

starters for Sunday

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

21 September 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Scott McCarthy, Minister of Langholm Eskdalemuir Ewes and Westerkirk, for his thoughts on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Contents

Exodus 16: 2-15	2
Psalms 105: 1-6, 37-45.....	3
Philippians 1: 21-30.....	3
Matthew 20: 1-16	3
Prayers.....	4
Time with Children.....	8
Musical Suggestions	8
Additional Resources.....	9



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 16: 2-15](#)

In his excellent wee book 'Sermon Sparks', Thomas Troeger suggests a number of tools to help us provide our listeners with a context for the passage or a broader theological perspective. Amongst the way we can use the passage more creatively is to take a word from the text and undertake a word study. The obvious word here is manna, the food that God gives the Israelites.

The Bible tells us it fell in the night to sustain them in the wilderness. God sent it for 40 years until they celebrated the Passover at Gilgal in the Promised Land (Ex. 16.35, Jos. 5.12).

Try as we might (and several have), we cannot explain it away as naturally appearing food. It was a miracle, not least because double provisions were available on the day before the Sabbath. Then there would be none at all on the Sabbath, in order to save the people from collecting it. Its miraculous nature is further confirmed by the fact that they kept samples of it for future generations (Ex. 16.31).

Note that the manna is sent despite the people 'murmuring' against Aaron and Moses, and therefore against God. Are there murmurers in your congregation? Yet God does not treat them as the world might. He is gracious in a way that surprises us. We will see this graciousness again in the Gospel reading.

Importantly for preaching purposes, manna is used symbolically to represent God's care (Neh. 9.20, Rev. 2.17). Jesus uses the image to describe himself (John 6. 31, 32 and 51).



[Psalm 105: 1-6, 37-45](#)

This psalm tells a story, beginning with Abraham, through Israel's experience in Egypt, to the settlement in Canaan.

It opens with a call to worship repeated over and over again. The psalmist is fulsome in his joyful thanksgiving for all that God has done. He makes specific reference to miracles, of which manna was one. Unlike the Exodus passage, we hear nothing of the people's sinful ingratitude. That is the theme of Psalm 106.

Verses 37-42 cover the period of the Exodus from Egypt and the journey through the wilderness. The people who had been forced to go down to Egypt broken by famine (v.16) now leave it carrying all the riches they could want. Verses 39-41 show God's guiding and protecting presence and provision of much-needed food and water in the wilderness, including the bread of heaven. What are God's gifts to your congregation?

[Philippians 1: 21-30](#)

Psalm 105 is a song of thanksgiving; Philippians is a thank-you letter. The Philippians, hearing of Paul's imprisonment, had sent him a gift. Paul is writing to thank him, but being Paul, he takes the opportunity to encourage them and warn them about the possible pitfalls. Paul's theme is that we are moving towards heaven, so we have to keep going.

Therefore in the three passages we see grace in the present, past and future respectively. A sermon might use instances of grace in the present, past and future of your congregation.

Alternatively, you could develop the theme of what Paul describes as the privilege of belief. If God is omnipotent, why isn't everyone made a believer?

[Matthew 20: 1-16](#)

The parables of Jesus are sometimes understood as devices used by Jesus to explain something by reference to events which might occur in normal daily lives of his listeners. This isn't so. No-one would expect the employer to pay his workers the same wage, given the difference in the hours each one worked. Although the situation in this parable would be a very familiar one to his audience, the outcome is not.



Equality is not always fair but the employer ensures that every worker receives a denarius, the usual day's wage. He rewards them according to their need. It is the basis of the community in Acts 4.32-35. It is interesting also, to consider a possible echo in 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' by Karl Marx: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!'

Jesus is warning the disciples that they must not claim a special honour because they were the first Christians. It is a warning to members of the church today too. Some people who have been members of the church for a long time think and act as if it belonged to them. Many years ago an elder told me: 'Elders are the pillars o' the kirk. They hud things up an' block the view!' That's not true of all of us of course, but the warning is still as valid for us as the disciples.

The parable tells us that we can expect the comforting love of God, no matter how late we seek it. God's compassion and generosity are infinite.

It seems that there was very little time between the ripening of the grape harvest in Palestine and the coming of the rains. It could be a mad dash to gather in the grapes and any worker was welcome, no matter how little time he offered. So it is with those who work for the coming of the Kingdom.

Prayers

Collect

Generous God,
 whose gift defies the balance sheet
 of ownership and just reward:
 free our hearts and minds
 from the envy which enslaves us;
 shape our lives to show
 your self-forgetting love;
 through Jesus Christ, the free gift of grace.
 Amen.

(from Prayers for an Inclusive Church by Steven Shakespeare)



Adoration

(If you are seeking inspiration try Psalm 8 or John Keats' poem To Autumn)

Creator God,
 as the summer sun fades
 with our memories of summer berries,
 we praise you for autumn hues amongst our trees
 boughs bending in deference
 with the ripe fruitfulness of the apple
 and the late flowers blossoming for the bees.
 The shape and form of your blessings change
 but your steadfast love and limitless grace persist
 manifest in your justice for all
 Amen.

Confession

(If you're struggling, Psalm 51 is a good place to start)

Specifying our sins in a prayer of confession is important. However, in public prayer, this is difficult, if not impossible, to do as a congregation.

When you confess, you firstly take ownership of and responsibility for the sin. Secondly you recognise the impact it has on God and other people. Then you ask for forgiveness and express your intention to avoid making the same mistake again.

Pray for a sensitivity to sin, for an openness to recognise our mistakes. Encourage prioritisation. Tackling all our sins at once isn't asking too much of God but too much of ourselves. What is burdening the praying person most?

Invite the congregation to reflect on how they have sinned against God and each other, encouraging them to name those sins silently. A prolonged period of silence is recommended.

Reassure them that God only wants the best for us and confession is an opportunity to transform our lives by unburdening ourselves onto God.



Thanksgiving and Intercession

Members of your congregation will have many different things to be grateful for, both in their own lives and in the world around them. It is important to leave space, in the form of silence, so that they can give thanks to God for them. It may be helpful to suggest the type of thing they might want to include: their community, family, health care, education are only a few examples. Good thanksgivers will be more imaginative than I am!

The 4th Duke of Cambridge is reported to have responded to a public prayer for rain by saying it was no good because the wind was in the east (John Pritchard, *The Intercessions Handbook*). It's easy to fall into the trap that God doesn't do anything unexpected. But the parable of the labourer in the vineyard reminds us that God's love and justice is surprising, generous and unworldly. Jesus tells us, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.' (John 14.27)

If it helps, use this type of framework. Change the order if you wish.

- Generous God, we thank you for all our blessings... here we praise God for all that he has done remembering what we said about Adoration and Thanksgiving (above). Silence may be used to allow people to reflect on their own blessing

We pray for the life of the Church especially...

- your own congregation
- church organisations and affiliated bodies
- the witness of the congregation in the community

We pray for our community, especially.....

- people who are lonely
- the unemployed
- the elderly
- the NHS who care for them, mentioning local hospitals and care homes
- voluntary organisations working for the good of the community, particularly that they might have willing volunteers and boundless energy
- for all members of the community, that they might be aware of the needs of those around them – and respond



We pray for those in particular need, especially...

- for patience for those in hospital or awaiting treatment
- wisdom for those with important decisions to make
- those known to us with their own challenges to face (whom we name in silence now)
- the families and friends of... (who has recently died), that they may be comforted by memories of the one they have lost and reassured by the knowledge that they are safe with you

We pray for the needs of the world, remembering....

- places in the news, particularly those that have dropped out of the headlines
- countries in long-term need, for good government and international help
- the United Nations, Red Cross and all aid agencies
- courage and patience for the peacemakers and peacekeepers



Time with Children



You might find the [Reader's Reactions](#) review of Bob Hartman's '[Bible stories through the year: lectionary readings for year A, retold for maximum effect](#)' useful for your Time with Children.

I can think of no better way of teaching the parable than to ask the young folk , at various intervals, to help with a task. Once the task is over, reward them all equally and invite them all to share and discuss their reactions.

Musical Suggestions

CH4 555	Amazing grace
CH4 643	For me to live is Christ
CH4 646	Forth in the peace of Christ we go
CH4 529	Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go
CH4 374	From heaven you came, helpless babe
CH4 153	Great is thy faithfulness
CH4 167	Guide me, O thou great Jehovah
CH4 560	Jesu, the very thought of thee
CH4 159	Lord, for the years
CH4 378	Praise to the holiest in the height
CH4 502	Take my life, and let it be
CH4 129	The Lord is king! Lift up thy voice

A metrical version of the psalm can be found in Sing Psalms, published by the Free Church of Scotland.



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.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Scott McCarthy 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.

