

KIRKRIDGE

Readings and Intentions 1988



WEEK-BASE DAILY LECTIONS

for individual and group meditation and prayer

This 46th 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 **intentions** 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. An occasional further influence in the invitations is the overarching Church Year.

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 eighth time he has written our lectionary invitations.

JANUARY

3--Jer. 31:7-14; Ps. 147:12-20; Eph. 1:3-6, 15-18; Jn. 1:1-18 (Epiphany) We are the size of the questions we're living and the answers we're testing. These four scriptures opening the new year invite us to live the largest questions and test the greatest answers. May this be, throughout the new year, our undergirding excitement and vital adventure. May we rejoice to let the Light shine on and through us!

10--Gen. 1:1-5; Ps. 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11 With God and our fellow-creatures we are participants in the splendor and travail of our endangered planet. Our **roots** are in the Love that rules sky, sea, soul, and all the storms therein. Our **reach** is for the wisdom and courage to match our task, that we may please the One Spirit before, within, and beyond heaven and earth.

17--1 Sam. 3:1-10 (11-20); Ps. 63:1-8; Cor. 6:12-20; Jn. 1:35-42 As **memory** keeps the present open to the past, **longing** keeps the present open to the future--longing, listening ("Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!"), and witnessing ("Come and see!"). Invited, we are inviters; loved, we are lovers; taught, we are teachers in the world-school of the one Master.

24--Jonah 3:1-5,10; Ps. 62:5-12; 1 Cor. 7:29-31 (32-35); Mark 1:14-20 The **bad** news is that repentance--returning to betrayed and abandoned reality, or turning to reality from cherished illusions--is so tough, so hard on the ego, so demanding of courage, that it is improbable. The **good** news is that repentance is the gate of new life, of peace, of joy, of learning and teaching.

31--Deut. 18:15-20; Ps. 111; 1 Cor. 8; Mark 1:21-28 The God portrayed in these readings, far from being made in the image of what we are, models our becoming what we can be, what we should be eager to be, what we should be ashamed not to be. And we are without excuse: for becoming what we are beckoned to be, nothing is withheld from us.

FEBRUARY

7--Job 7:1-7; Ps. 147:1-11; 1 Cor. 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39 "I grew up an atheist and so continued till the thought struck me that if I'm not here for any reason, then I have no reason to be here." But **logic** is ambiguous, equally usable by atheists and theists. It would be unlike God to let the issue of **love** for the divine hang upon logic alone.

14--2 Kings 2:1-12a; Ps. 50:1-6; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9 **Lent** is one of the Church Year's two special times for turning from low dreams, greeds, grudges, and lusts--a time for receiving the gift of the courage to turn from the merely manageable to the mysterious, the mystical, the Meaning that judges, purifies, redeems, transfigures our meanings, lest the present be only the shrine of the past and not the door to the future.

21--Gen. 9:8-17; Ps. 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15 (Lent) **Truths** like forgiveness, covenant, guidance, and deliverance from temptation are **values** only when owned and lived. In themselves, without the touch of grace, truths are only facts; and mere facts never saved, or even helped, anybody. The mind grasps facts; only the spirit gives them importance, shape, direction. Lord, in your mercy, direct us!

28--Gen. 17:1-10, 15-19; Ps. 105:1-11; Ro. 4:16-25; Mark 8:31-38 or 9:1-9 If in prayer we ask more for the sense of the Presence than for anything else, whatever else we get will be more than enough even when it is nothing. Thus the **God-longer** becomes more and more the **God-lover**; and the lesser loves, howsoever delectable, become dispensable. The saints make this truth undeniable; and the demons make it, with the cooperation of most human beings, unavailable.

MARCH

6--Ex. 20:1-17; Psalm 19:7-14; 1 Cor. 1:22-25; John 2:13-22 These passages reverberate with **soul-realism**. Repenting is even harder than forgiving, which is hard enough. Wanting what we need is tough when we're wanting something else. Stopping what we're doing when we're liking what we're doing is almost as difficult as doing what we don't want to. Good religion pleases God, but it isn't always pleasant.

13--2 Chron. 36:14-23; Ps. 137:1-6; Eph. 2:4-10; Jn. 3:14-21 Ours is not to choose whether we endure or to perish. Ours is only to choose, while perishing, whether to live for long dreams or short ones, for petty aims or great visions, for our little sovereignties or God's reign. As we choose, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," who perished for us and lives in us, stands ready to surprise us with eternal life.

20--Jer. 31:31-34; Ps. 51:10-17; Heb. 5:7-10; Jn. 12:20-33 The suffering Love that seeks to prepare for us a new world, and to place us in it as new creatures under and in the new covenant, is predisposed to equip our hearts for the trip toward "all things new" and to provide the Guide who never ceases sounding in our ears, "Follow me!"

27--Is. 50:4-9a; Ps. 118:19-29; Phil. 2:5-11; Mark 11:1-11 or Jn. 12:12-16. (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday) The very moment we did our worst, God did God's best. The Cross inverts the daily values, the street expectations. All the moods of Holy Week are **gates** into the new Jerusalem of this knowing, this discerning and deciding, this living and dying, this community of love and hope.

APRIL

3--Ac. 10:34-43; Ps. 118:14-24; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Jn. 20:1-18. (Easter) While sympathy for Christ **Crucified** increases our compassion, allegiance to Christ **Risen** nerves us with the courage to face, in ourselves and in the world, the forces that crucify--the lust, greed, malice, and ignorance that inflict destructive suffering. The Cross was occupied: we lose, and groan with the whole creation; the Tomb was empty: we win, and the world wins with us.

10--Ac. 4:32-35; Ps. 133; 1 Jn. 1:1-2; Jn. 20:19-31 The first Easter was the "someday" that was always coming and still is. Deep in my heart is the Easter faith that we, humanity, shall all be one some day, taking our places in the freedom of God on the new earth--God, who comes to the hungry in the form of bread, to the blind in the form of light, to the lonely in the form of community, and to us mortals in the form of life beyond death.

17--Ac. 3:12-19; Ps. 4; 1 Jn. 3:1-7; Luke 24:35-48 ... To what extremes our divine Parent goes to nudge us toward the freedom of love! We "killed the One who leads to life," who yet is unflinching here-and-now for us. The call to repentance and newness of life, while never overwhelming us, never relents, never gives up, never abandons us. Our danger, our insecurity, our despair are only in ourselves.

24--Ac. 4:8-12; Ps. 23; 1 Jn. 3:18-24; Jn. 10:11-18 "Green pastures" are the visible sign of roots groping for the living water of life and for life-nourishing nutrients. The green fields are traffic lights with "GO" on. Spring's juices are joy-signals to all our senses and wits. And the Good Shepherd, giving his life, is guiding us and "other sheep."

MAY

1--Ac. 8:26-40; Ps. 22:25-31; 1 Jn. 4:7-12; Jn. 15:1-8 Besides covering a multitude of sins, love closes a multitude of **gaps**. In succession, these passages show love closing the gap between confusion and illumination, the gap between false and true worship as well as the gap between the hungry and food, the gap between sin and forgiveness and between indifference and love, and the gap between root and fruit as closed by Jesus the Vine.

8--Ac. 10:44-48; Ps. 98; 1 Jn. 5:1-6; Jn. 15:9-17 If you have to ask the **price** of any of these, you can't afford it: love, truth, fairness, justice, generosity of spirit, faith, obedience, prayer. But when you want them so much you don't ask the price, you get them free. Anyway, it feels like free, it's **grace**, and you "sing for joy." You could look it all up in these four passages.

15--Ac. 1:15-17, 21-26; Ps. 1; 1 Jn. 5:9-13; Jn. 17:11b-19 Through **traditionalism** is the dead faith of the living, **tradition** is the living and lively faith of the dead--the righteous happy of the Psalms, the kernel Church of 120 in the upper room, all who before us have been "sent" (missioned) into the world as heralds of the Resurrection. Our present was their future and will be the past of those to whom we pass on the tradition, the memory and the experience of the Faith.

22--Ac. 2:1-21; Ps. 104:24-34; Ro. 8:22-27; Jn. 15:26-27, 16:4b-15. (Pentecost) As every leaving is a death and every return a resurrection, the Ascension is a dying and **Pentecost** is the rising of a dead community at the touch of the descending Spirit. The Church, which left the upper room to perform miracles of love and power, was itself a miracle of love and power. All inferences from this fact are disconcerting and directional.

29--Is. 6:1-8; Ps. 29; Ro. 8:12-17; Jn. 3:1-17 Wonder is the root of worship, and we Christians need the doctrine of the **Trinity** to express our way of wonder and our ways of worship. Behind Nicodemus' wonder, in the presence of the Son, at the Spirit's gestation in one's soul-womb of faith in the Father's love--behind all this we hear, in our first three passages this week, wonder-shouts of "Holy, Holy, Holy!" and "Glory to God!" and "Father, my Father!"

JUNE

5--1 Sam. 16:14-23; Ps. 57; 2 Cor. 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35 Great music stirs the mystery of the past within us, exorcises evil spirits, deepens our trust in God of nature and history, renews the spirit in aging bodies, fills our souls with thanksgiving and hope, and refreshes us for the seeking and **doing** of God's will.

12--2 Sam. 1:1, 17-27; Ps. 46; 2 Cor. 5:6-10, 14-17; Mark 4:26-34 We must live in the ambiguity of **force** and **faith**. David takes Jerusalem and there centers his kingdom; but the Psalmist, though rejoicing in the holy city and temple, hears God say, "Stop fighting, and know that I am God!" Jesus preaches his parables of God's kingdom, but his followers must live out their faith amid Rome's force. And Paul calls us to live beyond the ambiguity "full of courage" as we seek always to please God.

19--2 Sam. 5:1-12; Ps. 48; 2 Cor. 5:18-6:2; Mark 4:35-41 Destiny--personal, social, global--lies in decisions as to the location of the **holy**. Who-what-where now is the sacred, the inviolate? Tune in (in the order of our scripture) on the covenant box, the city called holy, the reconciled-reconciling community, and Jesus calming the storm.

26--2 Sam. 6:1-15; Ps. 24; 2 Cor. 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43 We tell these living stories from out of our past: God was a portable presence of danger and blessing; the great king went through his city's gates; God invited into the temple all whose purity was to will and do God's will; Jesus defeated disease and death. We? **We are the story** that is to be told in the days to come.

JULY

3--2 Sam. 7:1-17; Ps. 30; 2 Cor. 12:1-10; Mark 6:1-6 We are embarrassed for God when we hear the divine voice ecstatically shouting unkeepable promises of unconditional love. Driven by **power**, demands may achieve their end; but driven by **love**, promises can be fulfilled only when an answering love willingly surrenders and accepts love. This truth lies behind and within our four scriptures: two on the case of David (power and love), and one each on the cases of Jesus and Paul (weakness and love).

10--2 Sam. 7:18-29; Ps. 132:11-18; Eph. 1:1-10; Mark 6:7-13 We Christians see here an **evolution** of the divine locus and milieu: tent ("tabernacle"), its covenant box ("ark") traveling to the holy city and temple ("Zion," from which God wants to rule forever); the holy book (Scripture, when the land was lost); finally, the holy person (Jesus, in whom God sets forth "a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him"). This is our **Epic**, our central sense-making Story.

17--2 Sam. 11:1-15; Ps. 53; Eph. 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34 By our psalm's definition, David here--in his failed stratagem to conceal a pregnancy, followed by his successful strategy to commit a murder--qualifies as an atheist: not one who has trouble **conceiving** of God, but one who has no trouble **behaving** as though God were not. At war with himself, the fool makes casualties of others, even of God. In contrast, the compassionate Shepherd builds us all into "a holy temple."

24--2 Sam. 12:1-14; Ps. 32; Eph. 3:14-21; Jn. 6:1-15 Jesus the king of love refuses power; David the king of power abuses love and repents his abuse. And Nathan and the Psalmist press on us the realism that, in both public and private life, the cost of ignoring truth is higher than the cost of facing it.

31--2 Sam. 12:15b-24; Ps. 34:11-22; Eph. 4:1-6; Jn. 6:24-35 David's spirituality leads toward "I am the bread of life" and "a life worthy." Instead of calling his sins **mistakes** and proudly chalking them up to experience, he calls his mistakes **sins** and humbly lays them before the Lord in self-abnegation. Thus forgiven, he reverently accepts his punishment and is clean, free to return to life.

AUGUST

7--2 Sam. 18:1-5, 9-15; Ps. 143:1-8; Eph. 4:25-5:2; Jn. 6:35, 41-51 The more things fall apart, the more we hunger that they come together. The more insensitivity, the more tenderheartedness. The more we "lose all hope," the more we pray "Remind me of your constant love." And the more the world "gives opportunity to the devil," the more we want to "be imitators of God and walk in love." It's the homeostasis of the soul.

14--2 Sam. 18:24-33; Ps. 102:1-12; Eph. 5:15-20; Jn. 6:51-58 While **theology** can descend into **philosophy**, it can also ascend into **doxology**, the praise of perpetual gratitude to God "always and for everything." Even David's grief and the Psalmist's anguish. All is meant for and is means to the eternal abiding.

21--2 Sam. 23:1-7; Ps. 67; Eph. 5:21-33; Jn. 6:55-69 Our lived stories are social clothing without which we would be naked in cold time. David's last words tell us what story he has lived in, what "myth" (**world-story**) has housed him, what past he has shared in and what hope he shares with us "so that the whole world may know." Within the wider Story, Peter recognizes "the Holy One of God," and Paul expounds the "mystery" of marriage and membership.

28--1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12; Ps. 121; Eph. 6:10-20; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 As **praying** yields not necessarily what we pray for but what God intends through our prayer, so our **seeking** brings not necessarily what we intend to find out but what our Protector, the Maker of heaven and earth, intends us to find. So to trust is to be "strong in the Lord," eager to obey "the commandment of God," and alert against letting externals dominate one's inner life.

SEPTEMBER

4--Prov. 2:1-8; Ps. 119:129-136; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:31-37 As all four passages testify, **hearing-and-obeying** is the heart of biblical religion. In the printing of the Hebrew Bible, the only word emphasized is the first word of the Shema, "HEAR!" (Deut. 6.4). The One who speaks in love invites, commands us, so to speak as we listen: Jesus "makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

11--Prov. 22:1-2, 8-9; Ps. 125; James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-17; Mark 8:27-38 **Class** distinctions are doubly obscurantist. They obscure the inferiority of the values they express and exalt, and they obscure the superiority of the values **equality** expresses and exalts. In our four scriptures you may find about a dozen of the latter set of values. Here the Bible is sly: it **starves** class (instead of attacking it) and **feeds** equality (instead of preaching it).

18--Job 28:20-28; Ps. 27:1-6; James 3:13-18; Mark 9:30-37 **Struggle** is inescapable. Religious leaders, cleric and laic, struggle against doubt; the religious led struggle with faith; and the nonreligious struggle with agnosticism, cynicism, and aimlessness. God could save us from all this sweat simply by removing our humanity.

25--Job 42:1-6; Ps. 27:7-14; James 4:13-17, 5:7-11; Mark 9:38-50 Our four passages display four ways of being religious and teaching religion, which points to a relentless "more" in all things, an insatiable "beyond" in all occasions and relations, and in all human beings a yearning for a **more** that is not more of the same for a **beyond** that does not sacrifice, but rather illumines, the here and now.

OCTOBER

2--Gen. 2:18-24; Ps. 128; Heb. 1:1-4, 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16 "This is my body...my blood." Jesus makes himself one with the world's wounds. These **wounds**--his and the world's--are the context for understanding and proclaiming the text, the Word he is and brings. The believers say, "We have seen the Lord!" The world responds, "Unless I see the wounds, I will not believe."

9--Gen. 3:8-19; Ps. 90:1-12; Heb. 4:1-3, 9-13; Mark 10:17-30 Each of these passages can be read as an instruction on sifting the **everfleeting** out from the **everlasting**. "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Go...give...come, follow me."

16--Is. 53:7-12; Ps. 35:17-28; Heb. 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45 For us Christians, the NT images of Jesus are so many **mirrors** of the eternal, of how things really are. Just in this week's scriptures he is the world's victim, the Son of man, God's suffering servant, the high priest who is also the sacrifice, our ransom, his disciples' servant in modeling power from below (leading by being "slave of all").

23--Jer. 31:7-9; Is. 126; Heb. 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52 **Wisdom** rightly teaches us to live each day as if it were our last, but **joy** moves us to live each day as if it were our first. The scattered people are gathered; the scattered seed is gathered in harvest happiness; a blind beggar sees and follows Jesus; and God appoints our High Priest of the eternal temple.

30--Deut. 6:1-9; Ps. 119:33-48; Heb. 7:23-28; Mark 12:28-34 One may have a **doctrine** without having a **religion**. The first is an idea, the second is a love and the practice thereof. To have a religion means to practice devotion to what one most prizes, which thus defined is one's God. Thus, "Love the Lord your God" is the central commandment, and the central piety is the will to love God with all we've got through all we're given, even the whole world.

NOVEMBER

6--1 Kings 17:8-16; Ps. 146; Heb. 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44 The Bible's koan is this: **letting go** (faith) and **holding on** (faithfulness)--both simultaneously with both hands. Here, one widow in each Testament; and a Psalmist who's got his politics right; and Jesus, who "puts away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

13--Dan. 7:9-14; Ps. 145:8-13; Heb. 10:11-18; Mark 13:24-32 Biblical consciousness incorporates the paradox and lives with the tension that time--historical time and our time--has been untrue to what is **timelessly true**, what the great hallel-praise in the closing Psalms celebrates, namely, that a "constant Love" lies behind and within the world and all its creatures. We who would praise, preach, and promise this Love must practice its dominion.

20--Jer. 23:1-6; Ps. 93; Rev. 1:4b-8; Jn. 13:33-37 The Bible instructs us to **tremble** because God is King (or "Sovereign") and to **cool it** for the same reason. Tremble because God is righteous, cool it because God is merciful. The mercy is **moral**, conditional upon repentance; the righteousness is **merciful**, not relentless. Our passages sound profound notes on this dual theme.

27--Jer. 33:14-16; Ps. 25:1-10; 1 Thes. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36. (Advent) There's just so much you can do when you're absent: words and deeds **in person** are so much more effective. Advent is the Church Year's preparation for Christmas, the festival of the Incarnation, God's coming personally in Jesus--God, who had become frustrated with the poor results of sending others.

DECEMBER

4--Malachi 3:1-4; Ps. 126; Phil. 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6 It is not true that there are many ways to God. There is only one. It is the **hallowing** of the everyday, the welcoming of every day as an advent of the Holy One. Refiner's fire, fuller's soap, sower's seed, harvester's sheaves, messenger's words, prisoner's visitor, all **preparers** of the way of the Lord.

11--Zeph. 3:14-20; Is. 12:2-6; Phil. 4:4-9; Luke 3:7-18 All singers of the good news--all through whom God sings good news--know that **faith** is less possession than decision and less decision than **gift**. The gift of the Presence that assures and beckons. The gift of the inner knowledge that we do not so much seek God as God finds us, comes to us, abides in us, lives through us--defeating not us but our stupid and timorous resistance to salvation, to deliverance, to freedom, to peace and joy and Christlike action in a darkling, groaning world.

18--Micah 5:2-5a; Ps. 80:1-7; Heb. 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55 Our human capacity for **grandeur** made God's coming as a human being possible; our capacity for and enmiring in **misery** made it necessary. In Jesus, God accepts, experiences, and transcends the misery, reaching up through it to grandeur, for us all. Therefore with Mary "My soul magnifies the Lord!"

25--Is. 9:2-7; Ps. 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20. (Christmas) The Story of how and why the Great Love passed from the verbal to the visible is my centering story, my faith. No faith makes sense in all circumstances. This faith makes sense more often, and more profoundly, than its rivals. It's mine for Christmas and the whole new year. Or better, I'm its. "The grace of God has appeared!"

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.