

# starters for Sunday

## *Third Sunday in Lent*

*19 March 2017*

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Colin Sinclair, Minister of Palmerston Place Church, Edinburgh, for his thoughts on the third Sunday in Lent.

### **Contents**

Exodus 17: 1-7.....	2
Psalm 95 .....	2
Romans 5: 1-11.....	3
John 4: 5-42 .....	4
Sermon Ideas .....	4
Time with Children.....	5
Prayers.....	6
Musical Suggestions .....	10
Additional Resources.....	11



## 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 17: 1-7](#)

When things are going OK it is easy to “trust God”. But when the crisis comes the reality of our faith is exposed. For the Children of Israel that testing was to come regularly on their journey through the wilderness and almost never did they rise to the occasion. The crisis when it arose was serious, potentially life-threatening. They had travelled and arrived at camp but one essential ingredient was missing- water. To be without water in the desert is no joke and perhaps the sense of fear and panic precipitated their anger at Moses and implicitly also at God. All too easily the great events of their deliverance are consigned to history and an alternative reading is presented that confirms their original prejudice against Moses’ leadership. The mood is turning ugly and mob rule is not far below the surface. Moses, however, takes the problem to God. He is a person under orders and recognises something has to be done- and quickly. While it is a practical issue and there is an urgent need for it to be resolved, fundamentally it is a spiritual issue, reflecting their lack of trust in God. Moses acts decisively by first bringing the matter to God in blunt terms. Then he obeys the Lord’s clear directions which involve bringing the leadership on side with him. His act is to be simple yet spectacular. Moses strikes the rock and water flows out. The need is met but the underlying problem remains. If our default position is to doubt and to express that in grumbling and disunity, it is going to be a long hard road to get to the Promised Land.

### [Psalm 95](#)

This Psalm is a call to worship. Worship begins *with rejoicing* v1-5. It is something we do together and do aloud. Even Presbyterians can be exuberant in worship letting our voices express the love of our hearts! We can “sing for joy”. Sometimes we hold back perhaps feeling it is not culturally acceptable, but sometimes we are simply in a rut. Enthusiastic worship can be



infectious. Oswald Chambers wrote: “A joyful spirit is the nature of God in my blood.” In the end worship is not for my entertainment, but to help us focus on God. In the psalm the writer begins by affirming God as the Creator who remains in control of all that has been made, and for that we bless God.

Our rejoicing should both be tempered and informed by our reverence. God is God and we bow before God, marvelling at the beauty of holiness. From standing before God, we now bow down in the presence of God who is not only our Creator, but also our Shepherd v6-7a. God cares for his sheep and knows us personally. The more we get to know God the deeper our reverence will be. Our worship should include shouts *and* silence; happiness *and* holiness; rejoicing *and* reverence.

Finally the Psalmist calls for our response. When we take God seriously then we need to stop and listen and respond appropriately. We must not harden our hearts and indeed need to learn from the experience of God’s people in the Wilderness as in the passage above. Rather we need to live out in our lives what we affirm in our worship together. It is a call to the long obedience of faith. It is not enough to be moved in worship if we do not move when God calls us.

### **Romans 5: 1-11**

This section begins with the word “therefore”. Whenever you see the word “therefore” you should ask what it is “there for”. Paul is spelling out the implications of our being made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The benefits are wide-ranging and life transforming. We have peace with God. In fact we have not only peace with God (theologically) but peace with one another (sociologically) peace with ourselves (psychologically) and peace with our world (ecologically). Our guilt having been dealt with fully and finally, we can, through grace, go into the presence of God without fear knowing God as our heavenly Father. There we find hope for the future because our trust is ultimately in God and in the decisive victory secured in the death and resurrection of Christ. Life may not be easy, indeed it often won’t be, but even our sufferings will not be seen as either random events or punishment, but as part of God’s process to make us more like Jesus. We are becoming in fact what we already are in faith, being changed into the likeness of Christ. We are not left alone in that process because the Holy Spirit travels with us and within us and confirms in our hearts the certainty of God’s love for us.



When doubts arise, then Paul takes us back to see the immensity of the death of Christ for us. In light of such a sacrifice for us we know ourselves to be neither alone or abandoned. If God has committed to us without reservation when we were powerless, sinners, enemies, then how can we doubt that God will not complete the task? Our response is to rejoice in God, in God's goodness and grace, and to marvel at God's gift of reconciliation.

### [John 4: 5-42](#)

The gospel reading takes us to one of the most loved encounters in the gospels. The "woman at the well" is unnamed but not unknown. Here is a true "high noon" meeting. At a time when she seeks to avoid others, this Samaritan woman finds herself face to face with a Jewish man. Jesus sets her more at ease, by making himself vulnerable, through asking her for a favour. This sets her free to begin to talk, her curiosity whetted by his apparent breach of protocol. He tantalises her by using water as a picture of our longing for life, refreshment, vitality. She is preoccupied with the practical impossibility of such provision but at the same time, he has awoken wistfulness in her by his attitude and his words. Suddenly the conversation takes a twist as her back story is revealed. Too much to handle she seeks to divert him by raising a theological red herring. He answers it by getting behind "place" to "person" and she, having faced herself, now finds herself encountering the Messiah. Leaving everything, water jar and past, she returns to the village to become an instinctive evangelist and her sincerity and conviction win her a large response. The task is completed when she introduces them to Jesus. Harvest time has come to Sychar.

### **Sermon Ideas**

While each passage could be handled on its own the common link is worship. As we travel through Lent there is both a positive and negative side that could be developed

On the positive there are the reasons we worship God. God is our Creator and sustainer, our Shepherd and our Friend (Psalm 95) At the heart of our worship is the person of Jesus Christ who has come to reveal to us what God is like (John 4), to open the way to God and to make our worship reality not simply ritual. Paul reminds us (Romans 5) of all the blessings that we have in Christ, not least access into the presence of God and peace with God. This should prompt our



worship and our love. However the warning is also clear and is appropriate for Lent as we journey to the Cross in a spirit of self-examination. The Psalmist warns us of the danger of a hard heart which is often stimulated by grumbling and complaining (Exodus 17). It can also come about because we try to conceal our true situation (John 4) and the result is that our souls dry up and our spirits become bitter. The cure is the life giving water Jesus offers which can set us free to praise and proclaim.

## **Time with Children**

### **Make a space for God**

When things are hard it is easy to doubt God, A person who felt let down by God made a great big poster “God is Nowhere.” A Christian friend came to see them and try and help. He surprised the person by saying “I like your poster and I don’t want to change a single word or a single letter but I would like to make a little space where you have none.” So they took the poster down. They didn’t change a single word. They didn’t change a single letter, but right in the middle of “Nowhere” they left a little space so that it now read “**God is now here**” The friend had come as God’s agent to be with this person, to listen to his story, to offer practical help, to pray, and show God’s love in action. And in so doing he helped the person to hang on through a tough time till his faith revived again.

Sometimes it seems that God is nowhere. But if we make a little space for him, by taking time to be with other Christians, by saying our prayers, by coming to church on Sunday, we shall find that God is now here. That is what the Psalmist meant when he said “Be still and know that I am God” And if you don’t feel “in the mood remember the French proverb which says “Your appetite increases when you begin to eat”. Sometimes it is only as we start to worship we find we really want to and then we find God again..



## Prayers

### Prayer of approach and confession

O God our Father,  
we come to you to you today  
that we may worship you in spirit and in truth  
We come to you today  
to magnify the name of Jesus  
our saviour and our Lord.  
Forgive us for our sins and strengthen us to live for you.  
Send your Holy Spirit upon us today  
that the new truth we need may be revealed  
and we be reminded of old truths we have forgotten  
that we may worship you here as we are gathered  
and serve you as we return to our homes and lives  
for we ask this in Jesus' name.  
Amen

### Prayer of thanksgiving

Praise the Lord  
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good  
For his mercy endures for ever

O God our Father  
we give you thanks for all  
that you have done for us  
you created us,  
gave us the gift of life  
and this world in which to live  
You have given us work to do  
and the strength to do it  
You have kept us all our days



and brought us in safety to this present hour

**For all this we give you thanks, O God**

We give you thanks for all that others have done for us  
for those who taught us when we were children  
for those who shaped our lives during our formative years  
for those who loved us and surrounded us with care  
for those who pray for us and seek your face

**For all this we give you thanks, O God**

We give you thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit  
for the way the Spirit reminds us of the words of Jesus  
when we are in danger of forgetting them  
for the way the Spirit leads us into new understanding  
and opens your truth to us  
for the prompting, telling us what to say and do  
for the strength we are given and the courage we need to live our lives for you

**For all this we give you thanks, O God**

We thank you for all the Church has done for us  
for the teaching we have received and the example we have seen within the church  
for strength and guidance each week to live the life of faith  
for the friendship and fellowship which we enjoy  
for your word and for your table and for the prayers of your people

**For all this we give you thanks, O God**

We give thanks to you for all you have done for us in Jesus Christ  
that in him you have shown us the length and breadth  
and depth and height of your great love for us  
that through him you have opened up a new and living way into your presence  
that in him we have forgiveness of sins and peace with you and with ourselves

**For all this we give you thanks, O God**



We give you thanks for everything that has enriched our minds and preserved our bodies

We give you thanks for everything that has enabled us

to meet the duties and demands of life

and has given us the power to resist temptation

We give you thanks for everything that has strengthened our faith

and kept alive our hope

We thank you for everything which has given us strength for this life

and hope for the next

Accept this our sacrifice of praise

for your love's sake

Amen

### **Prayer of intercession**

O God our Father

hear our prayer today and the cries of our heart.

When things are going wrong we turn to you

believing you to be a God who hears and answers prayer

Bless your people today

Bless those who are haunted by their doubts and help them to find the full assurance of faith.

Bless those who are paralysed by indecision, and help them to know what they ought to do.

Grant them a light to show them the way ahead.

Bless those who find temptation difficult to resist and give them the strength to overcome evil and do what is right.

Bless those who are depressed by failure, and help them to take heart and make a fresh start.

Bless those who are discouraged because they see no change in their situation and no results of their work. Help them to do the best they can and to leave the outcome to you.



Bless those who suffer pain and help them to hold on to you knowing you share their sufferings and will not leave them desolate.

Bless those who are wounded by sorrow, and for whom life has become lonely. Grant them comfort to ease the pain within their heart, and the companionship which will take the ache of loneliness away.

Bless those who are soured by disappointment, and by the failure of the dreams on which they set their heart. Help them to accept life as it is and with your help to make something splendid of it

Bless those who are embittered by hatred, by an unforgiving spirit, by grudges they have refused to forget. Help them to learn from you how to forgive and how to choose to forget.

Help those who are inflated by self-conceit. Help them to find true humility by seeing their lives in the light of your holiness.

Help those who are uplifted by success and save them from sinful pride.

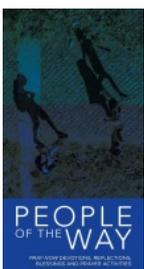
Bless those who are happy, especially those who are happy in each other. Keep them in perfect love and loyalty and let nothing come between them all the days of their lives

O God our Father take from us all fretfulness of spirit, all impatience and all restlessness.

Help us to live our lives steadfastly, to wait on you and to trust the future into your hands.

Make us now and always to be so sure of you that we may live and one day die in perfect peace because we trust in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *People of the Way* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2016. *People of the Way* is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



## Musical Suggestions

CH4 59	Oh come, and let us to the Lord (Psalm 95 – the Psalm of the day)
CH4 201	Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness
CH4 160	Praise my soul
	Bless the Lord (10,000 reasons)
Ch4 194	(Children's) This is the day
CH4 196	(Children's) Come now is the time to worship
CH4 443	(Children's) He is Lord
CH4 197	(Children's) As we are gathered
Stuart Townend	Speak O Lord
CMP 50	Be still
CH4 352	O for a thousand tongues to sing



## 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. [People of the Way](#) is available 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.*

