

starters for Sunday

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

10 August 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Aaron Stevens, Minister in Budapest, for his thoughts on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.

Contents

A few notes about the selection of Lectionary Readings	2
1 Kings 19: 9 – 19	3
Psalm 85: 8 – 13	4
Matthew 14: 22 – 33	5
Romans 10: 5-15	5
Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28	6
Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b	7
Prayers.....	8
Time with Children.....	13
Musical Suggestions	15
Additional Resources.....	17



Quick Guide...

Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

A few notes about the selection of Lectionary Readings

This week we have an additional passage to consider as 1st Reading, as well as an additional Psalm to accompany it. When deciding which readings should give shape to the service, it helps to have an awareness of the overall structure of the Revised Common Lectionary. The following notes depend heavily on *Making the Most of the Lectionary: a User's Guide* by Thomas O'Loughlin (2012, London, SPCK).

In year A (“The year of Matthew”), the semi-continuous reading of Matthew throughout Ordinary Time is organised to reflect the 5-sermon structure of that Gospel, and the 1st reading has been chosen to correspond with some aspect of that Gospel passage. Additionally, the Psalm for the day provides a kind of reflection on the first reading.

Based on the summary above, the Gospel reading for today is Matthew 14: 22 – 33 while the corresponding first reading is 1 Kings 19: 9 – 18. Psalm 85: 8 -13, then, reflects on themes from the first, 1 Kings. The comments on each passage later will consider the possible connections among these.

As part of a semi-continuous reading of Paul's Letter to the Romans, the second reading for the day (Romans 10: 5 – 15) follows a thread independent of the other readings. Connections that may appear can testify to the cohesiveness of the scriptures, but are not built into the design of the lectionary. For those who like to preach in a series of sermons, this strand is the only opportunity in the three-year lectionary cycle to engage in such an extended study from Romans.

Finally, for the first reading there is an alternative thread at the preacher's disposal: the semi-continuous reading of Genesis with corresponding Psalms. In this case, the readings are chosen



not because they correspond to the Gospel reading, but in order to give attention during Ordinary Time to a large narrative portion of the Old Testament.

The point is that, as a resource for worship, the RCL is best utilised when we respect the various strands offered within it. The structure of the lectionary is lost, for example, when we preach from Matthew but pair it with Genesis as the 1st reading, or when preaching from 1 Kings one week, Genesis the next, and then from Romans.

“Fearful Servants and a Faithful God” (1 Kings 19: 9 – 18/Psalm 85: 9 – 18/Matthew 14: 22 – 33)

[1 Kings 19: 9–19](#)

This wonderfully-described encounter with God is best appreciated in the context of Elijah’s having been threatened by Jezebel and encouraged by an angel earlier in 1 Kings 19; so a sermon on this text should provide that background.

At this point, Elijah has been nourished and emboldened by the angel’s gifts and guidance, but his fear is still very much a factor. Frightened as he may be, though, his behaviour still shows the discernment of a prophet. Undeterred and unmoved by the awesome spectacle of wind, quaking earth and fire, it is only for the gentle whisper that Elijah leaves his cave in search of a word from the Lord God Almighty.

In this reading, Elijah is twice asked what he is doing, and his answer seems somewhat defensive. We are not fair to him, though, to suggest he cares only for himself. Of equal concern to him are the acts committed against the covenant, the altars and the other prophets. There is an implied echo of that age old refrain, “How long?” Things are getting out of hand and it is almost too late; when is God going to do something? God’s instructions demonstrate how prophecy will continue, even if and when Elijah is no longer around to deliver it.

Possible themes worth exploring include:

- Our own willingness to seek God’s voice amidst our fears.
- Elijah as an example of how God’s servants are not some sort of stalwart biblical equivalents of superheroes, but rather vulnerable and sometimes frightened folk. In short, if these people were called to serve, we can be too, and are!



- How do we expect to hear God? In the sermon only? In our reading? In supernatural events? Are there unexpected quiet moments through which God might be speaking to us? Could our receptivity be enhanced by occasionally taking a retreat and preparing ourselves to hear?

[Psalm 85: 8–13](#)

As a congregational response to the first reading, the connections here are evident. Just after reading of Elijah's seeking God's voice, we cry out together, "I will listen to what God the Lord says..."

There are those who frown on preaching from the Psalms, but it is not difficult to imagine many excellent sermons being preached from these six verses. We see images of a holistic relationship to God, where "faithfulness" and "love" are not bywords for pundits at opposite sides of any given theological question, but go hand in hand. If that is difficult for us to imagine, then our understanding of these terms needs to be challenged.

The promise of peace in verse 8 offers reassurance in troubled times, as difficulty is the context from which this Psalm emerges. Consider verses 4 – 7: "Restore us again, God our Saviour..." The Psalm follows a pattern of remembering God's mercy in the past (vv. 1-3), seeking God's peace in the present (vv. 4-7) and expressing confidence in God's making all things right (vv. 8-13).

An attentive pastor will know in which situations in members' lives this message is needed, and a sensitive preacher will know how to speak to them without exploiting anyone's suffering for the sake of a sermon illustration.

One more point is worth noting: In verse 9 we read, "His salvation is near to those who fear him." The right understanding of fear here is worth spending time on, not least because in the Gospel reading we find "Take courage! It is I. Be not afraid." (Matthew 14: 27)



[Matthew 14: 22–33](#)

As already noted, both the 1st reading and Psalm were selected by the designers of the lectionary because of thematic connections with this Gospel reading, and during this liturgical year the readings during Ordinary Time are selected in a way indicative of the five-sermon structure in Matthew.

Today's story is a well-known one, but even familiar themes bear repeating.

Potential starting points for a sermon include:

In verse 23 we are reminded by Jesus's example of the importance of prayer. A minister exploring this theme might consider mentioning Elijah's going to the mountain as another example.

Several commentators have noted that the most often repeated command in scripture, in one form or another, is the instruction not to fear (v 27). Elijah's fear could be brought into a sermon addressing this message, as could a word or two on "the fear of the Lord" in the Psalm reading.

In verses 31-33 we see doubting and worship in close proximity to each other. These will be paired again at the end of the Gospel, in Matthew 28: 17. A sermon might remind readers that the presence of doubt does not preclude worship. Depending on how one interprets Elijah's story in 1 Kings 19, it can serve as an additional illustration. In contrast, the Psalmist seems full of confidence.

In the NIV, the heading for this pericope is "Jesus Walks on Water", but in The Message we find the section entitled "Walking on Water". Whichever title the minister prefers for this passage, there is a sermon in the difference.

[Romans 10: 5-15](#)

"Trust as a Trait of Right Relationship with God"

Rich as this pericope is, it is but part of a larger section (chapters 9-11) dealing with Israel. Four terms are key to our passage for the day: righteousness, faith, to believe, and to be saved.

Righteousness: Hearers of the sermon may believe word to mean piety (A sin "self-righteous") or justifiability, as in "righteous anger", and a look at virtually any English dictionary would



confirm such associations, but in this scriptural context a legal status is being described. The word describes not so much a purity of heart or a justness of cause, as much as whether or not a person is guilty before the law. In a way, to be righteous, in this sense, is to be "not guilty", with one essential stipulation. Our righteousness is not because of our being innocent, but because what God has done through Christ on our behalf makes us right before the law.

Faith/to believe: Two distinct words in English, these are forms of the same word in the Greek, and the implications of this are worth reflecting upon. We often think of faith as a type of religious category, as in "the Christian faith". To believe, unfortunately, can sound like something less certain than knowing. In our context today, some people view religious belief as a matter of opinion. None of these connotations reflect how Paul uses the terms. It is worth considering how the word "trust" might be used to show the link between the words and perhaps express their meaning in a fresh way, eg: "For it is with your heart that you trust and are justified and with your mouth that you profess your trust and are saved."

To be saved: Perhaps this word is most accessible to our own English usage. The problem, though, is that its metaphorical use is so common in Christian tradition that readers and listeners might need to be reminded that Paul is depicting a literal rescue. Our response is the gratitude of someone just spared, not the confidence of one who has just given the right answer.

"Remembering Wrongs, Knowing the Lord Made things Right" (Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28/ Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b)

[Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28](#)

The semi-continuous reading of the Old Testament as an alternative strand in the lectionary gives us but two highlights to cover the Joseph saga, the first one getting the narrative going this Sunday and the next one bringing us close to the conclusion next week. The story is one that congregants may well know from popular culture, but that is all the more reason to make sure we give the pulpit a chance to set the record straight. Preachers should feel free to use each of these Sundays to tell more of the story than is in the day's reading.



A few observations:

Jacob grew up in a household where both parents played favourites (Genesis 25: 28) and, consciously or not, he follows their example.

Considering in verse 2 Joseph has already brought one negative report of his brothers, we have reason to suspect that in verse 14 Jacob's concern is not just whether or not his sons are in good health.

In verse 3 Joseph is given an ornate robe and in verse 23 he is stripped of it. One way to follow his overall story is to note his changes in dress through the chapters.

The content of this week's reading gives us an opportunity to raise awareness about human trafficking as a problem which still exists today, and the fact that sometimes families are still part of the trafficking network.

[**Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b**](#)

As a song encouraging us to remember the wonderful works God has done, Psalm 105 recounts history from Abraham through Moses, with this week's verses being the section that describes Joseph. Note that these verses bring us farther along in his story than the Genesis reading does, giving us all the more impetus to do the same in our sermons. Whether the preacher makes use of the Psalm in worship or not, it is a good for any sermon on Joseph to make known God's deeds through this story.



Prayers

Collect

Almighty God,
you sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church.
Open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love, joy, and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

O God of summer and winter, springtime and harvest,
your faithfulness is great in every season
and your steadfast love is constant through every age.
We come to You in these late summer days
seeking to hear your word and feel your presence,
striving to praise you and glorify your name.

We turn to you in this place of worship and in our very hearts,
and ask for your blessing,
that Your word of comfort might quell our fears and
embolden us to follow your will as we come to understand it this day.

Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,
your might is beyond our imagining,
your love beyond our describing.



As we gather in Your name,
bless this, our worship, and grant us to know
that, even if in our songs and prayers the words fall short,
your steadfast love never does.

Amen

Heavenly Father,
we come to you as your own, as children called by a loving parent.
You have been good to us for as long as we can remember,
and longer.
Tell us the old stories of our family, we pray,
and teach us what they mean.

Amen

Prayers of Confession

O Lord, our Rock, our Redeemer,
we have a vocabulary to express our trust in You,
but we confess sometimes our fears feel more real than the poetry.
Forgive us for the times our inhibitions have kept us from fully trusting you,
and for the occasions we were afraid to speak for justice
or show kindness to another.

Hold before us the courage of Christ,
Remind us of Your unwavering love,
and guide us in living fully, forgiven and unafraid.
Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.



God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,

We admit it: we want to know the rules.

We seek a set of directions

so that we might know what to do in order to be assured of your blessing.

We want to be able to assess the level of discipleship we have attained, and perhaps even compare ourselves to others.

We speak of law and of grace, and we wonder who is getting it right.

Whether among one another, or among branches of the Christian family,

or within the wider context of our Judeo-Christian heritage,

forgive us, Lord, for our comparisons

and for any preoccupation with whether the others are good enough for you.

Remind us of our own unworthiness, and, by your grace, of our own belovedness.

Through Christ crucified and risen we pray, Amen

Just and loving God,

we read today of favouritism and of enmity between brothers,

and we would like to think that we are better than all that.

Reveal our hearts to us, we pray,

and show us the preferences among people we would otherwise deny.

Show us, too, the harm we have done others

or the times when, by remaining silent or thinking we would act later,

we have allowed evil to happen.

In your mercy, forgive us for not trying harder to love as broadly as boldly as Christ.

Amen



Prayers of Intercession

Eternal God,

We remember today a prophet on the run for his life
and a disciple who began to sink like a rock,
and the God who rescued them both ,
having called them both.

Rather than claiming to be bolder than these
or pretending to have a greater trust,
we learn from their example
and lift our concerns to you.

We live in a world that does not seem to value Your word.
Speak, we pray, to those who find no meaning in their lives.
Overcome the loneliness of mourning,
the vanity of constant acquiring,
the madness of competition,
the isolation brought by technology.

Strengthen those who have heard your voice
and suffer in their obedience.
Be with the prophets today who endure persecution
because they have shared good news
or simply because they owned a Bible.

Embolden all of us who endeavour to follow,
but then falter when we notice the wind and waves.
Lift us from a concern for only ourselves.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.



Living Lord,

We are grateful for the witness of your word and the wideness of your mercy.

We lift up to you a broken world and humbly ask that you heal it with righteousness.

Grant that there be upright individuals in the most dire situations,
so that people struggling with addiction might hear words of comfort and challenge,
people who are hungry might be served and strengthened,
people who are downtrodden might be heard and gain hope,
and people committing acts of violence might see a better way.

Strengthen the trust of your children that so that in our gratitude for your grace we might show others sympathy rather than judgment, and be emboldened to share a good news that is more than rules.

Save us, Lord, from the destruction human beings are wreaking on their own planet and against their own brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Make us instruments in ushering in a new era of wholeness.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray saying, "Our Father... "



Time with Children

“Sink or Float”

Preparation before the service: Find a large glass bowl or even a tall, wide-mouthed glass flower vase and fill it with water. Collect several objects that can be put into the water, taking care to include some things that float and some things that do not. (Possibilities: a toothpick, a pen, a ping-pong ball, a golf ball, a pebble, a cork, etc.)

During the Children’s Address: Show the children (and the congregation) the water and tell them you are going to show them some objects, and you would like them to tell you whether that thing will float or whether it will sink if placed in the water.

Begin with an obvious one, showing them the object and asking them what it is and whether it will sink or float. With some objects we might even ask why the children believe as they do.

After a few examples, stand up and point to yourself asking, “Who is this? And if I go into water do I sink or float?” As the children answer, you can remind them of the importance of learning to swim and of water safety in general, because we do not stay above the water.

Then explain that for Jesus, though, the rules of nature worked differently, and he was able to walk on water. Because Jesus could do this and perform other miracles, we know that Jesus is special.

“What does the Face of a Disciple Look Like?”

Ask the children (and possible the rest of the congregation) to make the face of someone who has just lost a balloon. (Important! The minister must also take part in this!) Let them look at each other, and then ask what emotion those faces were expressing? Probably everyone will recognise sadness. Then ask everyone to make the face of a person standing in front of a venomous snake. (This is most likely to be a frightened face.) And the face of someone who has just found a long-lost toy? (Surprise or happiness.) Finally, try to make the face of someone who is following Jesus. While people are thinking about this, it can be explained that all of the faces they had made so far would be good responses. Prophets and disciples felt all the same feelings we feel today: sadness, joy, fear and even anger. Because we feel afraid or sad at times does not



mean we are less faithful, but means that God has made us to enjoy a relationship with God, and are feelings are a part of that.

“Pay Attention to My Hands, and Clap as They Pass Each Other”

Here is a game in which the whole congregation can join. The minister stands with their profile to the congregation, with both hands outstretched in front of them. The farther hand from the congregation is held high up, palm facing the congregation. The closer hand is lower, with the back of the hand to the congregation. The minister will simultaneously move the upper hand downward and the lower hand upward in a steady motion so that about midway they will each cross paths, and whenever they see this happen the congregation should clap once precisely at the moment of the hands' meeting. At the end of the motion, the higher and lower hands have traded positions and from their new positions the minister begins to bring the higher one downward the lower one upward.

The point of the game is for the whole congregation to clap once whenever the hands cross paths. The minister should do this a few times until it is clear that the congregation has caught on and everyone is clapping at the right moment. Then the minister becomes less predictable, changing speed or stopping the motion just before their hands touch. Once the minister knows they understand, they are trying to trick the congregation into either clapping at the wrong moment or missing it when their hands do cross. This becomes a lesson in trust, because once the congregation has been duped once or twice, they will be much more hesitant. God, however will never trick us or let us down.

Seashells or pebbles

Bring in a large number of flowers or seashells or pebbles and invite the children to look at them all and pick out a favourite one. You might give a few children a chance to explain why this one is their favourite. Affirm every positive characteristic: each beautiful or nice smelling flower, or each colourful pebble or interesting shell. Explain that we all have preferences, and that sometimes people even show favouritism among other people! Teachers or sports coaches or even relatives sometimes seem to play favourites, and that can really lead to hurtful feelings. In the Old Testament story for today, Joseph was clearly his father's favourite son, and that wasn't good at all. God, however, is better than that. God made this flower (or pebble or shell) and the



person holding it; and this flower and the person holding it. (Be sure not to leave anyone out!). And everything and everyone God has made is very special and very loved. Encourage children to look at the object they've received during the week and think about what it means to be made by God and loved by Him.

Musical Suggestions

(In choosing hymns, I have made use of the indices at the back of CH4 and of the booklet "Selecting Hymns from CH4" by George K Barr.)

CH4 189	Be still
CH4 260	Eternal Father, strong to save
CH4 351	Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all
CH4 492	Dear Lord and Father of mankind
CH4 542	Lord, I pray, if today
CH4 565	My life flows on in endless song
CH4 588	Praise the Spirit in creation
CH4 602	Is it spooky, is it weird
CH4 606	Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders
CH4 609	Come, living god, when least expected
CH4 716	Come and find the quiet centre
CH4 754/5	Be still and know that I am God
CH4 221	Saviour, again to thy dear name we raise
CH4 471	To the name of our salvation
CH4 510	Jesus calls us here to meet him
CH4 560	Jesus, the very thought of thee
CH4 625	O thou who camest from above
CH4 662	Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts
CH4 496 (vv 2, 5, 6, 8)	Humbly in your sight we come together, Lord



CH4 168	God weeps
CH4 193	God is love: his the care
CH4 465	Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart
CH4 491/2	Lord Jesus, think on me
CH4 513	Courage, brother! do not stumble
CH4 535	Who would true valour see
CH4 570	When the storms of life are raging, stand by me



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Pray Now 2013](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#). [Revealing Love](#) will be available to purchase from November 2013.



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and

delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Worship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Aaron Stevens for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

