

LETTING THE BIBLE BREATHE

Using the Bible in worship (1)

WILD GOOSE RESOURCE GROUP

It is easy to forget that the Bible is a collection of different books, written at different times, encompassing many styles of writing and different types of literature (to say nothing of revealing a broad range of imaginative and vastly different ways in which God communicates with humanity).

Types of literature

To illustrate ...

<i>Type</i>	<i>Obvious example</i>
• History	Exodus
• Law	10 commandments, Leviticus
• Poetry	Psalms, Song of Songs
• Songs	Magnificat, Psalms
• Letters	Paul's writings
• Dialogues/conversations	All through Gospels & OT
• Sermons	On the mount (Matthew)
• Prophecy	Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel etc.
• Parables	Good Samaritan, Pharisee & Tax collector
• Wise sayings	Proverbs

Just as we would not read all 'secular' literature similarly, there is also a sense in which we should treat with respect the various styles of writing in the bible, by reading/ communicating them in a particular way appropriate to their 'genre'.

Conversations sometimes require more than one voice to make sense of an encounter and the interplay between the characters. Poetry requires rhythm and repetition to release its full creativity. Law requires intense scrutiny of every word and phrase, to understand its application and implication in the life of the reader & society for which it is written. Metaphor, parables and allegory require imagination to discover what reality, truth or person is being alluded to. Letters require background knowledge of the situations being referred to.

If this is true, then it has implications for the way in which we convincingly present and communicate scripture to people in our churches. One person reading everything monotone from a lectern seldom engages. This is particularly true, given societal changes. It is no longer possible to assume children or adults have any prior biblical knowledge.

Some suggestions

Certain passages are better read using more than one voice, others lend themselves to the use of music to break up long texts, which are full of concepts, imagery or themes. Some passages are better communicated by one voice, but suggest symbols or visual objects to enable the listeners to concentrate and focus.

For example, try reading *The Temptations* in Matthew Chapter 4 as a conversation, which it is. Use three voices - Narrator, Jesus and the devil, at different points in the church, as suggested by text (e.g. altar/communion table, pulpit and door/balcony). If feeling adventurous, split the three conversations with a sung *KYRIE* or Lord have mercy after each time that Jesus refuses the devil. This reading of the temptations leads very well into a reflection or conversation and prayers of a contemporary nature.

What other passages might benefit from a similar approach?

Some passages lend themselves to some kind of visual representation. For example, John's gospel Chapter 1 - may be represented by the placing of a bible, a candle and a cross when verses are read about the Word being present, light to humankind, and the word becoming flesh and humans not recognising him.

All this is not to detract from the power of God's Word, rather, to liberate the bible from a strait jacket of over-intellectualism, which disables people from bringing themselves and their experiences to the texts. Moreover, by utilising a variety of methods, we can enable different people to engage with scripture in different and appropriate ways.

Further reflection and development might result in the writing of small meditations or reflections on bible characters or stories, or even exploring the contemporary context in which the stories might be told.

Regardless of whether the reading is by one voice or many, with symbols and music, or without, it is *vital* that people are well prepared and rehearsed. That which we do not comfortably carry inside us cannot be convincingly communicated to other people. Preparation is a sign of the seriousness of our intention.

For further Wild Goose resources using Biblical material, see:

- **Cloth For the Cradle:** Readings and liturgical resources for Advent & Christmas.
- **Stages On The Way:** Readings and liturgical resources for Lent and Easter.
- **Present On Earth:** Readings and liturgical resources on the life of Jesus.
- **He Was In The World:** Meditations for congregations.
- **Jesus & Peter:** Conversations from biblical texts.

© WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH, Scotland.

WGRG, Iona Community, 4th Floor, Savoy House,
140 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3DH, Scotland.

T: 0141 332 6343

F: 0141 332 1090

E: wgrg@iona.org.uk

Info: www.iona.org.uk/wgrg_home.php

Holy City: www.holycity-glasgow.co.uk

Online Shop: www.wgrg.co.uk