



USHER'S DAY

Sunday, August 14, 2011

(Be sure to view the great videos and links included with this material.)

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The unit you are viewing, Usher's Day, is a compact unit. This means that it is not mainly a 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 sermon outline, songs, suggested books, and suggested articles, links, and videos. For additional information see Usher's Day in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008, 2009, and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

In 2009, Dr. Juan Floyd-Thomas, in the Lectionary Commentary for Usher's Day, said:

The work of ushers is best envisioned as a means of safeguarding the house of God, as well as the people of God, in order that worship can be enjoyed to the fullest extent. Therefore, celebrating Usher's Day acknowledges the work of those who enable the Holy Spirit to have its way in the sanctuary in an imminent and uninterrupted fashion. This day serves as a way of giving thanks for the many acts of stewardship and service provided by those who labor under the divine mandate to welcome strangers and newcomers as though they were members of your church family.¹ Ushers function as Christ's church-greeters to those seeking renewal and refuge from the harsh realities of the world.

Those women, men, and girls and boys who take part in this crucial ministry of the church draw attention to the ways in which stewards of the church are born to extend God's grace toward the world. Thus, by acknowledging the patience, goodwill, determination, stamina, willingness, graciousness, and humility required of ushers, this special day gives much-deserved recognition to the bearers of those gifts in accordance with how God would desire all of us to manifest and utilize our gifts.²

Many churches also have nurses guilds that are a division of their usher boards. In most instances these guilds are not comprised of trained nurses. Instead, modernly, many guilds are now

comprised of persons who have basic CPR training. For most of the twentieth century and even in some churches today a nurse is assigned to serve those in the pulpit.

With this as our backdrop, we provide a sermonic outline for Usher's Day 2011.

II. Usher's Day: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text: Romans 12:10-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 10) love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. (v. 11) Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. (v. 12) Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. (v. 13) Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

B. Possible Titles

- i. Hospitable Ushers
- ii. Delightful Doorkeepers
- iii. Do-Right Doorkeepers

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the notion of "lagging in zeal." Rarely is the need for the right attitude while living for Christ discussed this clearly and straightforwardly. Basically, the writer tells us not to be bored in our work or dull in our exhibition of it. Yes, Christians are told to love, forgive, be patient, long-suffering, etc., all of which are wonderful virtues to exhibit. However, in this passage we read of something about which little is said when it comes to service for God—being zealous about it; being ardent. We are familiar with the derision shown those who have "a zeal of God that is not according to knowledge"; but what of those who have knowledge of God and no zeal? Both are needed. In other words, those who serve God in any capacity ought to be knowledgeable and excited and passionate about serving God in any capacity.

III. Introduction

The book of Romans was written to Jews, Gentiles, and Jewish converts. The writer, Paul, engages in an over-arching two-fold task: he must encourage believers at Rome to stand for Christ although persecuted, and he must convince them to figure out how to get along with one another as believers. Neither task was easy. The second is relevant to this moment on the Lectionary calendar—Usher's Day. Why? Because ushers are our first guides into the Church. They lead us physically and most especially by demeanor—into worship as the body of Christ.

Such leadership is no small matter. Again, using the words of Juan Floyd-Thomas, ushers through their "patience, goodwill, determination, stamina, willingness, graciousness, and humility... [are] bearers of those gifts... God would desire all of us to manifest and utilize..." In

other words, we should see in ushers those Christian servant characteristics that we can all emulate.

If you darkened the doorsteps of a church and were greeted by grumpy, impatient, poorly dressed ushers, how quickly would you return? Would it matter if you were treated as a stranger no one wanted to get to know instead of as a family member returning home to a joyous embrace? If you did not know the rules, protocols, or people, would hospitality at a Church matter to you? Surely we know that so many who enter Church doors these days are dealing with dire or at least difficult circumstances. Oh for a place to rest, for an unexpected smile, for a sincere embrace and an invitation to come again and again, and even to join a church family because its doors hang on the hinges of welcome.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – Christians need to be reminded how to act and ushers can lead in showing the requisite behavior.

- a. Love those in the household of faith;
- b. Love as if it were a contest that no one loses if they engage in it; and
- c. Ushers and all Christians need zeal as they use their gifts to serve.

Move/Point Two – Hope, patience, and perseverance in prayer is necessary in the household of faith.

- a. Hopefulness is a necessary approach to life for ushers and all Christians;
- b. Patience allow ushers and all Christians to serve with less irritation; and
- c. Ushers must be prayer warriors because they play such pivotal roles.

Move/Point Three – Help saints and strangers.

- a. Good ushers are examples of Christians who know how to help other Christians;
- b. Helping others in the household of faith is a necessity, not an option; and
- c. God requires that we show hospitality to strangers, even today.

V. Challenge

The Bible says over and over again that showing hospitality to strangers (also called aliens in some instances in scripture) is important. Whether they are Latinos, Haitians, or others who are in the United States and not citizens, the body of Christ, through its words and deeds, is to welcome them. We are God's ushers in and outside the Church. But our fear has caused us to

give in to a selfish spirit of self-protection and self-preservation. Xenophobia, the fear of strangers, has increased in our country. Armed vigilantes have begun to patrol our borders compelled by a fear that government authorities will not do their jobs properly. The news media fuels xenophobic fears by bringing the “immigration problem” to our attention regularly. Some code words and phrases we hear often concerning strangers are invasion, terrorists, illegal aliens, they don’t want to be American, they’ll change our way of life, etc. But God will have none of this. So, the next time such attitudes arise in us or around us, we must stand as God’s cultural ushers of hospitality. We cannot fail God or our brothers and sisters.

VI. Illustration(s)

Gifts for a Stranger

A woman new to a neighborhood was invited for a meal by a family on the block. The woman was surprised and pleased by the invitation and though not eager about it, accepted it. At the end of the dinner the eleven-year-old in the family presented the woman with flowers, cookies in a zip-log bag, and a hand-drawn card that she had made. It said welcome in large letters and contained red hearts that were covered in glitter. The woman remarked, “Oh my goodness. You are a kind young lady, and I truly feel welcomed now.” The girl responded, “We treat all strangers as angels, just in case.”

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

Sounds: Christians greeting each other and strangers with welcoming tones; laughter;

Sights: Ushers greeting people with a smile; ushers patiently assisting persons to seats; churches welcoming guests with handshakes and hugs; ushers praying; and

Colors: Blue or black usher uniforms, the white gloves of ushers; and the black shoes of ushers.

VIII. Disability Awareness Information

This year the African American Lectionary wants all churches to do a better job of including the disabled/differently abled beginning with its pastors and ushers. Please consider the following when planning, during all worship services, and all other church activities:

We need to give people with disabilities access to society’s most important place: our compassionate hearts. In fact, if we each begin with opening our hearts, access to our church buildings, programs, and our lives will be a natural expression of welcoming all God’s children into the community of Christ’s body, freely and without prejudice. Our proactive inclusion of adults and children with disabilities into the full life of our churches then will become the living and best example of being like Christ.

“Communication and Etiquette with Persons with Disabilities.” Shepard, Charlotte, Wineva Hankamer, and Devorah Greenstein. Equal Access Guide: The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA Committee on Disabilities, in 2004. The Episcopal Disability Network. Online location: <http://www.disability99.org/id69.html> accessed 5 December 2010.

IX. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Well-Known Song(s)

- Order My Steps. By Glenn Burleigh
- It’s Gonna Rain. By Milton Brunson

There are staple songs in the black church for any Usher’s Day celebration. Three of the most noted are “Walking Up the King’s Highway,” “When the Saints Go Marching In,” and “Till We Gather Again.” Other staples include “We are Soldiers” and “In the Army of Lord.”

- **Walking Up the King’s Highway**

It’s a highway to heaven, none can walk up there
But the pure in heart. It’s a highway to heaven,
I am walking up the King’s highway.

- **When the Saints Go Marching In**

O when the saints go marching in
O when the saints go marching in
O Lord, I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in.

- **Till We Gather Again**

Till we gather again, God be with you
Till we gather again, God be with you.
May he give you his love, give you
His kindness, keep you in perfect peace.
God be with you till we meet again.

B. Modern Songs (Written between 2005–2010)

- Walking. By Erica Atkins, Trecina Atkins, Warryn Campbell II, Neal Brian Conway, and Crystal Waters
- Here I Am to Worship. By Timothy Hughes

C. Hymns

- We Have Come into This House. By Bruce Ballinger
- We All Are One in Mission. By Rusty Edwards. Tune by Marilyn E. Thornton
- Welcome into This Place. By Orlando Juarez

D. Liturgical Dance Music

- Praise on the Inside. By J. Moss

E. Invitational Songs

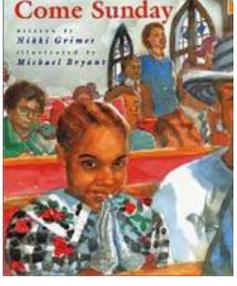
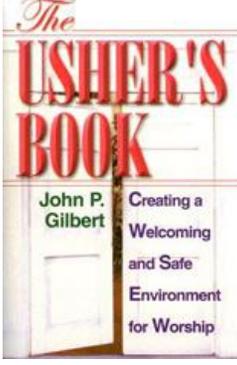
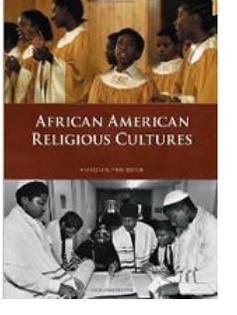
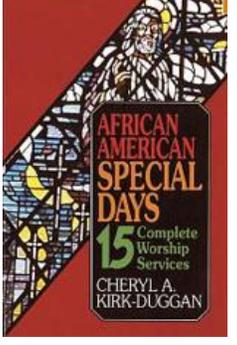
- Take My Life. By Carl Underwood
- My Heart Says Yes. By Troy Sneed

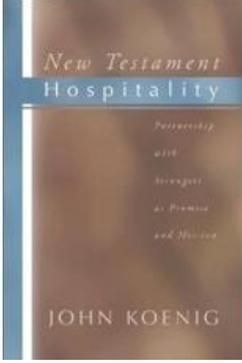
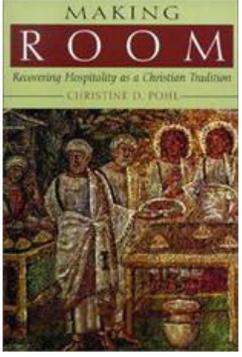
X. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- Funny Prank Call to an Usher. Online location:
<http://www.blackbottom.com/watch.php?v=5XUlwI5col> accessed 12 March 2011
- St. Rest Baptist Church 50th Usher's Day celebration. Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRLQGjsHpac&NR=1> accessed 14 March 2011
- Dancing Usher Board in Alabama. Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFetvZMoNzM&feature=related> accessed 14 March 2011
- Family Worship Center Church 2007 Ushers & Nurses Celebration March. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3yXYoJwS0g&feature=related> accessed 14 March 2011

XI. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Usher's Day

- One of the earliest usher guides was published in 1924 by the Fleming H. Revel Company. It was entitled Church Usher's Manual. This book was widely used for more than fifty years. The Universal Church Usher's Manual, by R.H. Boyd Publishing, is another usher's manual widely used by black Baptists. The Work of the Usher, by Alvin Johnson, published by Judson Press in 1966, and A Guide for The Church Usher, by Thomas L. Clark, published by Broadman and Holman Press in 1984, are also widely used. Many denominations have developed their own manuals for ushers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grimes, Nikki. <u>Come Sunday</u>. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 1999.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gilbert, John. <u>The Usher's Book</u>. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pinn, Anthony. <u>African American Religious Cultures</u>. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl. <u>More African American Special Days: 15 Complete Worship Services</u>. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Koenig, John. <u>New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission</u>. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pohl, Christine. <u>Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition</u>. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

XII. Links to Websites for Ushers

- Article by Victor Davis, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia, and author of “Ushering with a Mission.” Online location: <http://www.sbcbaptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?id=14040> accessed 12 March 2011
- Article on “Ways Ushers Can Contribute to Church Security.” Online location: <http://churchsecurityconsultant.com/?p=407> accessed 12 March 2011
- Alberta Ranton, an outstanding usher, dies at age 78. Online location: http://articles.philly.com/2011-02-01/news/27092919_1_worship-service-senior-usher-board-church-usher accessed 12 March 2011

XIII. Notes for Selected Songs

A. Well-Known Songs

- Order My Steps. By Glenn Burleigh
Location:
It’s Our Time. Indianapolis, IN. Tyscot Records, 2000.

- It's Gonna Rain. By Marvin Winans

Location:

Milton Brunson and the Thompson Community Singers. 50 Blessed Years. Nashville, TN: Myrrh/Word/Epic, 1998.

B. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2010)

- Walking. By Erica Atkins, Trecina Atkins, Warryn Campbell II, Neal Brian Conway, and Crystal Waters

Location:

Mary Mary. Something Big. New York, NY: Columbia Records, 2011.

- Here I Am to Worship. By Timothy Hughes

Location:

Headley, Heather. Audience of One. Brentwood, TN: EMI Gospel, 2009.

C. Hymns

- We Have Come into This House. By Bruce Ballinger

Location:

The African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #570

- We All Are One in Mission. By Rusty Edwards. Tune by Marilyn E. Thornton

Location:

Zion Still Sings for Every Generation. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007. #99

- Welcome into this Place. By Orlando Juarez

Location:

Zion Still Sings. #143

D. Liturgical Dance Music

- Praise on the Inside. By J. Moss

Location:

Album: V2... Inglewood, CA: Gospocentric, 2006.

E. Invitational Songs

- Take My Life. By Carl Underwood

Location:

Stamper, Micah. Songbook of Micah. New York, NY: Dexterity, 2007.

- My Heart Says Yes. By Troy Sneed

Location:

My Heart Says Yes. Middleburg, FL: Emtro Gospel, 2011.

Notes

1. Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:18-19.
2. Parrott, Leslie. Serving as a Church Usher. Paul E. Engle, ed. Zondervan practical ministry guides. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.