

Starters for Sunday

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost

17th November 2013

Rev Andrea Price, minister of Birsay, Harray and Sandwick offers her thoughts on the 26th Sunday after Pentecost.

This is the last but one Sunday of the Christian year. The days are getting shorter and darkness seems to take hold in our part of the world, which affects people more than we like to admit. Will darkness win in every way?

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We have to choose between two sets of OT readings:

[Isaiah 65: 17-25](#)

This passage rings with joy in God's will to create a new heaven and a new earth in contrast to the realities of the world now. It lists the past trials and sorrows, which are very easily felt as many people in our day still suffer the death of loved ones, loss of jobs and homes and the sorrow over the life paths our children have taken.

In contrast Isaiah places before us the vision of a world where no tears are shed, life is fulfilled, long lasting, peaceful and safe. Even the animals are at peace. Best of all God we will be in constant conversation with his people, listening and answering, blessing mankind.

[Isaiah 12](#)

This is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving in conclusion of the first part of the book of Isaiah. It might well be sung by all who experience God's saving strength. Though still oppressed, God is the source of our salvation, help and strength. Verse 2b is a quote of Exodus 15,2a, the song sung after Israel went through the Red Sea to freedom.

Both these passages are attracting with their intense sense of joy, even through darkness and suffering.



The alternative texts have a different emphasis:

[Malachi 4: 1-2a](#)

This book contains 5 speeches in dialogue style, where the prophet scolds the priests and the congregation about various malpractices and against tired religious scepticism. This passage seems a conclusion of these speeches contrasting the fate of the evil doers with those of the obedient faithful, destruction for the first and healing for the second. Comfortingly the prophet assures the obedient believers that God's saving power will rise like the sun on them and like the sun's rays bring healing with it.

Lest we think, however, we are the obedient faithful, let us not forget the many millions living in poverty around the world or our contribution to climate change. Are we really safe from burning? Are we supporting Christian Aid's IF Campaign to eradicate hunger and poverty in the world enough? Do we not merrily burn fossil fuels and bring judgment on ourselves by overheating the earth and burning up in the process? The sun these days is one burning up creation, while the sun the prophet thinks of is one bringing warmth and healing.

[Psalm 98](#)

This psalm is an eschatological hymn, culminating in shouts of praise at the coming of God, the ruler of the world and all creation to judge the world with justice and fairness. Only a new song can begin to describe the wonders of God's power.

Which strand to use? This will need to be a pastoral decision. If your situation needs hope emphasised and faithful joy singing through darkest times then go with the Isaiah readings. If you feel that we are in danger of becoming complacent and want to emphasise the coming of the just Ruler of the Universe Malachi and Psalm 98 will be right.



[2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13](#)

Paul expected the second coming of Jesus very soon, initially certainly in his lifetime. However as the parousia delayed, some used Paul's writing in enthusiastic abandon. The delay needed explaining and life needed to be carried on, as we still have to do. While we are waiting for the coming of the Ruler of the World, we must not get tired to do good! Nor must we be lazy, give up working in and with the realities of this world.

[Luke 21: 5-19](#)

This is the second of Jesus' apocalyptic speeches in Luke. The first in Luke 17, 20-18, 8 emphasises the sudden coming of the Kingdom of God. Here in this second speech Jesus tells of the destruction of the temple, the danger of people being misled to think the end is nigh and the persecution of the believers from forces outside the congregation and within.

Just as 2 Thessalonians admonishes us not to grow tired in doing good, so Luke reminds us today to look at hardship and persecution as a chance to tell the gospel, the good news. Jesus tells us again: Do not be afraid! Not a single hair of our heads will be lost and standing firm will bring us through the trouble and to life.

At this time of year the increasing darkness may well be depressing for people. Our lives will also be full of challenges, overbearing for some. It is good to remember that since the earliest days people have gone through troubles and that God promises his saving strength, his healing and presence for times of intense trouble to help us even through death to life and new creation. Fear not! Tell the Good News!



Thoughts for the Sermon

Have you noticed that the story just before today's gospel reading is the "Widow's Mite"? Here is a poor woman giving everything she has – and the next thing we read is the disciples admiring the beauty of the temple and its rich gifts! Is Jesus losing his temper here just a wee bit with the human tendency to seek orientation and inspiration in material things?

Is it not ironic that our rich society is finding it so hard to devise a benefit system which all agree is fair and just? Is it not strange how we are struggling with obesity while so many in the world go hungry? Is it not terrible that some people have to work so hard it affects their health and family happiness while others have no work at all?

Why such imbalances? Is it because of fear? Fear not to have enough to live on, not to have enough in recognition of our efforts, not to achieve the success we think will make us happy – will it?

Perfect love drives out fear, we read in 1 John 4,18, which explains why Jesus tells us in today's gospel story not to be afraid of any number of ghastly things, but instead to look at terrible situations as opportunities to tell the Good News.

At this time of year Christian tradition remembers those gone before, who have lived their lives well and whose faith is still an example for us today. Like stained glass lets light into a cathedral, so the saints let God's light shine into our common lives. Are they not the ones who have lived God's love and driven fear out, in spite of having great cause to fear?

This may be the point at which to tell the story of your local saint, past or present. E.g. the story of St Magnus, who refused to join in the raiding battle singing Psalms on deck ship instead. Or the story of Hans and Sophie Scholl, who stood up against the whole state to educate Germans about the real situation of their country and its treatment of Jewish citizens.

The when and how of Christ's second coming is not our concern. What is our concern is the faithfulness with which we pray, sing, tell and live love until he comes.



Prayers

Sentence: 1 Timothy 6: 14-15

“Obey your orders without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ which God will bring about in his own good time.”

Collect

Almighty God,
you sent your son Jesus Christ to be the light of the world.
Free us from all that darkens and ensnares us,
and bring us to eternal light and joy;
through the power of him who is alive and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever. Amen

Call to Worship (based on Isaiah 12)

One: Come, sing to the Lord!
All: Praise his holy Name!
One: Come sing and praise our God!
All: For God is our strength and Saviour!
One: So come and be refreshed,
All: as fresh water brings joy to the thirsty!



Prayer of approach, confession and supplication

Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, we come to give you thanks for all our lives and the many good things we have to enjoy our living with.

As the days get shorter and many a darkness is looming over us, we are in danger of feeling low and miserable. Life giving God, come to us now and enliven us with your healing strength.

Jesus, brother and friend, we give you thanks for coming to live our life, suffering, dying and coming through suffering, betrayal and death renewed and alive to give us hope and freedom. You know us, Lord, and the burdens we bear; we place them at your feet.....

Holy healing Spirit, we give you thanks for your everlasting presence and power to enliven all that has grown weak and tired. At times the problems of our lives threaten to overwhelm us but you want to give us strength and a new a way of looking at the world.

So be with us this morning. Open our hearts and minds that we may drink in your love, your forgiveness and strength, your life and rejoice once more in knowing you and being yours.

Amen

Prayer of Intercession

Praise and glory, honour and thanksgiving be yours for ever and ever, loving God, heavenly Father.

May our world know you better all the time and love spread its wings among us. For your will is fullness of life and love shared freely, driving out all fear.

Halleluia, we praise you!

- All sing: Hymn 771 If you believe and I believe



We pray for all who are bound by fear for their survival: we pray for the hungry in this world and those whose lives are in danger from obesity and addictions.

Lord, may we share generously with those in need.

- All sing: Hymn 771 If you believe and I believe

We pray for all living in countries at war or in warring neighbourhoods.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace!

- All sing: Hymn 771 If you believe and I believe

We pray for all who fear for their state of mind: we pray for all in ruts and fearing depression; we pray for all who lack purpose and those driven to distraction.

Lord, send us to be listening, supportive friends!

- All sing: Hymn 771 If you believe and I believe

We pray for all who have lost someone precious to them and fear to go on. We pray for all who have taken the first steps out of the valley of death to telling good news.

Lord, comfort and sooth the wounded among us!

- All sing: Hymn 771 If you believe and I believe

We pray and give thanks for all who by word or actions have been tellers of Good News for us and everyone they met. Lord let us learn from them and fill us with your love that we in turn may be your messengers in our times and places. This we ask in Jesus' name to whom be all glory and honour with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever

Amen



Activity

Ask the congregation to write Good News onto a slip of paper (could be shaped like a water drop referring back to Ps98) – it could be a bible verse, story or other phrase of trust and encouragement. Then have them collected with the collection and as you sing the final hymn hand them out again as an act of telling and encouraging each other.



Time with Children

Gather things children and adults are at times afraid of (the dark, spiders, thunder, losing jobs, illness, death...)

What do we do when we are frightened? The worst we can do is to tell no one and be afraid all on our own!

Tell a parent, a friend, tell God!

Now tell the story of the first Christians and how they were very afraid at times because many people did not like the way they talked about God and Jesus being his son and messenger. They got huge rows in front of everyone!

Luke reminded them what to do: Tell them the Good News! Don't be afraid, talk of Jesus' love and kindness, how he helped and healed people, how he died and was given new life and is with us now so we are never alone!

Jesus promised that God would give us the right thing and the wise thing to say. So don't be afraid and quiet, but tell the Good News!

Followed by Hymn 692 Jesus puts this song into our hearts



Musical Suggestions

CH4 238	Lord, bring the day to pass (Isaiah 65)
CH4 241	Isaiah the prophet has written of old (Isaiah 65: 23)
CH4 473	Thy kingdom come – on bended knee (Isaiah 65: 25)
CH4 772	In the Lord I'll be ever thankful (Isaiah 12)
CH4 512	To God be the glory (Isaiah 12)
CH4 264	Judge eternal throned in splendor (Malachi 4: 1-3)
CH4 112	God whose almighty word (Malachi 4: 2)
CH4 217	God of day and God of darkness (Malachi 4: 2)
CH4 61	O sing a new song (Psalm 98)
CH4 513	Courage brother do not stumble (2 Thessalonians 3: 13)
CH4 471	To the name of our salvation
CH4 540	I heard the voice of Jesus say
CH4 578	Christ, whose glory fills the sky
CH4 720	There's a longing in our hearts



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



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 on our Resourcing Mission website [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 Andrea Price 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.

