



Heart and Soul
Assembly Sunday
21 May 2017

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr Derek Browning, Moderator Designate and Minister of Edinburgh: Morningside, for his thoughts on Heart and Soul.

Introduction	2
Genesis 18: 1-8	2
Psalm 84: 1-4	3
Hebrews 13: 1-2.....	4
Luke 19: 1-10	5
Time with Children.....	6
Prayers	6
Musical suggestions.....	9
Additional Resources	11



Introduction

The theme for this year's Heart and Soul event on Assembly Sunday is 'Word of Life'. It is a rich and varied theme as each of us can think of several 'words' that mean 'life' to us within the context of our faith. 'Hospitality' is the Word of Life focussed on in this Starter for Sunday. Hospitality is something to be given and received. The gift of hospitality is the inclusion of people around our tables, within our homes, and in our company. Hospitality can be simple or lavish, but at its heart is the reaching out and connecting between humans, and between God and the created order God loves and blesses.

Genesis 18: 1-8

Abraham is already an old man, moving around the Promised Land, and found here at the Oaks of Mamre. He is approached by three individuals. Christians might want to see a prophecy of the Trinity here, but the text does not reflect this and indeed refers to one of them as greater than the other two when Abraham calls him 'lord'. In following verses it becomes clear that this important visitor is God.

In these verses Abraham remains active – he is the focus of action and activity, hurrying in his willingness to serve and to provide hospitality. In Middle Eastern terms the moment of arrival of the guests was hardly convenient – being midday – the time of siesta. In his hospitality, Abraham provides no mere sip of water and a morsel of bread, as he rather deprecatingly describes the purvey. This is a feast. Note also that it is not only Abraham who provides hospitality; Sarah is involved too, as well as an unnamed servant. Hospitality can be a corporate or a solo venture.

Does Abraham recognise he is entertaining angels, or even God, or is he simply demonstrating what would be to this day characteristic Bedouin hospitality, even to the point of remaining standing whilst his guests eat and drink? Set within the context of hospitality versus inhospitality (the story is followed by the destruction of Sodom for violating the norms of hospitality) it is also worth noting that the incident at the oaks of Mamre takes place in daylight, whereas when the three strange visitors go to Sodom, it is in the evening.



The story is also set within the Abraham and Sarah story, where the aged and barren couple, longing for a child, will soon be blessed with the gift of Isaac. The blessing, however, does not come to them because of their hospitality. Rather, their hospitality is seen as normative behaviour. Whether blessed or unblessed, rich or poor, young or old, the opportunity to offer hospitality to strangers is something that is expected and requires no premeditation. We are people to whom generosity has been shown by an open-handed God. That ought to be the example we follow when we are able.

Psalm 84: 1-4

If you go to Jerusalem today, and to the site of the ancient Temple, and stand at the base of the remnant of the Western (or Wailing Wall) and look up you can see vegetation growing out of the Wall. If you wait, you will notice that to this day sparrows still make their homes there, and nest.

Hospitality is at the heart of Christian faith and at the heart of God. We find the root of that reality in this ancient Jewish song. Psalm 84 celebrates the joys given to us in the fundamental belief that God dwells with us. For the ancient Jew it was in the Temple, perhaps symbolised most of all by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. For the Christian, the Christ-Child of Bethlehem, Jesus Immanuel – God with us. The presence of God around the Temple built on the idea of the House of God, where God’s children were made welcome. God, the giver of grace and glory, the giver of all that is good in life, the generous host, welcomes in this Psalm all Creation into God’s home. Sparrows and swallows welcome too.

God’s offer of blessing comes to us when we accept God’s gift of hospitality. This psalm is an invitation to commitment and association. One commentator notes that the psalm sets incomparable value on being present in the place of presence for the shortest time and in the most minimal way. “A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” (v10)

We are left questioning what for us it would be like to dwell close to God. What difference would it make to our lives and the way we lived them? Would we be filled with praise? Are we called to leave the world behind in order that we might be this close to God, finding a true home with God more than anywhere else? The hospitality of God is about welcoming in, but it might also be about sending out. Those who come into God’s presence, even the sparrows and swallows, will also go out



again into the world, fortified, rested, sheltered for a time, then prepared to take the news of that blessing into a wider world that is not yet at home with God. It is in the coming and going around the presence of God that blessing comes. We become part of the welcome, and part of the invitation.

Hebrews 13: 1-2

Tom Long notes that, “It is somehow comforting to know that the book in the New Testament with arguable the most elaborate Christological doctrine brings it immediately home to the dinner table.” Because Jesus is the exemplar of faith and practice, and sits in majesty at the right hand of God, we ought to set the table and prepare for guests. It is no mistake that the ecclesiastical furniture at the heart of faith takes the form of a Font, where we are washed and welcomed into the Church family, and the Table, where we are nourished and saved. Whether it is a communion meal, or any other form of hospitality where Christians get together to share, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that we do this as a token of the mutual love Christians are called to show to friend and stranger alike.

The allusion to entertaining angels unaware possibly refers back to the Abraham and Sarah story from Genesis, but it also has echoes within the teaching and practice of Jesus. “...I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:35-36) Hospitality is inevitably a practice that looks outward and seeks to include. The temptation to look after ourselves and those nearest us is superseded by the example and encouragement of Jesus to look beyond the immediate circle to those who find themselves by design or default on the periphery. Angels may be near at hand, or they may be further off. Our calling is to entertain them when we can, whether we recognise them or not. When we are hospitable towards the least and the lost, we find the presence of God brought near.

The church order *Didascalia*, written probably in the early decades of the 3rd Century AD for a community of Christian converts from paganism in northern Syria gives instruction to bishops about the kind of hospitality they should show if a stranger should arrive unexpectedly:



If a destitute man or woman, either a local person or a traveller, arrives unexpectedly, especially one of older years, and there is no place, you, bishop, make such a place with all your heart, even if you yourself should sit on the ground, that you may not show favouritism among human beings, but that your ministry may be pleasing before God.

Luke 19: 1-10

The story of Zacchaeus is a great favourite reaching back to Sunday School years. If you travel to modern Jericho there is still an ancient sycamore fig tree that is supposed to be connected to the one Zacchaeus climbed into. It is a story that is vivid and full of action. Running and climbing, looking up and hurrying down; grumbling and paying back, seeking and losing. It is a story about observation and invitation. The Zacchaeus story is preceded by Jesus healing a blind man on the road to Jericho (other gospels call him Bartimaeus) and is followed by the parable of the pounds. These are stories about how we see, understand and respond to the reality of Jesus of Nazareth. Rich and corrupt, Zacchaeus is nevertheless given by Jesus spiritual sight, and then goes on to invest his resources in the work of the kingdom by repaying those he had defrauded.

In some ways Jesus, in His interaction with Zacchaeus, seems like a pushy guest. “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” What is to be made of the word Jesus uses, ‘must’? There is urgency in what Jesus says. Zacchaeus was unpopular, as a chief tax collector, he would have been treated with disdain, or worse. He was a collaborator with the Roman authorities; he would have been considerably wealthier than most of the inhabitants of Jericho.

But Jesus insists that He must stay in the home of Zacchaeus and share in hospitality. It may have been Zacchaeus’ home, but Jesus seems more like the host than the guest as he does the inviting. Through the hospitality of grace and mercy, Jesus enables Zacchaeus to become something more than he had been before. By welcoming, including and acknowledging the little man, Jesus releases the bigger, better man that had been limited and restricted not by lack of height, but by lack of heart.

The hospitality of Jesus reaches out to rich and poor, male and female, young and old, weak and strong. It transcends social status, racial boundaries and sexuality. It seeks to include and welcome, to acknowledge and release those gifts of grace which allow us in turn to be hospitable. Jesus’



hospitality calls to the Zacchaeus in each one of us to come down from the tree, for this same Jesus must stay at our house today. In every kind of table fellowship, the ordinary or the sacramental meal, Jesus tells us that He wants our company. Jesus exercises and draws out hospitality.

Time with Children

Imagine with the children some of the best parties or events where hospitality is shared:

Birthdays

Burns Suppers

Weddings

Graduations

Promotion

Retirement

House warming

Christmas

What makes these parties hospitable and fun?

Is it the venue; is it the people attending; is it the event being celebrated; is it the food and drink shared?

Hospitality is about welcoming and sharing. The life of the church is about welcoming and sharing – baptism, communion, every Sunday where friends and strangers gather and become the family of faith.

Prayers

Scripture Sentence

“...I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25: 35-36)



Holy God,
Praising You we gather today
As guests of Your love and welcomed by Your grace.
Our glad hearts warm at Your words of peace,
And we rejoice at being named and called by You
To come up higher,
And to be with You in Your Kingdom of joy.

Merciful God,
In the presence of Your generosity
We lay before You with shame
Our acts of meanness and pettiness,
All those parsimonious and joyless
Times when our eyes were narrowed,
Our fists were clenched,
Our hearts were hardened.

Forgive us when we who are nothing
Without Your lavish mercy,
Have withheld even the little we have
When we ought to have shared
Without counting the cost.

Forgive us, Lord,
Call us out of our embarrassment and confusion,
That, finding ourselves restored to fellowship
With You and with those around us,
We might resolve once more to
Live openly and generously,
Reaching out with kindness,
And following the example of our Saviour,
Even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Generous Jesus,

For calling us down to be with You, we give our thanks.

For insisting You must dine with us, we give our thanks.

For spreading a table before us, we give our thanks.

Today we bless You for the tables which have blessed us:

Tables where we have eaten and drank with family and friends;

Tables where we have feasted on high and holy days;

Tables where we have shared what little we had;

Tables where we ate the bread and drank the wine,

And gave thanks for Your loving sacrifice for all.

Hear our prayers today for those who have no place at the table.

For those who will go hungry or thirsty.

For those who will remain excluded and unwelcome.

For those kept away for fear of abuse, or oppression, or shame.

Your table is broad and long, Lord.

May we, at our own tables, create where we can the

Breadth and length of Your welcome,

That our hospitality may not be inward but outward looking.

God save our Queen, and bless those women and men

Called to serve the people of our land.

May their decisions and policies

Aspire to a nation of generous and kindly welcome,

Where love is not limited and hope not hemmed in.

We pray for the Church in the world today,

And especially for our Church of Scotland,

Now met in General Assembly.

Bless the Her Grace, the Queen's High Commissioner,

And all Commissioners gathered to think,



To talk, to pray, to decide.

Bless the Conveners of Councils and Committees and Boards,

As they present their reports,

And seek to shape the future of our Church and her people.

Bless the Moderator, and all whose work is to

guide and enable the daily business of the Assembly.

Loving Lord,

May the many words of life that shape our faith

Be more than pious syllables in our mouths,

But deeds and actions and commitment

In our daily living,

Bringing faith to life,

And hope to reality,

And love to action.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

The greatest Word of Life.

Amen

Musical suggestions

CH4 10	The stars declare His glory
CH4 14	The Lord's my Shepherd
CH4 27	I will always bless the Lord
CH4 28	Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens
CH4 52	How lovely is Thy dwelling place
CH4 68	O thou my soul, bless God the Lord
CH4 93	Let us with a gladsome mind
CH4 171	Take up the song, and sing the praise of God
CH4 174	God of great and God of small
CH4 184	Sing to the Lord a joyful song



CH4 187	There's a wideness in God's mercy
CH4 198	Let us build a house
CH4 200	Christ is made the sure foundation
CH4 246	Great God of every shining constellation
CH4 268	O God of Bethel
CH4 340	When Jesus saw the fishermen
CH4 352	O for a thousand tongues to sing
CH4 357	This is my will, my new command
CH4 445	Alleluia, sing to Jesus!
CH4 461	How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
CH4 462	The King of Love my Shepherd is
CH4 478	Behold the amazing gift of love
CH4 484	Great God, Your love has called us here
CH4 490	Jesus, lover of my soul
CH4 501	Take this moment, sign, and space
CH4 504	Two little fishes, five loaves of bread
CH4 510	Jesus calls us here to meet Him
CH4 522	The Church is wherever God's people are praising
CH4 528	Make me a channel of Your peace
CH4 537	We do not hope to ease our minds
CH4 543	Longing for light, we wait in darkness
CH4 544	When I needed a neighbour



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers.

Word of Life is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

Quick Guide...

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](#)



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Dr Derek Browning for providing us with this 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.

