

starters for Sunday

Easter Day

20 April 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr Angus Morrison, Minister of Orwell and Portmoak and Moderator Designate, for his thoughts on Easter Day.

Contents

Acts 10: 34-43	2
Jeremiah 31: 1-6	3
Psalms 118: 1-2, 14-24	3
Colossians 3: 1-4	4
John 20: 1-18	5
Preaching Ideas.....	6
Time with Children.....	8
Prayers.....	9
Musical suggestions	11
Additional Resources.....	12



After 2,000 years and more of the church's proclamation of the message of Easter, today's theme is one with which we have grown very familiar. The risk is real of allowing what was once the most astonishing conceivable News ("He is risen!"), with its staggering implications, somehow to become ordinary and stale. To immerse ourselves prayerfully in today's diverse readings, in which in different ways the surprise and glory of Easter are highlighted, is to recapture something of the hope-filled wonder of the early disciples, and so to become equipped to help others make the great discovery for themselves.

[Acts 10: 34-43](#)

Easter surprise: reconfiguring the church's mission

These verses contain Peter's speech in the home at Caesarea of the Gentile Cornelius, a Roman centurion. It represents nothing short of a Spirit-directed paradigm-shift in the approach to mission of the early church. Peter's address was the outcome of two visions, the first given to Cornelius (10:1-8) in which he was instructed to send to Joppa for Peter, and the second to Peter himself (10:9-16) in which he was directed to kill and eat animals regarded as unclean in Jewish law. It began to dawn on Peter that this abrogation of ceremonial food-laws had a much wider bearing on the Christian mission as rooted in the Easter message: 'God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean' (10:28b). Having gone willingly to Caesarea with the messengers sent by Cornelius, Peter delivered his message to a Gentile audience gathered in the centurion's home.

Peter introduces his theme with a statement that may seem obvious, but at this juncture represented a complete change of outlook for Peter: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him' (10:34b-35). Peter's address is a summary of the gospel from this newly gained perspective that the mission and good news of the risen Christ who is now 'Lord of all' (v. 36b), does not exclude anyone on account of racial or other human-created distinctions. The message to be preached is one that proclaims both the universal authority of the risen Jesus ('he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead' v. 42), and, deriving from that authority, the inclusive promise of forgiveness 'through his name', to everyone without exception who 'believes in him' (v. 43).



Peter's address anticipates the decision of the Council of Jerusalem in support of the church's Gentile mission (15:1-35). The way was thus cleared for the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus that his followers would be his witnesses 'to the ends of the earth' (1:8).

[Jeremiah 31: 1-6](#)

Easter surprise: new life and covenant love

This alternative reading begins a chapter whose keynote is 'hope' – the hope of a fully restored nation of Israel and Judah, following the exile. The chapter anticipates a new age of divine grace, based on a new covenant, in which God's forgiven and inwardly transformed people will live new lives marked by love and obedient loyalty to their true, but previously spurned, husband, Yahweh (31:31-34). Various New Testament writers take up this idea of a new covenant to shed light on what Jesus accomplished by his life, death and resurrection (e.g., Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:5-14; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17).

The oracle of salvation in 31:2-6 traces the future redemption of God's people to its source in the 'everlasting love' of Yahweh, which guarantees his unfailing faithfulness (v. 3). There is no 'favouritism' in God for his love is a love of sheer grace: love for those who are inherently unworthy of it. Already in the Old Testament the way is being prepared for the global proclamation of this love, definitely revealed in Jesus, crucified and risen.

[Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24](#)

Easter surprise: vindication and joy

This hymn of thanksgiving for a great deliverance (it was, incidentally, Martin Luther's favourite Psalm) brings to a close the so-called 'Egyptian Hallel' (Pss. 113-118), sung in the context of the Passover celebrations. Following a liturgical call to the whole worshipping assembly to praise God for his 'steadfast love' (vv. 1-4), the voice of an individual worshipper sounds out, bearing thankful testimony to a personal experience of God's rescue from a situation of danger and distress (vv. 5-18). On the basis of v. 10, with its reference to being surrounded by 'all nations', and the apparently kingly welcome offered in vv. 19-27, some have concluded that person concerned was a king. Certainly, victory has been granted over powerful foes, a victory



recognized as due entirely to Yahweh (vv. 10-16). The voice of personal testimony includes the striking words, 'I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount then deeds of the Lord' (v. 17).

The individual approaches the gates of the temple and asks for admittance in order to continue praising God in the assembled congregation (vv. 19-20). On this request apparently being granted, the lone voice blends with those of the other worshippers in praise of God's signal deliverance (vv. 21-27). A striking image, taken from familiar building practice, is used to convey the marvellous and surprising nature of the individual's deliverance: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone' (v. 22; quoted in Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7). The clear implication that powerful people in Israel were complicit in the utter rejection of this individual, mistakenly judging him unsuited for the proposed (kingly?) role, together with the surprising news of Yahweh's subsequent vindication, makes natural the repeated New Testament application of v. 22 to Jesus.

The surprise and joy of God's rescue of his servant is celebrated in worship (vv. 22a-27). The individual is 'blessed' by the worshippers as 'the one who comes in the name of the Lord' (v. 26a). The cry of the congregation, 'Save us, we beseech you, O Lord' (v. 25a), once the Hebrew is transliterated into Greek, gives the word 'Hosanna'. For well-known Christological use of vv. 25 and 26 in the New Testament Gospels, see Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38.

[Colossians 3: 1-4](#)

Easter surprise: a new way of living

This passage marks a transition in the letter from polemic against the (dehumanizing) 'philosophy' being urged on the Colossians by certain false teachers (2:8-23), to a sustained appeal to the Colossian Christians to live an authentically human existence – one that is pleasing to the Lord (3:5 – 4:6). Their baptism into Christ had decisively marked their dying to the old order, and their rising as members of the new order inaugurated by Christ's resurrection (cf. Romans 6:1-14). Through union with Christ, they were now God's 'resurrection people', a part of his new creation, and so called to express this new reality in an appropriate integration of thought and action.



The Christian's life, in truth, is Christ himself (v. 4). At present, this life is 'hidden with Christ in God' (v. 3), and therefore to those who still belong to the old order, it makes no sense and may be deemed worthy of contempt. When Christ, however, is in due course revealed, the life of his people will simultaneously be revealed for the glorious reality it is (v. 4; cf. Romans 8:18-30).

What is needed meantime is a way of thinking and living that finds its centre and rest in the sovereign rule of the risen Christ (vv. 1-2). 'Think about him. Remember: your life is all wrapped up in his. "Your life is hidden with Christ in God" does not mean that it is gone, extinguished, but that the fullness of the life of God belongs to you. Your life is hidden in God's, and God through baptism and faith is in you. You are not obliterated; you have been given the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. You are as real and alive as God himself.' (Leonard R. Klein)

[John 20: 1-18](#)

Easter surprise: who are you looking for?

The relationship of John's Easter narrative to those of the synoptic Gospels is complex and is treated at length in the major commentaries. It is clear that there is much overlap but also much that is distinctive in John's account.

His narrative centres particularly on the figure of Mary Magdalene, climaxing with her encounter with the risen Christ in vv. 11-18. John is concerned to show that the order established by the resurrection of Jesus means that we are invited into God's new world, in which we experience the most profound and intimate relationship with Christ (as brother) and with God (as Father). See v. 17.

In John's narrative, Mary Magdalene on her own makes the first discovery of the empty tomb (v.1). In each of the Gospel accounts the discovery was made 'on the first day of the week' (see Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1), rather than on 'the third day', as in the predictions of Jesus (Matt. 27:63; Mk. 8:31). This may signal generally the surprising 'newness' of what is taking place. For John, the Word who became flesh is the one credited with the original creation (John 1:3), and the resurrection day may be understood as marking the beginning of God's glorious new week (cf. Genesis 1:1-2:3) – the launch of nothing less than new creation. In this light, Mary's mistaking of Jesus for the gardener in v. 15, in true Johannine style, takes on deeper significance. With



echoes from early Genesis, Jesus is indeed the ‘Gardener’, ‘charged with bringing the chaos of God’s creation into new order, into flower, into fruitfulness.’ (N.T. Wright)

Mary’s reporting of her discovery to Peter and the Beloved Disciple in v.2 (the role of a woman as first witness to the fact of the resurrection, thereby becoming an ‘apostle to the apostles’ deserves exploration in depth), is followed by an interlude in the narrative in which is described in detail the coming of the two disciples to the tomb and what they saw there prior to their return home (vv. 3-10).

The remainder of the reading (vv. 11-18) concentrates on the experiences of the solitary Mary Magdalene in the garden: her weeping (v.11a); her sight of two angels inside the tomb and her response to their question about the cause of her tears (vv. 11b-13); her sudden sight of the ‘gardener’ whom she failed to recognise as Jesus (v.14); Jesus’s identical question to that of the angels, with the additional and significant, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ (v. 15a; see Jn. 1:38; 18:4, 7) and Mary’s uncomprehending response (v.15b).

We come to the climax of the plot as Jesus proceeds immediately to disclose his misunderstood identity, by calling Mary by name. This evokes instant recognition on her part (v.16). Jesus then makes clear to Mary that everything has now changed. Since he has not yet reached his goal of returning to the Father she must not cling to him or try to keep him to herself (v.17a). Significantly, Mary again becomes an ‘apostle to the apostles’, charge with a message of promise (ascension) as much as of fulfilment (resurrection), conveyed in a manner that highlights the deepened relationship his followers would enjoy with the risen, ascended Jesus as his brothers and sisters, and with the Father as his beloved children (vv.17b-18).

Preaching Ideas

Easter is the most important season in the church’s calendar. Easter Sunday provides a special opportunity to proclaim the surprising, central and multi-faceted reality of our Lord’s resurrection. With the Psalmist we say, ‘This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it’ (Psalm 118:24).



Acts

Our Acts reading invites a retelling of ‘the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all’ (10:36), whose main points, climaxing with the resurrection, are summarized in the apostolic kerygma. This could lead into reflection on the bearing of Easter on the ongoing global mission of the church, with particular attention to ways in which we, like Peter, may need to be set free from prejudices which unhelpfully restrict our vision of the scope of the grace revealed in the gospel.

Psalm

There are not too many Old Testament texts from which a clear Easter message can be proclaimed. This is one of them. Through a messianic reading of the psalm, the church from earliest times has discovered in it all the key elements of the Easter story. Taking v.24 as a starting point, providing as it does the key-note of joy and gratitude, reflection can be offered on the rejection of the one ‘who comes in the name of the Lord’, as on his subsequent vindication and exaltation. With particular reference to v.17, thought can be given to the way in which Christ’s resurrection is set to transform our most basic outlook on life. ‘The way in which believers face every threat and crisis and need is colored by the knowledge that God has not given us over to death.’ (James L. Mays) Calvin comments, ‘We whose life is hid with Christ in God ought to meditate on this psalm all the days of our lives, Col. 3:3’ (Quoted by Mays).

Colossians

The Colossians reading could helpfully be taken with the psalm to illuminate the kind of resurrection life we find in Christ. Alternatively, it could itself become the main text for today. For this purpose, Murray J. Harris suggests the following outline:

‘With Christ’ (3:1-4)

1. In death to sin, self, and the world (v.3a; cf. 2:20; Rom. 6:6-11)
2. In spiritual resurrection to newness of life (v.1a; cf. 2:12-13; Rom. 6:6, 11)
3. In new, spiritual life, aliveness to God (vv. 3b, 4a; cf. Rom. 6:11, 13)
4. In resurrection glory (v.4b; cf. Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Thess. 1:10)



Gospel

The John reading calls out for reflection on the Easter encounter of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The ability of the risen Christ to bring transformation and hope into the most difficult situations of human pain and grief is powerfully and movingly highlighted. With this encounter, John ‘leads the reader from the empty tomb to that which is the real meaning of the resurrection – the creation of a new relationship between Jesus and those who believe in him.’ (Lesslie Newbigin) The nature of this new relationship, brought about by Jesus’s resurrection and exaltation could be unpacked. Jesus’s calling of Mary by name, leading to instant recognition of the Lord is worth lingering over. ‘It is beautiful to think what the sound of one’s own name would be, when the inflection of it would carry the meaning Mary heard in the unmistakable, familiar, and utterly unexpected voice of her friend and teacher.’ (Marilynne Robinson) And the implications of the choice of Mary – a woman – to be the first witness to the resurrection, for the ministry and service of women in the church, in light of other New Testament evidence, could be explored.

‘For me the most radical demand of Christian faith lies in summoning the courage to say ‘yes’ to the present risenness of Jesus Christ.’ (Brennan Manning)

Time with Children

The Great Fire of London of 1666 devastated a wide area of the city, including many of London’s churches. Old St Paul’s was one of the churches destroyed. Following the Fire, Sir Christopher Wren designed over fifty new city churches. One of these was the new St Paul’s. As he prepared for it to be built, Wren carefully chose the precise spot that would mark the centre of the great dome. He asked one of the workmen to mark the place. Looking round for some object that he could use for the purpose, the workman picked up a fragment of a broken tombstone. On it was written only one word of the original inscription - the word Resurgam: the Latin for ‘I shall rise again.’ Sir Christopher felt as though he was hearing the old church building speak, and he found new motivation and energy for the huge task ahead. Today, St Paul’s Cathedral is one of the most prominent and famous buildings in London, visited by huge numbers of people from all around the world [a photo of St Paul’s might be useful]. When Sir Christopher Wren died in 1723



he was buried in the Cathedral. His gravestone has a Latin inscription whose translation is: 'If you seek his memorial, look about you.'

The Easter application: Good Friday – hopes and dreams in ashes; Easter Sunday – the great discovery and a realisation that written over Jesus's life had always been the word Resurgam; the new creation resulting, the building of the church; the presence of the living Jesus with us all the days; sure hope for the future. The most joyful day in the Church's year.

Prayers

Collect

Lord of life and power,
through the mighty resurrection of your Son,
you have overcome death
and opened the gate of everlasting life.

Grant that we, being dead to sin
And alive to you in Jesus Christ,
May reign with him in glory,
Who with you and the Holy Spirit is alive,
one God, now and forever.

Approach

Gracious God, on this day of resurrection joy and gladness, with your people of all times and places, we bring to you our praise and adoration. From the tiniest particle of matter the unimaginable immensities of space, your glory fills the universe. We bow before you, our Creator, in awe and wonder.

As today we come to celebrate together the good news of Easter, we bless you that you are the God of new creation, whose gracious purpose it has ever been to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, and to renew the whole cosmos, through Christ your Son.

We thank you for your eternal love and power revealed in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Through your Holy Spirit come to us today in the power of his risen



life. Take away our sins; roll away the stone our crippling doubts and fears; fill us with joy and peace in believing; and make us eager, like Mary Magdalene, to bring the good news of Easter to others, that they too may find in Christ pardon and peace, joy and hope.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Intercessions

God of life and love, in the transforming light of the Easter message and its certain hope that one day your kingdom of justice, love and joy shall fully come, we offer to you our prayers for others.

In the light of the empty tomb, we bring to you our world, remembering before you all victims of war, violence and oppression. We pray for those who suffer crushing poverty and hunger, struggling to find adequate food for their families and for themselves. We pray especially for children everywhere who find themselves caught up in dark and dangerous situations which leave them frightened and confused. Strengthen and guide all those who give sacrificially of their time, their talents, their very selves, to bring relief to those in need of it. Let the light of the risen Christ shine in our world.

As we remember all nations, their leaders and people before you, we pray particularly for our own. Restore the honour of your name among us. We pray for our gracious sovereign the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, and all members of the royal family; for those who serve in public office in every sphere; for all who willingly and cheerfully serve the common good. We pray for all the men and women of our armed forces, particularly those of them on active service at this time, for the chaplains who serve them, and for those who wait at home for their return. Let the light of the risen Christ shine in the nations.

We pray for the church of Christ in this and in every land. Come Holy Spirit to us all in resurrection power. Forgive and heal our division and conflicts, and bind us together in the truth and love of the gospel, so that our Saviour's prayer will be answered, and the world come to believe the message we bear. Bless our Church of Scotland and every branch of the church in



Scotland. Encourage all who are faithfully building for Christ's kingdom. Let us witness a new day of our risen, exalted Lord's gracious power. Let the light of the risen Christ shine in the church.

We pray for all around us who are in real need, and all who suffer. We remember the lonely, the frightened, the abandoned, the sorrowful. Call them by name, as you did Mary by the empty tomb, and let them also find in you their peace and joy. We pray you to heal those who are troubled in mind, body or spirit. Bring relief to those who are deeply stressed and see no way out from under the burden. Let the light of the risen Christ illumine every heart and life.

Risen Lord Jesus, accompany us all as we walk into the week ahead. May we follow closely your footsteps and rejoice in your presence. Make us strong to bear witness to your loving Lordship, and may we so live as your resurrection people that we may be channels of your grace and peace to all we encounter on the journey. Let the light of the risen Christ always shine upon our path.

Graciously hear our prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Musical suggestions

Of many suitable Easter hymns, the following is a small selection:

- CH4 425 The Saviour died, but rose again
- CH4 410 Jesus Christ is risen today
- CH4 407 Comes Mary to the grave
- CH4 409 Jesus is risen, alleluia!
- CH4 412 The strife is o'er, the battle done
- CH4 433 Haven't you heard that Jesus is risen!
- CH4 419 Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son



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. [Pray Now 2013](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#). [Revealing Love](#) will be available to purchase from November 2013.



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](#).

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 Dr Angus Morrison 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.

