; Romans 8:18-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 What we "groan" for beyond "the sufferings of this present time" is that the whole creation "obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God." Here the breathtaking sweep of the Bible's shalom-promise is to nerve us for **action against oppression** ("I will send you"), for the **practice of the Presence** ("I will be with you"), and for **patience** till "the Son of Man" separates the weeds from the wheat.

26--Exodus 3:13-20; Psalm 105:1-11; Romans 8:26-30; Matthew 13:44-52 The Bible boldly represents God as living with humanity the mystery of the **tension between the particular and the universal**. The partisan God gives his people a land that belongs to other people! The same God, now as the God who shows no partiality, lays claim on his chosen to be good news for all: our advantages are a stewardship, and "in everything God works for good." To live this mystery honorably and faithfully, we are given "treasure new and old."

AUGUST

2--Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 143:1-10; Romans 8:31-39; Matthew 14:13-21 Grace, God's caring Presence, supervenes over and interpenetrates the common day. It is the food within all food, the comfort and strength within all assurance, the song that sings itself within all our moods. To know this is light, to live it is life eternal. The Love that will not let us go will not let us down.

9--Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 106:4-12; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33 Squeezed between the natural threat of water (symbol of chaos) and the human threat on land (Egypt, symbol of oppressive order), the Israelites were in the only predicament that can make philosophers (viz, hopelessness) and saints (viz, the despair unto faith). To come were more calls to trust God's goodness: the singing psalmist retelling the Red Sea, Peter walking on water, and Paul in "anguish" for his people to experience the promise full-come in Jesus come and coming.

16--Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 78:1-3, 10-20; Romans 11:13-16; Matthew 15:21-28 Faith is the bridge from natural to supernatural food, from rejection to acceptance, and from prejudiced provincialism to the human ecumene. Murmurings, puzzlements, and packaged securities yield, in the evolution of the heart, to the open mystery of "I am the Lord your God."

23--Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20 Moses' rod points toward the holy nation's holy-land habitation; Peter's keys point toward the transnational "church" as agent of the "kingdom" uniting heaven and earth. Again, the one God of the particular and the universal, and the one Christ, "the Son of the living God." Peter denies but confesses, the Israelities "faultfind" but follow, God gets "disgusted" but persists in leal-love. And, through this rich mystery story, "all things" point to God in praise.

30--Exodus 19:1-9; Psalm 114; Romans 12:1-13; Matthew 16:21-28 What kind of God have we in these lections? A God of deeds and words, of destruction and protection, of power over nature and humanity, of nation-and-church-building. This God challenges us to choose between real and false gain, between real and only seeming loss, between foolish conformity and wise transformation. The God who in Jesus, between the promises of reward and the threats of punishment, says "Follow me."

SEPTEMBER

6--Exodus 19:16-24; Psalm 115:1-11; Romans 13:1-10; Matthew 18:15-20 "Love is the fulfilling of the Law," but what to do when "rulers are...a terror to good conduct" and when the Law and the laws conflict? One clue is to note where the Law was given: not in settled Egypt but in unsettling Sinai, a wilderness. And another is that the earliest Christians lived the law-Gospel without resort to the lawcourts, in disciplined relationships. In the wilderness and "where two or three are gathered," the Presence.

13--Exodus 20:1-20; Psalm 19:7-14; Romans 14:5-12; Matthew 18:21-35 Said Moses, the awesome setting for the Giving of Torah (the Teaching, the Law) was so that "the fear of God may be (forever) before your eyes." Religion aims to make most impressive the most important, the most serious, the most real. So we don't forget where the Center is and who the Judge is and how crucial is forgivingness "from the heart."

20--Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106:7-8, 19-23; Philippians 1:21-27; Matthew 20:1-16 Idolatry--the worship of anybody or anything other than the God of Moses and Jesus--is the Bible's diagnosis of human failures, betrayals, and corruptions. Sentimental religion falsely imagines that God is not dangerous to idolaters. Christian faith teaches us to evade the idolatries and avoid the danger by living "worthily of the gospel of Christ" in joyful gratitude for the divine "generosity."

27--Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 99; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:28-32 "Vision" and "wisdom" have the same Sanskrit root. Moses prays to see God's glory and with the vision is given wisdom. Jesus comes humbly, "emptying himself," and his followers experience him as God's wisdom, foreseeing universal submission to him as "Lord, to the glory of God the Father." And the visionary John the Baptist cries the wisdom of repentance in preparation for welcoming the Kingdom of God.

OCTOBER

4--Numbers 27:12-23; Psalm 81:1-10; Philippians 3:12-21; Matthew 21:33-34 Leadership issues pervade all these passages. Leadership transition: Moses ordains Joshua. In our Psalm, God's leadership occasions a joy festival. The Gospel lection speaks to the emergence of Christian leadership. And Paul boldly presents himself as a model of faith and action and hope.

11--Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 135:1-14; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14 Somebody dies, somebody gets a new job, some fall into a church fight, somebody moves in on new real estate, and somebody gets married. That's the bare-bones "news" of these scriptures. In and out of all this ordinariness the Bible weaves Another News--which couldn't even exist as woof-news without the warp-news of our human everydayness, on which the Bible teaches us to weave the Other News.

18--Ruth 1:1-19a; Psalm 146; I Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22 When we "turn to God from idols," prayer and politics become inseparable. Ruth's private loyalty has public consequences. The Thessalonian Christians become an "example" of new community, the new humanity. A psalmist and Jesus wise us up to discern between power that suppresses in order to achieve quiet and love-power that releases in order to achieve peace.

25--Ruth 2:1-13; Psalm 128; I Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46 To be real, love must match the beloved. To "love the Lord your God with all" is to obey God's teaching (Torah)--when out of power, as Ruth; when in power, as Boaz. Only this can "please God, who tests our hearts."

NOVEMBER

1--Ruth 4:7-17; Psalm 127; I Thessalonians 2:9-13, 17-20; Matthew 23:1-12 Nothing matters but the love of God--God's love for us, our love for God--and everything matters because of the love of God. From Ruth to David, from Jesus to Paul, to labor in this wisdom is to be "worthy of God." The world thus beheld in love is a house being built by God and a life being lived as God's servant (Latin, "minister").

8--Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 50:7-15; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13 True worship reshapes the contours of the soul misshapen by lust and greed and the contours of society misshapen by vainglory and malice. It is accepting, in the presence of God, responsibility to "watch" the present in the interest of the future God wants to give the church and the world. It is a moment and a lifetime of promise-making and promise-keeping face-to-face with the Eternal.

15--Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18; Psalm 76; I Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30 No way can we evade the fact, embarrassing to us moderns, that these scriptures intend to scare us: the Bible is as gutsy with negative as with positive reinforcements. God is the Holy Terror as well as Holy Love--indeed, the former in order to be wholly the latter. Fierce caring threatens ecumenical holocaust with "no escape" except penitent response-love toward God and "the oppressed."

22--Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 23; I Corinthians 15:20-28; Matthew 25:31-46 In all four of these texts, God's severity is in the interest of kindness. Try to eliminate the severity and we wind up, in public as well as private life, with impotent benevolence that rots into private apathy and public tyranny. David the prince, Jesus the king, God the sovereign are all of them protecting, providing, judging shepherds.

29--(Advent) Isaiah 63:16 - 64:8; Psalm 80:1-7; I Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:32-37 Advent (Latin for "arrival") asks us to ready ourselves to please the coming Guest, who will be displeased if we have not been "waiting" and "watching"--the verbs that move these four scriptures. Our souls are "unclean," and our social and societal garments are "polluted." We're not ready for the second Advent, or even the first.

DECEMBER

6--Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:8-13; II Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8 Feel, in these readings, the divine eagerness to be good news to our fragile, flawed, failed humanity. All that is asked of us is that we meet the divine promise with human penitence and that we promise faithfulness-loyalty after the divine model. That is all, but it will take nothing less than our all, with grace working in and through us toward the "new heaven and earth."

13--Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Luke 1:46b-55; I Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28 Some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that the Coming One will be intolerant of all power achieved and maintained at the expense of justice--and are we not beneficiaries of such power? The good news is that, by the power of the spirit through Isaiah's song and Jesus' sacrifice, we can here and now "make straight the way of the Lord" by works of love and righteousness.

20--II Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-24; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38 Read from below, the Bible is a sad saga of betrayals and brutalities. But read from above, it's the epic of a Steadfast Love never ceasing to announce and advance the Covenant-Kingdom "without end." Christmas, as narratives and reality, has eyes both below and above.

27--Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3; Psalm 111; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40 I talked with Helen Keller, her hands on my face. And she said "God is the light in my darkness, the voice in my silence." She was "a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord," and she deeply knew that "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" I have no better words with which to begin the new year.

THE KIRKRIDGE PRAYER —

(unison) ALMIGHTY GOD, Known in our silence and entreated in our hunger for Thee, nourish us now with the common bread of Thy grace. Shape with Thy hands the witness of this quiet company, that our ministry may be Christ's own life in our day. Bestow Thy serenity and clean strength on each member of this circle, granting us honest work and steadfast friendship in Thee. Deepen, O God, Thy intention for our life in Thy spirit. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SHARED INTENTIONS — This varied fellowship seeks a style-of-life with daily:

1. Openness to Scripture 'til word or verse speaks with power;
2. Intercessions by name, with thanks and praise;
3. Centering down in silence for at least minutes before God;
4. Seeking to act out Christian claims about justice, enemies, church, families, body-earth-air, intellect, our own affluence.

It is the aim of Kirkridge in everything to celebrate Christian faith in joy, without compulsion and without anxiety. Join us!



KIRKRIDGE
Bangor, Pennsylvania 18013

The Kirkridge symbol, a modified Celtic cross, is actually the medieval sign for annealing, tempering -- our own devout intention.