

CELEBRATING ASSOCIATE CLERGY

Sunday, May 27, 2012

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The unit you are viewing, Celebrating Associate Clergy, is a compact unit. This means that it is not a complete commentary of the Scripture(s) selected for this day on the calendar, nor does it have a full, supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided a sermonic outline, songs, suggested books, and suggested articles, links, and videos. For additional information on Associate Clergy Day, see the archives of the Lectionary for 2011. 2011 was the first year that the African American Lectionary posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Associate clergy persons are consumed with details—the nuts and bolts of ministry. They are often the first to arrive and the last to leave the church, homes of parishioners,

hospitals, and nursing homes. They spend countless hours visiting sick persons, serving communion, counseling or providing advice, arranging funeral services, planning the details of morning worship service, and preaching as needed. To be effective, an associate clergy person must be a jack-of-all-trades. Unlike most senior pastors, the associate clergy person does not have flexible work hours. He or she is expected to work tirelessly without reasonable vacation time, financial support, and without complaining. Although congregants have more interaction with associate clergy persons than the senior pastor, the senior pastor almost always receives all of the public acknowledgment. It is “the call to serve” that keeps the average associate clergy person encouraged and engaged in the life of the church.

Associate clergy function in a vital role within the local church. Like the senior pastor, they serve as watch persons, announcers of good news, caretakers, and encouragers, among other things. This is reason to celebrate associate clergy! They, too, endure the “burdensome joy” of ministry. This day on the liturgical calendar is an opportune time to reverse the marginalization of associate clergy. It is a clarion call to move them from the peripheral to the center in order to encourage them and affirm them but most of all, to say thank you for a job well done!

The text selected for today, Isaiah 52:7, with the entire pericope extending through verse 12, most scholars agree, was written by Second Isaiah, the author of chapters 40–55. They are rhetorically distinguishable from the bulk of chapters 1–39 and from the author of Isaiah chapters 56–66. Chapters 40–55 are speeches delivered to Jews deported to Babylon from Judah and who would be later placed under the rule of the Persian Empire that would overtake Babylon. The Persian policy of allowing the exiles to return to Zion provided yet another unique chapter in the life of the Children of Israel. However, amidst all of the upheaval, strife, newness, oppression, and confusion, the Israelites needed a clear-throated, passionate, culturally astute spokesperson for Yahweh to persuade them to look to God (not their circumstances) and submit to the will of Yahweh, for in Him was their salvation.

Associate clergy find themselves in a role similar to Second Isaiah. They are orators who have to persuade people who are facing upheaval, strife, newness, and oppression to submit to the ways and will of God. They have to use all of their powers to help believers understand that God is with them, leading them through each and every experience. Associate clergy, like many biblical prophets, are not thanked or venerated for their work, but they diligently toil on. They work in churches, hospitals, homes, on telephones, at jails, missions, nursing homes, schools, and wherever they are needed to get people to accept and live into the will of God for their lives. They work by teaching, praying, preaching, consoling, and uplifting. Indeed how beautiful are the feet of these who “announce peace, bring good news . . . and announce salvation.” Thank God they keep showing up.

With this material as our backdrop, we provide a sermonic outline as we celebrate associate clergy.

II. Celebrating Associate Clergy: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Isaiah 52:7 (New Revised Standard Version)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’

B. Possible Titles

- i. These Three Words
- ii. Celebrating God’s Messengers
- iii. News That Changes Everything

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the tone of excitement and celebration. This verse begins with a positive exclamation (“*how!*”), which sets the tone for the entire verse. The focus is on the description of a person who is bringing news that changes people’s perceptions, attitudes, worldview, and emotional state. Noteworthy is the emphasis on the person, the messenger God is using to deliver good news.

The metaphor of “feet” conveys the path or way of the messenger. This is fitting on this day of celebrating associate clergy. We give thanks to God for associate clergy who are messengers who bring words of hope to dismal and bleak situations.

The passage uses a variety of images such as “the announcing of **peace**,” “the bringing of **good news**,” and “announcing of **salvation**” to describe the content of the messenger’s message. This is an apt description of the care and concern that associate clergy persons provide to local congregants.

III. Introduction

I love to watch action-adventure movies. One of my favorite movies is “Bad Boys II” starring Martin Lawrence (Marcus Burnett), Will Smith (Mike Lowery), and Gabrielle Union (Syd). In this movie, Marcus and Mike are lead detectives in a special tactical narcotics unit. Their sole purpose is to take down Johnny Tapia, who is a big-time international drug dealer with a large drug operation. As Marcus and Mike are slowly dismantling his drug operation, things take a turn for the worst. Johnny Tapia realizes Marcus’s sister, Syd, is associated in some way with both Marcus and Mike. As a result, he captures her and takes her across international waters to Cuba. Tapia holds her hostage in his multi-million dollar drug mansion. He binds her hands and feet and gags her mouth. For several days Syd sits in a foreign house lonely, scared, confused, and

wondering if anyone will save her. But, as in all good movies, things take another turn when Marcus and Mike come bursting through the door with guns blazing to rescue Sydney. One of the most interesting camera shots in this scene is the look on Syd's face as she hears the sound of help coming through the house. Her expressions of uncertainty and fear change to excitement, victory and hope. For her, it was a time of rejoicing, a time of excitement, and a brand new day!

Well, today we celebrate associate clergy persons as messengers of good news. They, too, bring words of hope and good news to people in dark situations. As watch persons, counselors, and first responders, their work is unending. This day is set aside to praise, honor, and thank them for their unique contributions to the local church.

Here in the Isaiah text, the people of Israel get a message of victory and salvation for their oppressive circumstance. In response, those who had ears to hear praised God's messenger for news that impacted their lives. To move God's people from hard times to hope and praise, God's messengers bring three words of excitement. Let's look at the text:

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – God's messengers bring words of peace.

- a. Many of us are in overwhelming situations and need peace;
- b. Peace is NOT the absence of trouble; and
- c. A word of peace is an inner resolve that God's presence is with us.

Move/Point Two – God's peace flows out of God's good news, which God's messengers also bring.

- a. In spite of pain and difficulty there is always a word of good news;
- b. God's good news may be hidden in the subtle realities of life; and
- c. The good news is that God is always on the side of God's people.

Move/Point Three – God's messengers bring a word of salvation.

- a. God's salvation is not just a spiritual reality;
- b. God's salvation is also a political and socio-economic reality; and
- c. Salvation brings us victory.

V. Celebration

We have a reason to celebrate because the God we serve never fails! God does not forget about God's people. It may seem like God has forgotten, but just hold on. Help is on the way. Good news is on the way. A brand new day with victory written in it is coming. It does not matter how things look, how dark the day, how grim the night. God has not forgotten about us. God made a promise to us that he would be with us always even until the end of the age! And because God reigns we always have the victory. I grew up singing a song in a small Baptist church that simply says:

God never fails!
God never fails!
He abides with me.
He gives me victory.
Oh, God never fails.

Just keep the faith and never cease to pray.
Just walk upright morning, noonday or night.
He'll be there,
He'll be there,
There's no need to worry 'cause
God never fails!

VI. Illustration(s)

Poking Holes in the Darkness

Robert Lewis Stevenson, best known for his adventure story *Treasure Island*, was in poor health during much of his childhood and youth. One night his nurse found him with his nose pressed against the frosty pane of his bedroom window. "Child, come away from there. You'll catch your death of cold," she fussed.

But young Robert wouldn't budge. He sat, mesmerized, as he watched an old lamplighter slowly working his way through the black night, lighting each street lamp along his route. Pointing, Robert exclaimed, "See; look there; there's a man poking holes in the darkness."

There were no street lamps, cobblestone streets, or frosty windows in Isaiah's day, yet ancient Israel had its own kind of lamplighters who poked holes in the darkness. Isaiah sang:

*How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,*

*who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it
with their own eyes. (Isaiah 52:7-8, NIV)*

—Brian Flemming, "Christian Life: Poking Holes in the Darkness"¹

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

Some of the sights, sounds, and colors include:

Sounds: People cheering; the report of good news, peace, and salvation; the sound of feet walking; associate clergy praying for members;

Sights: Messengers arriving; people gathering; looks of excitement; the mountain; and

Colors: The purple color of the robe of the royal messenger.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymns

- Lift Him Up. By Johnson Oatman, Jr. and B. B. Beall
YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UStpVpPLbEo>
- I Love to Tell the Story. By Katherine Hankey and William G. Fischer. *This song can be used as an opening hymn.*

B. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2011)

- Good News. By Vanessa Bell Armstrong
YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyCw3t_78j4
- I'll Say Yes. By Carol Cymbala
- I'm Just a Nobody. By Leonard Williams

C. Well-known Song(s)

- Never Too Busy. By Brent Jones
- Use Me. By Jeanie McQuinn and Jacquelyn Reddick
- Let God Use You. By Walter Scrutchings
- Am I a Soldier of the Cross. Text by Isaac Watts. Tune by Thomas A. Arne
- If I Can Help Somebody. By A. Bazel Androzzo. Arr. by Kenneth Morris
- Do It All in the Name of the Lord. By Donna Jones
- Incredible. By Brian C. Wilson. Music by Brian C. Wilson and Leon C. Lewis

D. Liturgical Dance and Mime Ministry Music

- God Cares. By Levi Seacer, Jr. and Billy Steele

E. Songs for the Period of Prayer

- I Need Thee Every Hour/'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus/I'd Rather Have Jesus. By Annie S. Hawks, Louisa M.R. Stead, and Rhea F. Miller
- Hush! Hush! My Soul. By S.S. Morris. Tune by Edward C. Deas

F. Sermonic Selection

- Safe in His Arms. By Darius Brooks
- Our Father You Are Holy. By Andre Crittenden, Sheron Davis, and Elisha Harris

G. Invitational Songs

- 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus. By Louisa M. R. Stead and William J. Kirkpatrick
- Give of Your Best to the Master. By Howard Grose. Tune, (BARNARD), by Charlotte A. Barnard

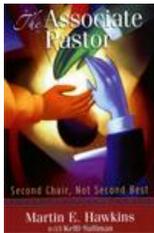
H. Benediction Songs

- Be Fruitful. By Vashawn Mitchell
- I Don't Feel No Ways Tired. By Curtis Burrell

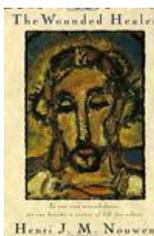
IX. Ideas to Honor Your Associate Clergy

- Hold a card shower. Ask all members to bring cards to give to associate clergy. Teens and children should make their cards and decorate them in church classes.
- Hold an afternoon or evening social.
- Put up a bulletin with photos and the names of all of the associate clergy at the church.
- Have the church pay for and the pastor give flowers to all associate clergy.
- Raise a special offering that will be split equally among all associate clergy. Ask members to give at least twenty dollars to this offering. Announce the offering one month in advance to give **all** members time to contribute.
- Ask members to prepare notes of appreciation to associate clergy.
- Have a church appreciation banquet. Invite family and friends of all associate clergy to attend.

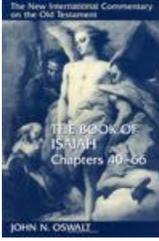
X. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Associate Clergy



Hawkins, Martin E., and Kelli Sallman. Associate Pastor: Second Chair Not Second Best. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2005.



Nouwen, Henri. The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society. New York, NY: Image Books: Doubleday, 1979.



Oswalt, John. The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.



Hopewell, David. Keys to Becoming an Effective Associate Minister Church Minister and Church Leader. Lithonia, GA: Orman Press Inc., 2004.

XII. Link to Helpful Website for Celebrating Associate Clergy

- A word of encouragement for members of the clergy. Online location: <http://www.examiner.com/christian-spirituality-in-columbus/clergy-appreciation-month-let-s-celebrate> accessed 20 December 2011

XIII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymns

- Lift Him Up. By Johnson Oatman, Jr. and B. B. Beall
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #54
- I Love to Tell the Story. By Katherine Hankey and William G. Fischer. *This song can be used as an opening hymn.*
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #513

B. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2011)

- Good News. By Vanessa Bell Armstrong
Location:
The Experience. Brentwood, TN: EMI Gospel, 2009.

- I'll Say Yes. By Carol Cymbala
Location:
Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. I'll Say Yes. Mobile, AL: Integrity Media, 2007.
- I'm Just a Nobody. By Leonard Williams
Location:
The Williams Brothers. Greatest Hits Plus. Summit, MS: Blackberry Records, 2005.

C. Well-known Song(s)

- Never Too Busy. By Brent Jones
Location:
Cage, Byron. Live at New Birth Cathedral. Inglewood, CA: Gospocentric, 2003.
- Use Me. By Jeanie McQuinn and Jacquelyn Reddick
Location:
Draper, O'Landa & The Associates. Live...A Celebration of Praise. New York, NY: Sony 1994.
- Let God Use You. By Walter Scrutchings
Location:
Just Call on Jesus. Akron, OH: Scrutchings Music, 1997.
- Am I a Soldier of the Cross. Text by Isaac Watts. Tune by Thomas A. Arne
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #482
- If I Can Help Somebody. By A. Bazel Androzzo. Arr. by Kenneth Morris
Location:
Zion Still Sings for Every Generation. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.
#140
- Do It All in the Name of the Lord. By Donna Jones
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #627
- Incredible. By Brian C. Wilson. Music by Brian C. Wilson and Leon C. Lewis
Location:
Zion Still Sings. #52

D. Liturgical Dance and Mime Ministry Music

- God Cares. By Levi Seacer, Jr. and Billy Steele
Location:

Sounds of Blackness. Time for Healing. New York, NY: Perspective Records, 1997.

E. Songs for the Period of Prayer

- I Need Thee Every Hour/'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus/I'd Rather Have Jesus. By Annie S. Hawks, Louisa M.R. Stead, and Rhea F. Miller
Location:
Headley, Heather. Audience of One. Brentwood, TN: EMI Gospel, 2009.
- Hush! Hush! My Soul. By S.S. Morris. Tune by Edward C. Deas
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #450

F. Sermonic Selection

- Safe in His Arms. By Darius Brooks
Location:
Darius Brooks Presents the Reunion: Live in Chicago—Side A. Forest Park, IL: Journey Music Group, 2006.
- Our Father You Are Holy. By Andre Crittenden, Sheron Davis, and Elisha Harris
Location:
Dillard, Ricky & New Generation. 7th Episode: Live in Toronto Limited Deluxe Edition. Brentwood, TN: EMI Gospel, 2008.

G. Invitational Songs

- 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus. By Louisa M. R. Stead and William J. Kirkpatrick
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #368
- Give of Your Best to the Master. By Howard Grose. Tune, (BARNARD), by Charlotte A. Barnard
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #465

H. Benediction Songs

- Be Fruitful. By Vashawn Mitchell
Location:
Triumphant. Brentwood, TN: EMI Gospel, 2010.
- I Don't Feel No Ways Tired. By Curtis Burrell

Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #414

Note

1. Flemming, Brian. Sermon: "Christian Life: Poking Holes in the Darkness." Online location: <http://www.preaching.com/sermons/11563683/>