

# Starters for Sunday

## *Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost*

**11 August 2013**

Rev Anne S Paton, Minister of East Kilbride: Old, offers her thoughts on this week's Lectionary passages.

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## [Genesis 15: 1-6](#)

When preparing for a child to be born, people often ask prospective parents, “What are you hoping for, a girl or a boy?” Most parents answer, “I really do not mind”. In Abram’s day though, the culture was very different. A son was more important than a daughter because a son could carry on the family name and a son was also a symbol of strength. Abram wanted a son so that he could pass everything on to him.

In Abram, we see a man whose faith had been tested. From his time in Egypt when he lied about Sarah being his sister instead of his wife; to rescuing Lot from the kings who had captured him, we now encounter Abram getting too old for these adventures and settling down, still holding on to the promises of God. In our reading today, God comes to Abram with the promise that he will have a son. This is more than the promise of prosperity or of new land, for if God can do the impossible and bring forth a son from the old bodies of Abram and Sarah, then nothing is impossible for God. In this son, Abram would pass on his faith, the faith which would be the cornerstone of a new people and a new nation.

As Christians, we believe that God has sent us his son not only as a sign of God's continuing favour to his people, but also to secure our future and to preserve and strengthen our legacy of faith through him. Jesus, the son, was sent by the father as a sign of God's continuing favour to us.

## [Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16](#)

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews establishes something which reads a bit like a “Hall of Fame”. In this “Hall of Fame” are many of the faithful, including some who are well known like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Although the lectionary reading ends at verse 16, I would include verses 32 – 40 where it speaks of others unnamed and unknown, facing great persecution, who wandered in the deserts and mountains, hid in caves and holes in the ground, with no place to call home and no name to be enthroned. It is not merely the “famous” people who are faithful. Where would our churches be without the countless unsung heroes who diligently live out their faith in their own communities and contexts?



## [St Luke 12: 32-40](#)

Sometimes in the lectionary we encounter a passage which makes us question just why the particular verses have been chosen. For me, this is one of these passages. Following on from last week when we looked at the parable of the rich fool, we might initially wonder why this week's verses are not v22-34, not least because they include the well-loved verses about "consider how the lilies grow". (v27) From v35-48, the theme changes and Jesus now speaks of being ready and being watchful, but the lectionary passage ends at v40, when perhaps reading to v48 might be more helpful. With next week's reading beginning at v49, this would be possible.

From verse 22, Jesus is telling the disciples to relax and enjoy life as it comes to them. Many of the phrases in that speech have crossed into popular culture: "... do not be anxious about your life ... which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his span of life? ... Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin..." Jesus was encouraging the disciples to let go of the things that were keeping them back, and to trust God completely for the future. Jesus realised, however, that this scared the disciples (as it does us), so he adds some comforting words: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." (v32) As he tells them not to fear though, he does issue another drastic appeal, "Sell your possessions, and give to the poor."

The disciples were afraid of the same thing we are all afraid of and that is of stepping into the unknown with no assurances of what the future holds. It is only when we let go of all our assets and reconfigure our lives, that we can be totally dependent on God. There is some rationale to his appeal for Jesus reminds the disciples that by taking such a plunge they will then be basing their future welfare on "a treasure in heavens that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys". Jesus was suggesting that, unlike banking on their own possessions (which are unpredictable), they can have a totally predictable future by relying on God's never-failing fatherly care.



Yet Jesus adds another dimension to all of this when he introduces the idea about “being ready”. The teaching here is about the Second Coming. There is praise for the servant who is ready when the Lord returns, and He is going to return. We do not know when or how, but you cannot read the New Testament faithfully and miss that message.

While in a narrow sense, Jesus is referring to the Second Coming of Christ, in the wider sense, He is referring to the time when God's call enters a person's life. So this passage speaks about the whole of life, and the need to stay awake because we never know when we are going to be surprised by new possibilities. Most of us have lived long enough to know the unexpected will happen -- we can count on it. It might be that a new possibility for service has presented itself, or it might just be that our circumstances have changed. “See I am doing a new thing!” ([Isaiah 43:19](#)).



## Sermon themes and illustrations

The passages for today take up two themes, one of faithfulness and one of being watchful and focussed. If we are faithful, we will be loyal, reliable, committed, dedicated and dependable. We have all encountered people on our journey of faith who have inspired us by displaying these very qualities. Often they are not the people in the prominent roles; they are the ones who work tirelessly behind the scenes. They are great however, because others can depend on them. They are the people who can be relied upon to do their part in their time on earth. As Christians, our lives are very much intertwined with those who have gone before us and those who are yet to come after us. We inherited the church from our forefathers and have a responsibility to pass it on to future generations. In God's plan, “only together with us will they be made perfect”, says the writer of Hebrews. Will those who went before us find us faithful?

Rev Neil Dougall, Convenor of the Ministries Council, tells a story in his induction for new council members of an experience he and his family had. They once travelled by train from Edinburgh to the far south west of England, a journey which took a considerable time. The journey was so long that it took more than one train crew to work it, so at various points along the way, the crew who had worked their shift got off, and a completely new crew got on to take the train on the next part of their journey, his analogy being that this is what council members are being asked to do. This also, however is an analogy of what we as a church are being invited to do.

In Yellowstone National Park there is a geyser called “Old Faithful”. It is not the largest and grandest geyser in the region, but its popularity lies in its dependability. Old Faithful erupts on time every time, giving tourists what they have come to see and experience. You can find information on the internet, including YouTube clips of the eruptions.



You might remember “Don’t worry, be happy” by Bobby McFerrin (full lyrics on various websites including [www.lyricsondemand.com](http://www.lyricsondemand.com)):

Ain't got no place to lay your head

Somebody came and took your bed

But don't worry, be happy

The land lord say your rent is late

He may have to litigate but don't worry, be happy

Look at me I am happy



## Children's Address

V32-34 “provide purses that will not wear out...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.

Show children a variety of purses, savings banks, bank pass books (if any still exist) or auto-bank cards for withdrawing cash, and talk through the issue of saving money, why it is necessary, and what occasions we might need to save for (birthdays of family members, holidays, days out, saving up to buy something we really want). Stress that saving money is not necessarily a bad thing.

Jesus says, however, that we should provide a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted. Talk through what that treasure might be... good deeds... loving acts etc. Using pieces of paper write down some of these things which bring treasures in heaven and put them into a purse or savings bank. These are the treasures Jesus values.

**Or**

Retell the story from v35: Here is a simplistic version.

A long, long time ago, when people used candles and lamps to see at night because there was no electricity, there was this man and he left home to go to a party. His maids and his servants had no idea when he would return home, so they waited into the night for him to come home. It was getting late and the man had not returned home. The maids and the servants kept looking out the windows and wondering when their master would return. Now it was very late, all the stars were out and the moon was slowly sinking down. All the maids and servants who were waiting for their master to return from the party were very tired and sleepy.

They kept the lamps and candles burning all night, and they stayed up because when the master came home they wanted to meet him at the door, welcome him home, and help him get ready for bed.



While telling this story, have a ball, perhaps a soft football, and as the story is told, throw the ball to a child and gesture for the child to throw the ball back. Keep doing this as you tell the story and eventually the children's attention will be on the ball, anticipating when it will be thrown to them. What has happened is that they are "ready and watchful". Expand by explaining that this is what we as Christians are doing, being "ready and watchful" for Jesus will return one day and we need to be ready.

How do we do that? We can love one another; we can help people in need; we can read our bibles; we can pray etc.



## Prayers

### Collect

Almighty God,  
you sent your Holy Spirit  
to be the light and life 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.

### Prayer of Approach/Confession

Living God, we are glad to come to your house to worship you, glad to be part of the great fellowship in heaven and on earth who sing your praises this day. We come reminded of all that you have done for us in Christ, marvelling at the love with which you surround us, rejoicing in all that you have given to us. We come with awe and wonder for you are a great God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

We do not come simply to praise you, we come also to bring our confessions to you, for we have failed in so many ways. We have not lived as your people, worshipping you as we should, giving gratitude for all that we have. We have not looked to you for guidance in our lives, preferring to go our own ways. We have thought too highly of ourselves, and less of our brothers and sisters, failing to show them the love and forgiveness you so freely offer to us.

Father, we bring ourselves before you depending on your forgiving love, to lift us up and renew us once more. Help us to live in such a way that our words and our actions might show the world that our faith is real. So may all we do and say bring glory to you. Amen



## Offering Dedication

Living God, you have poured out your blessings upon us day after day and have filled our lives with so many good things. In faith we bring our offerings before you as a sign of our worship, a symbol of our discipleship, freely offered to you as you offered yourself to us in Christ. Take all we bring and all that we are and use them we pray to bring closer your purpose of love for your world. Amen

## Prayer of Intercession

Lord Jesus Christ, you tell us not to be afraid of what the future holds, not to worry about tomorrow, but you know how difficult we find it to heed your words. For we worry about so many things, our families, our friends, our circumstances, some worries big worries, most worries tiny niggles. We come before you this day with these big and tiny worries, and with confidence we know we can lay them all at your feet.

We bring our big worries about health and happiness and security for ourselves and for our loved ones. We bring big worries about the world we live in and its future existence as we continue to fail to address so many ecological problems. We bring big worries about the way people in our world are treated as less than human, exploited, tortured, helpless and abused.

Father God, we know that you are concerned with every aspect of our lives, so we also bring the little things that concern us, the worries which keep us awake at night, the worries which only you know.

Living God, reach out to all those for whom the future brings fears and uncertainties. Assure them that you are with them, even when that future seems dark and circumstances feel like they are spiralling out of control. Remind them that you are able to transform even the bleakest of situations, bring healing and wholeness.

Lord we make our prayers in faith, for we know that your Spirit is at work in our world making all things new.

Amen



## Hymns

CH4 267	Blessed be God
CH4 511	Your hand O God has guided
CH4 551	In heavenly love abiding
CH4 473	Thy kingdom come!
CH4 530	One more step
CH4 556	I need thee every hour
CH4 535	Who would true valour see
CH4 741	Glory to you O God
CH4 702	Lord in love and perfect wisdom
CH4 742	Rejoice in God's saints
CH4 172	Sing for God's glory
CH4 179	Ye holy angels bright
CH4 529	Forth in thy name O Lord I go



## Additional Resources

### Resourcing Mission



[www.resourcingmission.org.uk](http://www.resourcingmission.org.uk) is host to Starters for Sunday as well as key mission resources from the Church of Scotland, for download and purchase, and has an online booking facility for Mission & Discipleship events (eg National Youth Assembly). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. We welcome all feedback so if there is something you'd like to see on this new site that isn't

already there, please use the 'Website Feedback' option on the 'Contact Us' page.

### Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in Prayers. You may also be interested in looking at our publication Pray Now 2013. Please click [here](#).



### 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 magazine Different Voices which can be found [here](#).

### Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. If you would be interested in looking at our free materials on how you might preach, please click [here](#) to see our [Preachers Perspectives](#) web page 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 i the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

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

[Scots Sacraments](#) If you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism you may find some helpful materials here

*The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to Rev Anne Paton 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.*

