CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH READINGS

for Labor Day Weekend Services

Many religious traditions have standard readings used in services. Among Christians, these readings are called lectionaries. In synagogues, there is a similar tradition of standardized readings. Which passages are read on which dates vary by year. Below are some of the traditions that use the set readings and where to find them.

Be sure to check with the leadership at the house of worship where you will be to find out if the congregation will be using a set of readings. If so, review the passages. If one or two of the passages have themes that relate to justice for workers, consider using them in your message. It is not required that your Labor Day message relate to the passages, so don't worry if the passages are unrelated to worker justice.

The **Roman Catholic Lectionary** is used by Roman Catholic churches. Find the readings at www.usccb.org/nab.

The **Revised Common Lectionary,** which can be found at http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary, is used by various Protestant denominations including:

- The United Methodist Church
- The Presbyterian Church (USA)
- The United Church of Christ
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- The American Baptist Churches

The **Episcopal Church Lectionary** is used by The Episcopal Church. The readings can be found at www.satucket.com/lectionary.

Lots of additional lectionary reading background materials are available at www.textweek.com.

In **Jewish synagogues,** there are two standard readings. First, a passage from the Torah is read. In the course of the year, the entire Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy) is read. This passage is referred to as a parshah. The weekly parshah is followed by a passage from the prophets, which is referred to as a haftarah. The readings can be found at www.jewfaq.org.

Possible Worker Justice Themes from the Readings

Psalm 45: Verses 6 and 7 describe a God whose royal scepter is a scepter of equity. They honor God who loves righteousness and hates wickedness. The word "righteousness" is the same word as justice. It is right relationships between people. Labor Day is an appropriate time to lift up a God of equity and justice.

Deuteronomy 4: The verses admonish the Israelites to obey God's laws in order to make a great nation. Many of the rules of fairness and justice, especially toward orphans, widows and immigrants, are appropriate guides for the nation today.

Psalm 15: This short Psalm has strong words about doing what is right, speaking the truth, despising wickedness and fearing God. This passage offers guidelines for just relationships between managers and workers—appropriate for Labor Day.

James 1: This passage is the easiest with which to work. Believers are urged to be doers of the word and not just hearers. Pure religion is described as that which cares for orphans and widows, as well as keeps people unstained by the world. Labor Day provides an opportunity to challenge people of faith to do justice and not just hear about it or talk about it.

Mark 7: In this passage, the Pharisees and some scribes criticize the disciples for not following all the dietary rules. Jesus draws on the words of Isaiah challenging hypocrites who speak religious words but don't act justly because their hearts are not right with God. The Mark passage combined with passages in Isaiah could lead to a strong Labor Day message.

Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9: Chapter 16 discusses the need to have judges and officials who "follow justice and justice alone." As was mentioned above, the following week's Torah portion, which includes Deuteronomy 24:14–15, is particularly strong: "Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy.…"

Ephesians 6:10–20: The first few verses in this passage often are used to discuss struggling against unjust systems and evil in the society. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Please note this passage is not in most of the lectionary texts.