

starters for Sunday

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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The Mission and Discipleship Council offer their thoughts on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

This week's material, from our archives, was prepared by Rev Andrew C Donald, Minister of Kirkcaldy: Pathhead.

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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](#)

[Exodus 32: 11-14](#)

This short passage from Exodus might be entitled “The God who can change his mind”. Lectionary Bible Studies and Sermons [[Pumpkin Cottage Ministry Resources](#), Lectionary Bible Studies and Sermons] begins its commentary on this passage saying: “While Moses is with the Lord for forty days on Mount Sinai receiving the law, the people grow restless. They look for a new leader, and then, a new god.”

It continues, “During the classical period, Christian theologians were more concerned with handling the enigma of a God who seemingly changes his mind. They tended to conclude that he was speaking "in human fashion", while Calvin argued that God was just testing Moses.” Moses employs a twofold argument with God. Firstly, the folly of a course of action which would allow the Egyptians to assert that Yahweh was a poor deity, leading his people out of Egypt only to slay them in the wilderness. Secondly, Moses’ appeal to the covenant relationship and Yahweh’s binding promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In any relationship that is under strain, a reminder of solemn vows and promises made helps to reinforce the bond that already exists. The difference here is that God is the one being reminded of his vows! For that reason this exchange may be best understood as a test for Moses, who passes with flying colours. God averts his wrath and Moses descends the mountain to deal with the apostate people and confront them with their sin. Although delivered from ultimate destruction, there is still a heavy price to pay.

[Psalm 106: 1-6, 19-23](#)

This Psalm recalls the misdeeds of the people of God when they exchanged the worship of God for the worship of a gold bull-calf. Verses 1 to 6 praise God for all his marvellous deeds. The author looks back on the faithfulness of God and the blessings conferred on those servants who



obey his commands. A plea is made by the Psalmist to be remembered by God in his mighty acts of salvation. There is recognition that God's people do not deserve such favour. In fact, there is a remembrance of how sinful his chosen ones have been from the days of their deliverance in Egypt. Verse 19-23 relates the incident of the gold-bull calf, inviting the question, "How could such a wonderful and loving God be so quickly deserted by his own people?" Such behaviour only deserved death and yet the writer of this Psalm reminds himself that Moses pleaded with God on behalf of his people and God did not carry out his threat of destruction. The Psalm as a whole pictures God wrestling with a stubborn and rebellious people - not dissimilar to a loving parent who tries to keep a strong-willed and rebellious teenager on the right path. The loving father indicates that such behaviour has dire and painful consequences. In the case of the Israelite's only the intervention of Moses, prevented their ultimate destruction. This points us to the New Covenant, where it is Christ who pleads with God on behalf of his people. The contrast is that Christ has the power to deal with our sin, once and for all.

[Isaiah 25: 1-9](#)

In this passage the salvation of God is described using the imagery of a banquet where only the richest food and the finest wine are served. It is obvious why this passage is often read at communion services. What food is more acceptable to God than the body of his own dear Son? What wine is holier than the blood that was shed for us? Despite the loving nature of our heavenly Father, God's people have constantly found themselves eating the stale bread of sin and drinking the cheap wine of idolatry. They know where salvation is to be found but they have wandered and strayed from the safety and security of God. The result is that they have been overrun by their enemies and are living, not as conquerors but as those conquered. Yet there is hope. Isaiah begins this chapter, recalling the many wonderful deeds of God. He remembers how powerful nations were humbled by God's mighty action and how the poor and helpless found a mighty defender in the Lord their God. The prophet Isaiah has not lost hope. He anticipates a day of splendour when God's servant, the Davidic King, will feast at his royal banquet.

It is at the banqueting table of our Lord that the cloud of sorrow is suddenly removed. The location of this banqueting table is found on Mount Zion – God's holy mountain. For centuries, a



cloud of sorrow has hung over this holy mountain, like the mists that descend on the Scottish mountains and Munros [mountains above 3000 feet, 914.4 metres]. This cloud is not like the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration, where the splendour of God is revealed. This cloud is cold, damp and miserable. It chills one to the very bone and obscures the vision of God from one's sight. A cloud of this nature has caused many a hill-walker to fall over a precipice! This is a cloud of sin, shame and regret, but thankfully God will blow this cloud away, or burn it off in the radiance of his eternal light. Salvation will come to his people in an instant. The many sorrow of centuries will be forgotten, when God swiftly removes our last and most terrible enemy – death!

[Psalm 23](#)

The image of the Lord being one's personal shepherd has brought comfort to millions down the centuries. He supplies his sheep with all their needs. He provides guidance, direction and strength. Walter Brueggemann "The Threat of Life"; Sermons on Pain, Power and Weakness notes in the second half of the poem, "Now it is the image of a traveller going through dangerous territory." Yet, even there, the Shepherd's rod and staff are there for protection. We do not travel dark valleys alone. Later Bruggeman asserts, "There on the journey, where we thought there was only scarcity, the God of generosity pours out precious oil on our heads, into our cup. Our lives brim over because of God's inexplicable generosity, just where we thought God had no gift to give." The demonstration of the Lord's goodness and mercy is not shown in the absence of pain, difficult, doubt, disappointment, conflict and strife, but rather through all these things. The Psalm rings true in the experience of us all as we journey through life.

[Philippians 4: 1-9](#)

The Good News Bible introduction to Philippians reminds us that Paul's Letter to the Philippians was written to the first church that Paul established on European soil, in the Roman province of Macedonia. It was written while the apostle was in prison. One might imagine that a letter written from prison would be depressing to read, but strangely Paul's Letter is characterised by hope and joy. This is evident in the fourth chapter when he writes, "May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!" Paul writes from the gloom of a dark Roman dungeon. However, to snatch a phrase from another of his Letters, his mind is not fixed on the seen, but on the unseen! Paul is filled with hope and joy, not because his imprisonment is a



breeze, but because he is confident that the Lord's return will be soon and that present suffering will be replaced with inexpressible joy. His concern for the time being is to ensure that his beloved brothers and sisters in Philippi remain focused on the goal of their faith and not to be distracted by petty squabbles over things that are ultimately unimportant. Paul's advice in this passage is primarily pastoral and is centred on a dispute between Euodia and Syntyche. Like many squabbles within churches and Christian communities the reason for the dispute is lost within the mists of time and a cloud of sorrow. However, the principle of Christian forgiveness and forbearance is one that should never be lost. Paul asks his faithful partner to help these hardworking women to put the dispute behind them. Behind this request is a duty of every Christian to be a peacemaker in the spirit of Christ's beatitude. The identity of the faithful partner remains anonymous, but the advice of one commentator [J.A. Motyer, *The Bible Speaks Today* series] is that here we should insert our own name that we ourselves might be agents of healing and reconciliation within the fellowship of the church.

[Matthew 22: 1-14](#)

It seems incredible that anyone would refuse an invitation to a royal wedding banquet; yet that is exactly how the people in Jesus' parable responded. They were indifferent and just carried on with business as usual. Worse still, some of them even beat the messengers, showing contempt for the king and committing a flagrant act of rebellion. The king is furious and he punishes the rebels. He then extends his invitation to the people on the streets telling his servants, "round up anyone you can, both good and bad alike." The king in this parable obviously is God, and the invited guests are his chosen people. The servants God sent were his faithful prophets. God's desire is to fill his banqueting hall with honoured guests. It is just a shame that so many people do not want to join the celebration. The parable seems relatively straightforward to this point, but then a guest arrives wearing the wrong clothes. The king was furious.

Commenting on this incident, Alan Smith, minister of White House Church of Christ, Tennessee, shares the following illustration. At the end of World War II, the Russian head of state gave an elaborate banquet to honour British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The Russians arrived in their best formal wear - military dress uniforms - but their honoured guest did not. Churchill arrived wearing his famous zipper coveralls that he had worn during the German blitz in London.



He thought it would provide a nostalgic touch that the Russians would appreciate. They did not. They were humiliated and insulted that their prominent guest of honour had not considered their banquet worthy of his best clothes.

The fact that we enter the kingdom by grace does not mean that there are no standards. When we are invited around Jesus' table; we are invited to the banquet of the King of Kings. This banquet of bread and wine reminds us that Jesus gave his life for us on the Cross. He does not expect a half-hearted response on our part. The invitation to salvation is open to all, but when we come through that door we must put off our old clothes and our old ways. Jesus calls us to accept the new life of the Kingdom and to live accordingly.

Prayers

Call to Prayer Scripture Sentence

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to remain in your courts. Grant us in abundance the bounty of your house. Psalm 65: 4

Collect

Almighty God,
in our baptism
you adopted us for your own.
Quicken your Spirit within us,
that we, being renewed both in body and mind,
may worship you in sincerity and truth
and serve you with thankfulness of heart;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.



Prayer of approach, confession and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your invitation to gather round your holy table.

When we look at the bread and the wine we are reminded of your own body and blood.

Your body that was broken for us and your blood that was shed.

But we know that your death was not the end.

We celebrate the fact that you are no longer nailed to a cross

but present with us now by Your Holy Spirit.

We are glad that you invite us to share in a special banquet

of the richest food and the finest wine

- a celebration banquet that reveals your heavenly Kingdom.

Help us to respond to your invitation and not to despise it.

Help us to put away our old clothes of sin and wear the wedding clothes of your Kingdom.

Today we ask for your forgiveness, for living without your presence in our lives.

- For relying on our own achievements.
- For believing that we are the architects of our own destiny.
- For living as though you have no place in our modern world.

Forgive us, restore us,

renew us and equip us

to do Your will on earth,

until the dawning of your heavenly Kingdom.

Help us to find the riches of your grace,

as we study your word, and meet with you in prayer.

This we ask, as we further pray in the words which you taught to your disciples saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven.

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.



Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever, Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Dear Lord our God, we are thankful that you are constantly at work in our lives. You are...

- A help in times of difficulty
- A strength in times of weakness
- A guide when we feel lost and alone

We know that through Your Son, Jesus Christ, You have the power...

- to transform lives
- to mend broken relationships
- to bring strength to the weary
- and hope to the broken hearted.

So we bring our worries and our burdens, our hopes and dreams, before your throne of grace, knowing that you are the Lord of our lives and the hope of the world.

Today we pray for world leaders that they may always seek the peace and security of our world:

- We pray for countries laid waste by war and conflict and dictatorship, remembering especially, the plight of people in ...
- We pray for the police and the emergency services, as they seek the peace and security of our nation; and for ordinary people caught up in the events of world politics.
- We pray for the world-wide Church, recognising our fellowship with Christians in Africa, Asia and throughout the developing world. We ask your blessing upon ministers and missionaries, medical workers and Aid Agencies whose task it is to feed the hungry, heal the sick and support the broken hearted.

Lord we pray for your church here in Scotland, for those that are thriving and those that have lost a sense of direction. We give thanks for our own church and its people, and gladly



acknowledge all the gifts you have given us. Grant us your help and guidance and support. We too, have problems and needs and concerns - worries about ourselves, our families and those we love. We remember in our prayers today...

- those who are worried about their health and what the future might hold
- those who feel anxious or depressed or afraid
- those who are in hospital
- those with burdens they find impossible to share
- those who still mourn the loss of someone dear to their heart.

And we pray for ourselves – that we might know the gentle authority of Jesus in all parts of our lives - leading us, guiding us, encouraging and directing us, now and always, Amen.

Time with Children



You might find the [Reader's Reactions](#) review of Bob Hartman's '[Bible stories through the year: lectionary readings for year A, retold for maximum effect](#)' useful for your Time with Children.

based on Matthew 22: 1-14

“A special invitation”

Find various invitation cards such as invitations to weddings, baptisms, birthdays, anniversaries and other special celebrations. Ask the children if they have ever written any invitations to special events. [Parish ministers have often received hand written invitations from primary school children to school events]. The children might also have their own stories to tell about how they have been invited to special events such as family weddings etc.

Explain that it is a great honour to be invited to special events. At the foot of most formal invitations are the letters, R.S.V.P. Highlight the fact that it is always important and courteous to respond to an invitation. Then get the children to imagine what it would be like to receive an invitation to a royal celebration. Ask them how they would feel and what they would have to do to prepare for such a celebration. For example:

- how they would reply with special writing paper,



- how they might go out shopping to buy a special outfit for the occasion
- how they might cancel any other engagement, just to ensure they wouldn't miss the big day.

Then describe the parable of the wedding feast and how rude certain characters in the story happened to be by ignoring the invitation altogether – and how they missed out on such a magnificent banquet!

Conclude by telling the children that God invites you and me to his royal banquet. He invites us to feast at his special table. It is important that we respond to God's special invitation to enjoy his marvellous gifts.

Children's Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting us around your special table. Help us to respond to your special invitation of kindness and love. Amen.

Musical Suggestions

CH4 210	Awake my soul and with the sun
CH4 548	Approach my soul, the mercy seat
CH4 70	Give praise and thanks unto the Lord
CH4 76	How can I ever thank the Lord
CH4 124	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
CH4 180	Give thanks with a grateful heart
CH4 559	There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son
CH4 462	The King of Love my Shepherd is
CH4 412	The strife is o'er, the battle done
CH4 451	Where high the heavenly temple stands
CH4 459	Crown him with many crowns
CH4 511	Your hand, O God, has guided



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. [Revealing Love](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#).



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

[Wurship 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 Andrew Donald 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.

