

# Coaching the Uncommon Lectionary

November–December 2007

By Tom Bandy

**T**he Uncommon Lectionary is an alternative worship design for mission-driven churches. It is fully explained in *Introducing the Uncommon Lectionary: Opening the Bible for Seekers and Disciples* by Tom Bandy (Abingdon Press).

Sunday morning should generate a conversation between Seekers and Disciples. “Disciple Worship” takes church members deep into salvation history, preparing them to mentor seekers. “Seeker Worship” introduces inquirers into the basics of Christian faith, motivating them to talk with mentors. Radical hospitality, targeted worship, education and small groups are seamlessly connected to create this larger conversation.

The Seeker Cycle begins January 1<sup>st</sup> and ends December 31<sup>st</sup>, addressing the holidays and high points of public life. It focuses the basic Bible texts every Christian should know. The Disciple Cycle begins May 1<sup>st</sup> and ends April 31<sup>st</sup>, covering the entire Bible, through rhythms of daily life, in five themes: *Israel’s Covenant*, *David’s Legacy*, *Faithful Servants*, *Jesus’ Purpose*, and *Christians’ Mission*.

## Seeker Cycle Coaching

**Seekers** in North America will be preoccupied with Halloween and Thanksgiving. The retail culture will then rapidly shift to Christmas with all the consumerism of parties, presents, and childhood sentimentality. The more serious will observe Remembrance Day and World AIDS Day, and some will be conscious of other religious celebrations such as Hanukkah. This year may experience a higher than usual anxiety about war, global warming, pandemics, tsunamis, and other fears of catastrophe.

Seeker cycle worship addresses fundamental issues about the struggle between good and evil, and gives assurance about the victory of God both personally and globally. Most people are anxious that the struggle between good and evil in their lives is not, cannot, or will not ever be resolved. Parties grow more raucous, because of this pervasive sense of insecurity. Families tend to obsess over home and hearth, childhood memories, and nostalgia in a “circle-the-wagons” defensiveness against the world. Seekers need to see an authentic reason for optimism.

The texts for worship are in bold print, and the texts for meditation by the leadership teams are in normal print. Seekers are profoundly interested in the supernatural and the miraculous, just as they are profoundly frustrated by political events, threats of war and disease, and the daily grind. This is your opportunity to clarify the promise of eternal and abundant life of Christ in prayer, preaching, and song. Thanksgiving marks a huge mental shift. The more worship becomes a huge act of generosity, the more you can influence that shift away from selfishness toward compassion.

There is no “Advent season” for seekers ... only the “Christmas season” ... so do not be timid about Christmas. Make it extravagant. Worshippers should be utterly surprised at the decorations of the sanctuary, the power of the music, and emotion of the preaching. Strongly connect every worship service with a concrete mission that is supported by volunteers from the church. Seekers want joy to truly overflow and bless strangers in

Week	Seeker Cycle
45 Nov. 4	<b>John 11:1-12:11</b> Acts 20:7-12
46 Nov. 11	<b>2 Kings 4 &amp; 5</b> Luke 4:31-5:26
47 Nov. 18	<b>1 John 3:11-5:5</b> Luke 11:14-36
48 Nov. 25	<b>Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-9</b> Luke 21:25-36
49 Dec. 2	<b>Luke 1</b> Acts 28:17-31
50 Dec. 9	<b>John 1</b> Luke 22:39-46 and 23:26-49
51 Dec. 16	<b>Luke 2:1-20</b> Acts 14
52 Dec. 23	<b>Matthew 1:18-2:23</b> Luke 9:18-36
(53) Dec. 30	<b>John 1:17-51</b> Revelation 22:1-13

Week	Disciple Cycle
45 Nov. 4	<b>Isaiah 41:1-13</b> Philippians 4:4-13 <i>Isaiah 30:1-18 &amp; 35 and 40-42 and 45</i>
46 Nov. 11	<b>Isaiah 55:1-13</b> Romans 10:1-17 <i>Isaiah 52-53 &amp; 55 &amp; 58:1-9 &amp; 61:1-11</i>
47 Nov. 18	<b>Colossians 1:1-23</b> Isaiah 25:1-9 & 26:1-12 <i>Luke 1 and Col.1:13-23</i>
48 Nov. 25	<b>John 19:16-30 and 20:11-18</b> Isaiah 53:1-12 <i>John 18-20 &amp; Mat. 27:1-54 &amp; Heb. 8</i>
49 Dec. 2	<b>Luke 4:16-30</b> Isaiah 42:1-9 and Psalm 22 <i>Luke 4:16-43; Mat 5-7; Galatians 5</i>
50 Dec. 9	<b>John 8:12 &amp; 9:1-41</b> Isaiah 60:1-5 & 19-22 <i>John 8-10 and 1 John 1:5-2:17</i>
51 Dec. 16	<b>1 Corinthians 13</b> Hosea 11:1-4, 8-12 <i>John 14-16 and 1 Cor. 11-14</i>
52 Dec. 23	<b>Luke 2:1-20</b> Isaiah 9:1-7 <i>Mat. 1:18-2:23; Luke 1-2; Phil. 3:1-4:7</i>
(53) Dec. 30	<b>John 1:17-51</b> Revelation 22:1-13 <i>Hebrews 1-3, 5, 12</i>

need. This will also provide future bridges to draw them into short term mission projects and small groups in the New Year.

**Sunday morning** will require some very intentional shaping from the core leaders. This is a season when seekers are very likely to show up unexpectedly and slip away quickly, so you will need to increase hospitality and double the training for those who greet and follow up. This is also a season of selfishness and introversion for many members, and they may tend to be undisciplined about attendance and volunteer responsibilities. Train your choir and music leaders to be especially disciplined in about attendance before Christmas and on Christmas Eve. Remind them that they are the first line of evangelism. Most seekers will talk with a musician or vocalist *first* just after worship, when they may never talk to the pastor or refreshment servers. The musicians will have the first and best opportunity to draw seekers deeper into Christian faith.

### Disciple Cycle Coaching

**Disciples** in the North American church will be finishing the salvation history theme “Faithful Servants” by studying Amos and Hosea. The focus will be on God’s assurance of redemption and forgiveness, anticipating the coming of Christ. Unlike conventional approaches to Christmas, the cycle starts with reflection about Jesus death and his example of obedience. There is a clear connection between the birth of Jesus and his destiny to become the Light of the World.

Disciple cycle worship draws faithful Christians deeper into the saving significance of Christ’s birth. The new theme in salvation history entitled “Jesus’ Purpose” starts earlier than traditional lectionaries begin “Advent” and lasts through the end of January. These ten weeks of focus on Christ happen during one of the most emotional and transitional times of the year.

The texts for worship are in bold print and the texts for meditation by leadership teams are in normal print. In addition to the teaching of worship, this is an important time for members (“disciples”) to publicly share their experience with Jesus the Christ. There are many movies on the life of Christ, and you should excerpt specific scenes to provoke prayer, reflection, and dialogue. Invite lay leaders to share their personal answer to the question “*What is your experience of Jesus this community cannot live without?*” This helps focus their message in future mentoring conversations with seekers on Sunday morning.

The texts for small group discussion are in italics. Members should *not* be reading from the myriad of pop-theology books critiquing the historicity of Jesus, but rather from faith-based books exploring the mystery of incarnation. “Incarnation” is the key to experiencing Jesus, not merely “history”. Jesus is both “within reason” and “beyond reason”, which means the goal of the small group is not merely to “understand” what happened at his birth, but the spiritual significance of his birth. It connects with the destiny of humankind and the world as a whole.

You may discover that seekers from the “Seeker Cycle” will temporarily attend small group sessions ... motivated by the worship and the mentoring conversations. This is a time to exercise extraordinary patience, and to increase the time spent in prayer.

The real success of worship during this period will be measured by how many seekers keep coming to worship in January ... and how many seekers are drawn into small groups to continue their exploration of incarnation.