



Sixth Sunday of Easter

21 May 2017

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Suzanne Fletcher, minister of Dunglass Parish Church, for her thoughts on the sixth Sunday of Easter. This material has been taken from the Mission and Discipleship Council archives.

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Acts 17: 22-31

Paul visits Athens and takes the time to learn and understand its cultural assumptions and icons. When he speaks publicly in the Areopagus, the centre of philosophy and courts, he uses the language of the audience there to show how these icons point to God's kingdom already at work and Jesus Christ as King and risen Lord.

Paul's sermon to the Athenians illustrates the importance of putting the gospel into the language of your audience. This sermon is like no other in Acts, because Athens is a cultural context like no other in Acts, because of its intellectual population. Watching Paul at work here, we learn something about Christian preaching and Christian faith.

This passage commends preaching that seeks to establish a foundation of common ground with an audience. The uniqueness of the Athenian sermon within the book of Acts allows it to emphasise this point: you don't need always need to "fit the whole of Scripture into one sermon" or recite the history of Israel in order to explain the gospel. Sometimes poetry, natural theology, and human experience provide an excellent starting point for meeting people where they are as human beings, and putting the gospel narrative into language they can understand.

Psalms 66: 8-20

Despite persecution and difficulty, the people of God continue to offer themselves with thankful sacrifice, wherever they are. The reader/listener is invited to praise God with the people of Israel, during the exodus and during the exile of second Isaiah, and to recognise how both call out to us to relive these experiences, as we bring our prayers of thanksgiving before God in the context of our own life circumstances.

1 Peter 3: 13-22

Christ suffered and died for all people in all times and everywhere. So wherever we are, we are to be ready to give an account for the hope that is us. It may also be helpful to remind people, however, that we should remember that suffering is inevitable, even for Jesus, and yet we should not do things which invite suffering upon us, for we have through baptism be cleansed and renewed by Christ, and should seek to serve him only.



John 14: 15-21

Jesus says he will give the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with and in his disciples forever, wherever they go, always, everywhere. This promise is a gift, not something the disciples have somehow earned, but a gift which calls us to keep his commands by loving one another.

Sermon ideas

Whether from a personal (the spirit of love that lives in us that we are called to share) or a communal (expressing love and support for others in tangible ways), the message here is one of God's love through Christ and in the presence of the Holy Spirit for all and our call to be grateful for such love, without being selfish with it, as we seek to reach out in love to a world - which is suffering in so many ways from a lack of love or a love of the wrong things. How then can we manifest such love in our daily lives as we go about our family, working and community lives?

As I suggested earlier, the metaphor of family may be helpful in doing this.

Illustrations could include asking questions/making suggestions of how worshippers demonstrate their Christian faith in public life. Do they work in the soup kitchen? Do they turn the other cheek? Do they share the story of Noah with wee ones or talk about real meaning of Easter or Christmas or the Sermon on the Mount with friends/colleagues from time to time?

The following liturgy (Call to Worship, Prayers, Statement of Faith, Sending and some of the hymns are all taken from the [Spill the Beans](#) resource, a rich set of worship and all age material produced by a group of Scottish ministers, which I have found hugely helpful in planning for worship. It is copied here with permission and I encourage you to look it up on the web for future use alongside Starters for Sunday).



Prayers

Collect

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass all understanding.
Pour into our hearts such love toward you,
that we, loving you above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Call to Worship

Leader: "If you love me" Jesus says.

All: **We show that we do by loving.**

Leader: "If you love me" Jesus says.

All: **We show that we do
by sharing.**

Leader: "If you love me" Jesus says.

All: **We show that we do
by serving.**

Leader: "If you love me" Jesus says.

All: **We show that we do
by worshipping.**

Leader: So let us worship God.



Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God our parent,
Mother and Father of all,
through Jesus
we have become your children,
no longer alone, unwanted or unloved.

We are humbled by your adoption of us;
we are delighted to belong,
to be part of your wider
world church family.

Help us as we settle into our roles within this family;
may we be tolerant of each other, mindful of our differences,
willing to give and take to keep the peace.

We are sorry for those times when we are selfish and unkind,
for those times when
we are rude and thoughtless,
for those times when
we cause disunity and strife within our families.

Forgive us, O God,
remind us that
we are united by your son, Jesus, that we all belong in your family,
and that it is up to each of us
to play our part to maintain unity.

Help us to learn to live together in harmony and unity.

Help us to look to our advocate
to guide and support us in our daily living.



As you, our parent,
redeemer and guide are one,
may we be one with all our family and with you also,
now and always. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Parent God,
giver of all that we have
accept all that we offer here today.

Take these gifts of money and use them
to provide opportunities for us to take your invitation
to all people to come and join in your worldwide family. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

Parent God, redeemer and sustainer;
three in one and one in three,
you invite us to be part of
a wider family community,
a family that is diverse
and spread around the world.

Hear us now as we bring before you our brothers and sisters,
known and unknown to us
who are in need
of your help this day.

We pray for children and adults
who have faced the death of a parent or parents.

We would ask that you
would draw them near to you that you would comfort them



and let them know that they are not alone.

We pray for children and adults who live in abusive families,
who long to be free of them but are afraid to be alone.

We would ask that you would protect them
and find a way to remove them from a place of harm.

We pray for children and adults who have never known
what a family is,
who were or are in care homes never knowing the
joy and commitment of a family.

We would ask that
at some time in their lives they would experience
the joy of a family relationship.

We pray for children and adults who were once your children
but who have strayed from the path and
who now fear there is no option to return.

We would ask that
they have an opportunity
to know that they would be welcomed with open arms.

We pray for children and adults who have not yet come
to know your parenthood.

We would ask that we would be able to invite them
to come and see for themselves the joy of a church family
where they are made welcome and accepted as they are.

O God, Father and Mother of us all, help us to share your invitation
to join your family with others. Give us courage



to take your invite to all people whoever they are
and whatever they may already believe.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Statement of Faith

This is a statement of faith in the unknown.

*There is an awful lot of unknown in God and the consequences of believing in love
are still as yet unknown because we don't trust it fully yet,
though we are called to trust it into the unknown.*

I believe in love:

a love that embodies God;
a love yet unknown in its power to transform
that which is dark into that which is light,
all that hurts into what heals,
a cross into a means of resurrection.

I believe in love,

a love yet unknown in its power to transform
though to be trusted into that unknown.

I believe in grace:

a grace that celebrates God;
a grace yet unknown
in its power to hang on,
to embrace that which needs
to be redeemed,
waiting all eternity
for the time of redemption
when all people are gathered
into the love of God.



I believe in grace,
a grace yet unknown in its power to hang on
though to be trusted into that unknown.

I believe in life:
a life that glorifies God;
a life yet unknown in its fullness,
a fullness of life that shapes our humanity
beyond our prejudices today,
that brings us nearer
to being the community
God calls us to be.

I believe in life,
a life yet unknown in its fullness
though to be trusted into that unknown.

I believe in God:
a god as yet unknown who has been calling us
from the ancient time of creation
into relationship
with each other and with God.

Unknown as yet,
because with God nothing is ever finished.

I believe in God,
who is not yet fully known
though to be trusted into that unknown.



Sending

Go out into the world,
 the community you know,
 your workplaces and your homes with hearts open and
 ready to love those you meet.

your notes

Go and reflect the welcome of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 whose heart closes no-one out
 but whose love is for all, always.

Musical suggestions

CH4 181	For the beauty of the earth
Mission Praise 1	A new commandment
CH4 427	Alleluia! Alleluia!
CH4 694	Brother, Sister, let me serve you
from CD <i>Build Up</i> by Fischy Music	Build Up
CH4 510	Jesus calls us here to meet him
CH4 714	Gather us in
CH4 594	Come Holy Spirit Come
CH4 595	O Breath of life
CH4 596	Breathe on me, breath of God
CH4 512	To God be the glory
CH4 710	I have a dream
CH4 634	Word of the Father
CH4 263	God of freedom



CH4 354	O love how deep how high
CH4 638	Lord we have come at your invitation
CH4 198	Let us build a house
CH4 792	Our God is a God who makes friends
CH4 444	Out of sight, the Lord has gone
CH4 641	Seek ye first
Mission Praise 664	The Spirit lives to set us free
CH4 224	The Spring has come
CH4 715	Behold the mountain of the Lord
CH4 726	When we are living



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 Rev Suzie Fletcher 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.

