

# starters for Sunday

## *Third Sunday after Pentecost*

**14 June 2015**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Eleanor Macalister, retired Minister formerly of Ellon, for her thoughts on the third Sunday after Pentecost.

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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](#)

Please note that all Biblical references come from the Good News Bible 2nd Edition.

[1 Samuel 15: 34 – 16: 13](#)

[Psalm 20](#)

[Ezekiel 17: 22-24](#)

[Psalm 92: 1-4, 12-15](#)

### Some thoughts on our Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Readings

So King Saul has been rejected. Following his disobeying of the Lord, Samuel is called to deliver the blow in that, because he rejected the Lord's command, the Lord has rejected Saul as king.

Steeped in the tradition of temple worship, we can understand how Samuel grieved over this rejected king for the rest of his life. He had, in a sense, nurtured Saul in the ways of the Lord, had seen him develop as a king, watched as he began to distance himself from the will of God through his disobedience. How hard it is as a mentor, to observe all of this happening and yet still feel called to support and encourage.

In the Psalms, we discover that those who have written them have a determination to share with the reader that when people study the Torah, they are changed by doing so. Here, in the 21st Century, the reader is also changed through reading the Psalms. Professor Tom Wright speaks of the image in [Psalm 1](#) of the devout person being likened to a tree drawing up nourishment from the Torah. This encourages growth. Similarly [Psalm 92](#) develops this point and so it would seem to be fair to say that in this, the 21st Century, the Psalms have the ability, through the reading of them, to effect change – transformation – where the old has gone and the new has come. Of [Psalm 92 verses 12-15](#), Professor Wright says this: *“I think the Psalmist would have been only too ready to believe that the changes described there are not, as we might*



say, merely spiritual transformations but transformations of character that actually affected the matter of the human being. And the Psalms are there to enable people not only to become aware of this possible change but actually to bring it about.”<sup>1</sup>

As the anointed king, would it be fair to say that Saul’s shortcomings lay in the fact that he was out of touch with the Lord’s teachings? That the transformation that can affect every part of life from following God was lost?

### [Mark 4: 26-34](#)

The image of shelter-offering branches, found in tree parables throughout the Hebrew Bible, is a metaphor for political sovereignty. Jesus’ allusion to this tradition in his conclusion, places the entire sermon firmly in an anti-imperial context. In the time of Mark, Judea was once again a tiny client-state being fed by the underground rivers from the imperial centre of Rome. Have a look at [Ezekiel 31:4](#). Mark’s community within Palestine was a small, persecuted minority. The question being asked was, “What chance did followers of Jesus have against the power of the Judean Temple-state, much less against that of Rome? The parable of the mustard seed proposes exactly such a mismatch: “All the trees in the land will know that I am the Lord. I cut down the tall trees and make the small trees grow tall.” ([Ezekiel 17: 24](#)).

With such parables, “Jesus preached his message to the people, using many other parables like these; he told them as much as they could understand.” ([Mark 4: 33](#)). This Jesus is no guru dispensing arcane secrets, pedantic theology or pious platitudes. He is a popular educator who can speak the language that ordinary people can understand, images that they can relate to from their own experiences and stories which portray them as subjects of the sovereignty of God. By saying and doing all this, he sows hope among them, insisting that the tall trees can be brought down and that the smallest of seeds absolutely will bear fruit.

We live in a world in which many of us know very little of the story of the land we live on, or of the contemporary demographic and economic activities that shape it. The people of Israel were taught to make offerings of the fruit of the land to God and to leave unharvested grain in the fields for the poor to eat. They were taught to help the orphan, the widow, the dispossessed,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Wright, *Finding God in the Psalms*, SPCK London 2014. Page 158



remembering that they, too, had been sojourners who had wandered without a home. They were taught too, that when they failed to live up to this ethic, their God would raise up prophets to call them back to justice. Today, our whole culture is uprooted and transient, made up of people moving quickly, abandoning one place for another. Hearts are driven, wandering, ungrounded, cut off from a meaningful relationship with the land. In this globally shrinking world that is our home, many are never able to know the blessing of living on and with the land. Many ask, “Because we are estranged from the land, are we estranged from who God intended us to be?” Christian spirituality, though, has as much to do with how we stand on the earth as how we experience heaven. In this shifting landscape of life, it is crucial that we seek, somehow, to re-establish some kind of sense of being grounded, of place, of connection, to a story of land. Watching many excellent television programmes which give us a glimpse into the way of life of people from the heights of the Himalayas to the desert plains of Africa, we can see just how different each person’s world view is. The world view of desert people, for example, is shaped differently from that of ocean people. The people whose view as they look out each morning at a great mountain mass is entirely different from those who look out onto an endless plain of swaying elephant grass. We can ask ourselves the question, “What does that land mean to me?” when asked to consider a special place which has shaped the inward landscape of one’s soul.

The story of Israel, its tragedy and promise, is still our story as people of the Word. Where is the “promised land” today? Might it not just be beneath our feet?



## Prayers



*Living Stones* is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It is also the theme for Heart and Soul 2015. *Living Stones* will be published on 30 April 2015. Pre-orders and discounts are available from [St Andrew Press](#).

### Call to Worship based on Psalm 92

Leader: The children of God portray the wonder and beauty of your Spirit

**All: They are like springs of water in a parched world**

Leader: They flourish even amid the distortions

**All: Their lives are rich and productive in a barren and desolate society**

Leader: Help us, those of us who love you, O God, to prove to our disjointed world that you are in our midst.

### Collect

Almighty God,  
without you we are not able to please you.  
Mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit  
may in all things direct and rule our hearts;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### Prayers of Praise & Confession

Sovereign God, we praise you that you are far greater than our minds can grasp;  
far higher than our highest thoughts;  
leaving us lost for words.

We offer our praise to you,  
for your working in our lives and in our world,



for your never-ending mercy,  
for your intention that your work be fulfilled in us.

We praise you that in Christ,  
you teach us to live by faith,  
to place our hope and trust in him,  
and through Christ, experience your unconditional love.

As we dig holes for ourselves through our own deceit or wrongdoings,  
we ask your forgiveness.

As we are tempted to sing songs from other hymn-sheets,  
place your song of compassion on our lips.

And when we consider that the grass is greener on the other side,  
bring us home to your promised land,  
that we may honour your name in everything we do.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession**

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you walked our walk here on earth,  
bumping into friend and stranger,  
offering words of hope and encouragement,  
putting your life on the line,  
because of love.

Compassion on your lips,  
healing in your hands,  
wisdom in your words  
and challenges to bring this world into line,  
set you apart - and yet brought us closer to you.

Hopes and dreams,  
life-changing actions  
and promises of that new life in Christ,



have encouraged all who follow you  
to offer you thanks and praise for the chance to begin again.

Lord Jesus Christ, you know, too, the pain of being let down,  
of being pushed from pillar to post,  
of watching hopes and dreams being snatched away  
in the flurry of a sword,  
in the whisper in a temple courtyard.

And so we pray that your compassion,  
your understanding,  
your promises of hope,  
be heard in the murky shadows of a dimly lit prison.  
May your voice be heard in the back streets of inner cities,  
where humanity is given over to inhumane actions.  
May fields that have seen much bloodshed  
flourish again with new growth  
as old regimes disappear and newer and fairer ones arise.

And be there by the bedside of one who is dying,  
whispering words of hope,  
comforting those who grieve.

For your church here and across the world,  
encourage all to shout from the roof-tops that you are Lord,  
from the highest mountain to the flattest plain,  
from cathedral to village hall,  
from shanty town to city centre,  
that your message of hope will be heard  
and seeds planted  
to grow your kingdom here on earth.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen



## Time with Children

Remind everyone that it's only a few weeks ago that we celebrated Pentecost, the birth of the Church. It may be that birthday cakes etc were not mentioned on that occasion but for today, they will be!

### Ingredients

2 small cakes

1 packet of ordinary birthday candles

1 packet of birthday candles that can't be extinguished (can be got online)

Sufficient candle holders for one's needs

### Method

Chat about birthdays and birthday cakes. Find 2 people (any age) from the congregation/group who have just celebrated a birthday. Ask if they'd like another birthday cake? Hopefully "Yes please!"

Encourage them to come out to the front and show them the 2 cakes. Ask them to choose one each (best if both cakes are exactly the same to save any problems on the day) and to choose a packet of candles – important to "sell" the candles as being birthday candles. Once decided who's having which cake, work out how many candles each should put on their cake. Put the normal candles on one cake and the non-extinguishable ones on the other. Using a candle lighter, set the candles alight and with much excitement invite the person with the normal candles to blow them out. This should happen easily! Audience participation for encouragement should be to the fore.

Then invite the second person to blow out their candles – the non-extinguishable ones – and see what happens. Best to ad lib all of this as the candles blow out and immediately re-light. (Good idea to practise at home first!)

Using one's own form of address, explain that everyone hopes for life to be good – for some it's hope to get a new job; hope to get better soon; hope to have no wars; hope to hear good news.

A long time ago, the prophets wrote and spoke of the hope of a new way of life which would lighten up this world. We know that it was Jesus who would bring this new way of life. We



sometimes speak of Jesus being the Light of the World, bringing hope that no matter what happens – wars, sadness, etc etc – his light of hope will never be destroyed. Just like the candles on the cake that won't blow out, the Church, which is Jesus' body here on earth, will never be destroyed even though it faces problems from time to time. So at this time of Pentecost, let's celebrate the church's birthday and let's work hard to keep its light burning in our own community and in the world beyond.

## Musical Suggestions

CH4 284	Hope is a candle, once lit by the prophets
CH4 180	Give thanks with a grateful heart
CH4 182	Now thank we all our God
CH4 530	One more step along the world I go
CH4 782	Lord of life, we come to you
CH4 754	Be still and know that I am God
CH4 566	When I receive the peace of Christ
CH4 543	Longing for light, we wait in darkness
CH4 531	My Jesus, my Saviour
CH4 525	Have you heard the raindrops drumming on the rooftops?
CH4 458	At the name of Jesus



## Additional Resources

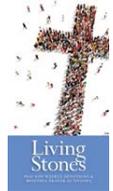
### Resourcing Mission



[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. [Living Stones](#) is available to pre-order 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 Eleanor Macalister 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.*

