

# starters for Sunday

## *Third Sunday of Easter*

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The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Susan Miller, Probationer Minister at Gorbals Parish Church, for her thoughts on the third Sunday of Easter.

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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](#)

### Introduction

This week's readings for the third Sunday of Easter are concerned with the experiences of the disciples in the period after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The reading from Luke's Gospel follows the account of the meeting of two disciples with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The disciples have been devastated by Jesus' death and they make their way from Jerusalem. At first the disciples do not recognise the stranger who draws alongside them and accompanies them on the way. Then they stop for a meal and Jesus becomes known to them in his familiar action of breaking bread with them. In the account of the road to Emmaus we see the presence of the risen Jesus breaking into the world unexpectedly in the ordinary event of the sharing of a meal. In our passage the two disciples pass on the news of their meeting with Jesus, and then Jesus again appears in their midst with a message of peace. God has overcome the power of death and vindicated the one who was crucified.

The readings are also concerned with the human response to the grace of God. The passage from Isaiah describes the prophet's vision of the glory of God and his subsequent willingness to accept his commission as a prophet. The reading from Acts follows the first healing carried out by Peter and John after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The disciples testify to the resurrection of Jesus by saying that they have healed the lame man "in the name of Jesus". In this account the power of Jesus remains active in the world through the actions of the disciples.

In 1 John the early Christians are grappling with their experience of the love of God breaking into the world. They have received a new identity as children of God but they live in a world in which their identity is unrecognised by those around them. What does their experience of the love of God have for the way in which they live their lives in the present? What impact does their identity as children of God have for their relationships in the world around them?



## [Acts 3: 12-19](#)

At the beginning of Acts 3 Peter and John go up to the Temple to worship God but on their way they find a lame man who has been left at the Beautiful Gate. The man is taken there every day in order to beg from the worshippers who are entering the Temple. Peter and John stop to speak to the man but instead of giving him money, they heal him in Jesus' name.

Our reading begins with Peter's speech to the crowd of bystanders who have witnessed the healing. The crowd is amazed at the disciples' healing of the man but Peter draws attention away from the disciples towards God. As Peter points out, the man has not been healed by the disciples' "power and piety" but he has been healed in the name of Jesus.

The disciples' act of healing is testimony to the power of God at work in the world. In the ancient world the name of a person was believed to contain his or her character or identity. When the disciples say the name of Jesus, the power of Jesus' breaks into the world. In this passage Peter and John have the role of witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and their proclamation in itself is a source of power.

The Book of Acts describes the growth of the early church in the period after the death and resurrection of Jesus. At this time the disciples discover their own identity and what it means for them to follow Jesus. Jesus has been renowned as a healer and his acts of healing have been integral to his proclamation of the kingdom of God. Jesus has come to bring life in all its fullness. Now the disciples have the task of continuing his healing mission.

This account is the first healing which is carried out by the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus. The man has been healed physically but his healing will also change all the other circumstances of his life. He will no longer depend on others to leave him at the Temple entrance and he will no longer need to beg from worshippers. In the New Testament healing is not only the physical healing of an individual but also a restoration of the healed person to their community.

In the early church, healing played an important role in ministry. Today some churches carry out a healing ministry. Other churches can be "healing" communities for people who suffer in emotional ways. Many churches have cafes which offer hospitality to people in their local communities. Opportunities to listen to people and offer friendship can also bring healing into



the lives of people. Open and inclusive communities who reach out to people and offer friendship can transform the lives of the people they meet

This man has been left each day to lie on his own so that he can beg for help as others enter the Temple to worship God. He is unseen by some, pitied by some, ignored by some. How many people have walked past him? The passage raises questions about the people who are unseen in our society today. How can the church challenge the practices in today's society which leave people feeling that they have been left behind?

### [Isaiah 6: 1-9a](#)

The Old Testament reading describes the prophet Isaiah's vision of God in the Temple in Jerusalem. God is portrayed as a king seated on a throne with seraphs in attendance. This description of God emphasises God's majesty and authority, and it points to God's control over the events which take place in the world.

The seraphs cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." God is not only found in heaven but is present throughout the world. In this passage the earth is transfigured by the glory of God. Sometimes God may seem to be hidden in the world. In Isaiah the prophet looks beyond the surface appearances of the world to glimpse the deeper reality of God's glory.

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Thomas Merton<sup>1</sup> gives an account of his perception of the glory of humanity one day as he walked in Louisville: "In Louisville at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers... And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

In our Old Testament reading Isaiah's experience highlights the transcendence of God. God is holy, and Isaiah responds to his vision of the holiness of God with awe and terror. His perception of the holiness of God makes him aware of his own sinfulness. God is holy but he feels unclean.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (London: Burns and Oates, 1968).



Nevertheless, his experience does not separate him from God because God moves towards him. A seraph flies towards him and touches his lips with a burning coal. Isaiah's lips are made clean and he is able to prophesy. God commissions Isaiah as a prophet and he is now sent into the world.

### [1 John 3: 1-7](#)

This letter is addressed to an early Christian community who have shared a deep experience of the love of God. Their experience of God's love has transformed their lives and has given them a new identity as children of God. They now struggle with the implications of their experience. What does their new identity mean for their life in the world? In what ways does their new identity change or shape their behaviour in the present?

The reading begins with a sense of wonder at the abundant love of God which is given to human beings. The author is writing to people who feel like strangers in the world. The people around them do not share their beliefs. Their values and way of life are not understood by those who live around them. Their lives find their only meaning in their relationship with God.

The community is living between the time of the resurrection of Jesus and his return. The world did not recognise Jesus and it does not recognise them. They follow Jesus, a man who has been put to death by the religious and political leaders of his time. At present they are children of God but they do not yet know what they will be in the future.

They wish to live pure lives but as human beings they are unable to live up to their hopes. At the same time they believe that the death of Jesus has taken away the power of sin. Jesus breaks the power of sin through forgiveness. Forgiveness prevents human beings from being possessed by guilt. Jesus brings freedom to let go of the past.



## [Luke 24: 36b-48](#)

The gospel reading describes the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples in Jerusalem. Earlier that day Jesus had appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As the two disciples tell the others about their experience, Jesus appears suddenly in their midst with a greeting of peace.

At first the disciples are overcome by a mixture of emotions. Some are terrified and some are amazed. They wonder if Jesus is a ghost. How did Jesus enter the room? Luke stresses the physical nature of the resurrection. Jesus shows the disciples his hands and his feet. Luke emphasises the continuity between the crucified Jesus and the risen Jesus. The one who was crucified has now been raised.

Jesus then asks his disciples for something to eat and they gave him a piece of broiled fish. In some healing accounts such as the raising of Jairus' daughter, food is served to the restored person as a confirmation of his or her cure. In our passage Jesus' meal acts as a confirmation of the resurrection but it is also reminiscent of the many other occasions in which Jesus has shared meals with his disciples in their life together. The sharing of food brings back a sense of normality after the terror and anguish in the last week of Jesus' life.

In this account Jesus has come with a message of peace to bring calm to the disciples' fear and turmoil. Jesus' message indicates that his enemies have not prevailed and his mission is not at an end. This reading emphasises that despite the cruelty of the world, God remains in control of events. The disciples are able to have peace because they may place their trust in God. Jesus sends the disciples into the world with a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations.

This passage concludes with the commission of the disciples who are sent out from the holy city of Jerusalem. In Acts there is an account of the spread of the church from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth. The sending out of the disciples raises the question of what is our commission today? What does it mean for us to bear witness to the resurrection in the present world? What is the nature of the peace Jesus brings? Do we bring a message of peace?

Throughout their lives the American priests, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, took part in peace protests. In 1968 they were part of a group who became known as the Catonsville Nine. This



group protested against the Vietnam War by burning three hundred and seventy eight draft cards in Catonsville. When Philip asked Daniel to take part in this action, he was reluctant. At first Daniel wanted to think things over but eventually he agreed because he could not think of any reason not to take part. He didn't want to do it, but he couldn't not do it.

In the 1980s the Berrigans were part of a group who founded the Plowshares movement by carrying out symbolic actions to protest against nuclear weapons. This movement was inspired by Isaiah's vision of the new age in which swords are turned into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:2-4).

In 1973 a group, including Philip Berrigan and his wife Elizabeth McAlister, founded Jonah House in Baltimore as a place of nonviolence, resistance and community. The Catholic Church gave them the caretaker's house of St Peter's cemetery on the condition that they would look after the cemetery. The group later built another house which has large windows looking out onto the cemetery. When Philip died, he was buried in the cemetery. At a time when many people struggle to get by the community in Jonah House provide food and clothing as well as support for people who are protesting against nuclear weapons. The community who live in Jonah House have campaigned and protested for years against weapons of mass destruction. The house of hospitality with its large windows which look out onto the cemetery is itself a sign of the resurrection.

## Prayers

### Collect

God of life and love,  
your Son made himself known to his disciples  
in the breaking of bread.  
Open the eyes of our faith,  
that we may see him in his redeeming work,  
who is alive and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.



Let us pray  
Early in the morning  
When the sun was rising  
Near the garden tomb  
Mary met the one  
who knows her name.  
Life-giving God  
We worship you.

Early in the morning  
When the Son has risen  
Near the worn graves stones in the rose garden  
The spring blossoms and the stillness  
We find the one  
who calls us by our names.  
Jesus, Son of God  
We come to worship you.

For the sun is risen  
And life comes out of death  
And love overcomes fear.

And there is a new world  
Everything looks the same  
But everything is different.  
The familiar and the certain  
have passed away with the darkness  
And beyond the old stone walls  
a new path is waiting.



Come among us now  
with your life-giving spirit  
and renew us.

Come to the people in their homes around us

Come to the people of the city

To the hungry,  
To the homeless,  
To the stranger,  
To the bereaved.

Take us into the fragile and broken places

Take us out from the garden

With the message of the gospel

For you are not only with us here

You are waiting for us there.

Amen.

Let us pray

This Easter you come to us

In unexpected places,

In a crowded room,

In a journey on a dusty road,

In conversation,

In the stillness.

You come in the midst of our doubt, our fear, our sorrow

You come in the power of the resurrection

No pain and suffering is unknown to you.



You bring us peace  
And we pray for the places where there is no peace  
Countries torn by war  
Refugees seeking homes  
Prisoners facing torture

You bring peace  
Peace to the tensions and conflicts within us  
To the regrets, the failure,  
The broken relationships  
The lost friendships

You bring peace  
For you are a friend to us  
When we are alone  
When we are lonely  
Unseen you are there  
You bring us peace  
And we pray that we too  
may become peacemakers.



## Musical Suggestions

CH4 409	Jesus is risen, alleluia!
CH4 416	Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
CH4 417	Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain
CH4 418	Away with gloom, away with doubt!
CH4 419	Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son.
CH4 422	Christ is alive, and the universe must celebrate
CH4 423	I know that my Redeemer lives
CH4 425	The Saviour died, but rose again
CH4 426	All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord
CH4 428	Word of the Father: Jesus Christ!
CH4 443	He is Lord, he is Lord
CH4 798	The peace of the earth be with you



## 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.

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*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.*

