

starters for Sunday

Fourth Sunday of Easter

26 April 2015

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev MaryAnn Rennie, Minister of Dunfermline Abbey, for her thoughts on the fourth Sunday of Easter.

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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](#)

[Acts 4: 5-12](#)

Joining a longer story part way through, we miss out why Peter and John find themselves before the Sanhedrin. They had been arrested for healing a crippled beggar and then speaking to those who were watching about how such a miracle had taken place.

Our reading offers an opportunity for us to meet again Annas and Caiaphas, who question Peter and John about how they were able to perform such a miracle. We encounter the ancient Near Eastern belief that names held a power.

There are two particular thoughts in this reading that are worth pursuing. First is the inherent power of names, and the belief that a name was embodied with the character of a person or a god. Throughout the Old Testament God is elusive in the delivery of His name, instead the understanding for those who seek to know God revolves around the verb “to be”. In the story of the Gospel, the unthinkable happens (a heresy to the Jews) and God reveals his name in Christ, offering direct access to the divine. So in this meeting of Peter and John with the Sanhedrin, Peter names the character of God in the power of Jesus Christ. When miracles are performed in the name of Jesus Christ, they are performed in God’s name.

The second thought lies in verse 8 “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said to them”. This is the first time that Peter is described as being filled with the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2 of Acts it is the whole room that is filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In the weeks before Pentecost there is an opportunity to begin to explore the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people of God.



[Psalm 23](#)

It's an extremely familiar psalm, and perhaps difficult to find something new to say about it. Tied with the Gospel reading it gives rise to the familiar title of this Sunday as "Good Shepherd Sunday". Reflecting on the words it is a psalm of contentment and trust in God, and even when there is a suggestion of the threatening world around the presence of God in life challenges the threat.

In the familiar language, it is worth remembering that in the ancient Near East "shepherd" was a widely used metaphor for kings. It's a metaphor that asks what it meant to be a shepherd in ancient times, so as well as a guide to the flock, it is someone who keeps the flock together; challenges the surrounding dangers; puts their own life on the line, because to lose even one sheep is costly. They are the provider of the sustenance that keeps the flock in tip-top condition.

However as well as the comfort of the presence of God in life, the psalm also explores what it means to trust God with our lives. This is not a romantic psalm though, instead the background suggests that danger is looming and hope is found in God.

A book I have in the past found helpful to explore is "The Lord's my Shepherd" by J Douglas Macmillan.

Alternative Readings:

[Zechariah 10](#)

In another text loaded with shepherding metaphor, the prophet speaks of the difference between the Lord as Shepherd and other leaders who have been "shepherds" of Judah. The first two verses speak of the effect of no shepherd and the need for humanity to have someone who offers guidance. Verses 3-5 speak of alien shepherds, the other rulers who have played their part in the history of Judah. Those who have not exercised good care of the flock.

The rest of the chapter speaks of how God as the Shepherd will care for his people. That he will bring them strength, return them to their homes and offer them guidance so that they no longer wander aimlessly through life.



[Psalm 80: 1-7](#)

These verses of the Psalm take the form of two short prayers separated by a response. The first prayer, verses 1-2, tell of the leadership of God who steps out ahead of his flock to see what dangers lie ahead. They call on the presence of God in the activity that lies ahead.

Verse 3 and verse 7 offer a response and give an indication that the psalm may well have been used in public worship.

Verses 4-6 ask God to set aside his anger, and remain the shepherd of their lives, continuing to care for them in every situation.

[1 John 3: 16-24](#)

When thinking about how to use this text within preaching it is probably worth being honest and admitting that it was an address made to a community that had experienced division. Lose the rose-tinted spectacles of an early church clear in its mission and focussed in its action, and instead recognise that the church has always been full of flawed human beings. So much so that perhaps while this text is inspired by God, the original author was flawed.

The text itself is exclusively written for the Johannine community. It is meant for the one group of people who had experienced controversy and seen a section of their group leave. It aims to remind those who are left behind how they should live as a community. It's about relationships within the group, and not those beyond the group.

However, while we acknowledge that, there is an opportunity to use this text to think about love within and without the Christian community. How do we relate to each other, and to those beyond are normal experiences?

At the heart of the message is that true Christian love is active. Modelled on Jesus Christ, it is unselfish and to be offered to others. Christian love is about more than saying the right thing, instead it invites the believer to put others first.



[John 10: 11-18](#)

Like the reading from the Book of Acts this text is part of a much longer reading, and again similarly Jesus finds himself surrounded by others following his healing of a blind man and investigated by Pharisees. This reading comes after the Pharisees have questioned the healed man, his parents and then finally come to Jesus, who has suggested that it is they who are blind to the presence of God in their midst.

Using the familiar image of shepherd, Jesus describes what a good shepherd does to look after his flock. This is a role that requires strength and courage, patience and self-sacrifice. We need to put aside the beautiful pastoral imagery of stained glass windows, and grasp the rugged treacherous nature of shepherding. As the owner of the sheep, the flock has a value that the shepherd is willing to protect.

Jesus compares the role of the shepherd to that of a hired hand who would be interested in the wages and not the flock. There may be a dig at religious leaders within that comparison.

A little is revealed about the flock. We discover that some are already within the fold, but there are others to be brought into the pen. A continuing suggestion that the knowledge love of God is for more than the Jews but for a worldly audience, but it also offers an opportunity to explore the diversity of the flock. A recognition that in the metaphor of the sheep, humanity is not seen as uniform. Instead the unity of the flock is found in the Shepherd.

Sermon Ideas

There is the potential for a variety of different sermons arising from the readings for today, and no harm in following the traditional route for Good Shepherd Sunday, using Psalm 23 and John 10: 11-18, and look at the role of the Shepherd. The Psalm talks about God, while the Gospel allows us to place Christ into that role. In the weeks following Easter, there is an opportunity to be inspired by the potential dangers of faithful leadership.

I quite like the idea of flipping this theme a little and moving from the leadership of Christ to what kind of sheep we are invited to be. There is no indication of uniformity, and instead the unity of those who follow is to be found in placing our trust in Christ, as our Lord and Saviour.



Focussing on Acts: 5 – 12, it is possible to explore the ancient understanding of the power of names. The idea that knowing and using a name allowed the inherent character of a person or divinity, to be transferred to another and the skills and talents used by another. In some ways our faith still holds a little of that ancient belief for in prayer (and maybe even in our service) we act in the “name of Jesus Christ” and allow His presence to transform all that we have asked (or do). However there is the potential to stretch this out to look at how naming our fears and our hopes (in the presence of God) allows us to take control and perhaps resolve a situation or move to a new way of being. Many of the anxieties we have or our inability to make decisions is because we have not set the markers for how transformation can happen. So in the presence of God should we name these, and allow ourselves to see the markers through which God seeks to lead us.

Prayers

Call to Worship

Awaken from Your slumber,
and bring Your fears and anxieties
into the presence of the Lord our God.
Hear the call of our Shepherd,
and allow His voice
to lead from selfish ambition
to the feast of grace.
May the light of Christ
shine into the hidden darkness of our lives
and restore us
for the service of the Lord.

Come let us worship God.



Collect

Shepherd of the lost and the lowly,
of the weak and worn out,
who sets a feast to satisfy the need of heart, soul and imagination;
may Your desire to feed all people
bring new expressions of the fullness of Your love
as those of faith reach out with justice, mercy and grace;
through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with You,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God forever.
Amen

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Great Shepherd,
who sets off ahead on every journey,
You are ever watchful of the road and passage,
ensuring that no danger may overwhelm
those within Your care.
With heavenly host surrounding,
You have sight of all creation
and yet You have chosen
to set Your feet
in earthly ground
and bring the promise of Your care and attention
to the detail of all human life.
With Your light
You restore humanity,
bringing grace and mercy
in to the dark recesses and corners



of imagination and ambition,
offering the possibility
of heaven's presence in our midst.

Restore us, O God,
for we know that we have failed
to live as those
who know the light of heaven in our lives.

Restore us, O God,
for ignoring Your anger at worldly injustice
and allowing the hungry to go unfed,
the naked to be unclothed,
the rejected to be ignored.

Restore us, O God,
when from the depths of our own anger
we have spoken of our hurt
in harsh and cruel tones.

In the saving light of Your presence,
Lord God Almighty,
You set our roots,
that we may grow in the depths of Your love,
assured of Your forgiveness
offered in the life of Christ.

Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of love,
You have met our every need,
filling hearts with praise,
souls with hope,
and hands with justice.



In every gift around Your presence pours forth,
and so with gratitude
we bring from our lives,
the offering of time, talent and possession
that each of these may be used
in service of You,
bringing Your restoring light to all.
Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of many names,
we praise You
for the many ways in which You reveal Your presence
in human life,
for you are active
in the continuing cycle of creation.
As day passes
we are caught with wonder and surprise
at all You have made
and continue to bring to life,
for even in the deepest moments
of regret or fear,
You call with words of courage
to step out into the unknown future You prepare.
So we thank You for Your constancy
and for the trust You place in us.

Jehovah Rohi,
Great Shepherd God,
the leadership You have shown
calls for self-sacrifice and a willingness to respond to the needs of others.



We pray for those who are in positions of power
and of leadership;
for governments and politicians;
for heads of state;
for the chiefs of industry and commerce.
May You challenge the need for profit and gain,
and instead inspire thoughts of a fairer world.

Jehovah Jireh,
God who provides for every need,
Your table overflows with all the sustenance creation needs.
In a world where greed ensures that some have more than others,
teach us to share.
May the warmth of our homes
make us uncomfortable
and lead us to ensure that others have a roof over their heads
and a place to sleep.
May the sounds of children's voices
disturb us
so that every child is loved,
and has the opportunity to learn,
to be loved,
to grow to all You have hoped for them.

Jehovah Rophe,
healing presence of God,
You are the warmth
that brings comfort to those who hurt,
and the kindness
that wipes the tears of the lonely.
We remember those who are hurting,



and those who are need of healing.
May those who are bereaved
be reminded of Your continuing love.

Eternal God,
the One who is always there,
Your presence is revealed in the lives of those who have touched our lives
and in the activity of Your Spirit,
help us to follow You
and encourage us to embrace
the way of service You invite us to walk,
in Christ's name.
Amen.

Time with Children

Is there such a thing as an original idea for talking to children and young people? So my apologies to whomever I may have borrowed from.

“His Master’s Voice” – Using the HMV picture of the dog listening to the gramophone, there is lots you can ask the children about in the picture. In a world of iPod and MP3 players, it now seems an alien picture. You will find lots about the picture on search engines, but the picture depicts a dog called Nipper whose owner had died. The owner was the brother of the artist Francis Barraud, who noticed that Nipper took an interest whenever he heard his owner’s voice on the phonograph. The Gramophone Company bought the image and had Barraud modify it to show one of their disc machines, and the image then went on to be used in advertising. The story could lead to a conversation about the voices we listen to: our teachers, our parents, our friends, God. Voices that offer help and encouragement.

Or could you have a shepherd or an animal “keeper” of some kind come and talk about how they look after their animals? How do those owners or keepers, feel the animals respond to them. A ministerial bee- keeper once spoke to one of the congregations I have served in the past, and offered insight into the control of bees which requires smoke. Perhaps there is an



opportunity to begin a community project if you had space in church grounds with a hive. This would require research as while there is a need for bees for pollination, such a project would have to be sustainable beyond one Sunday.

Musical Suggestions

CH4 14 – 17	The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want
CH4 115	Love is the touch if intangible joy
CH4 132	Immortal, invisible, God only wise
CH4 133	Source and Sovereign
CH4 263	God of freedom, God of justice
CH4 363	We have a gospel to proclaim
CH4 461	How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
CH4 462	The King of love my shepherd is
CH4 521	Children of God, reach out to one another!
CH4 710	I have a dream, a man once said

For children

Junior Praise 404	Jehovah Jireh
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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 MaryAnn Rennie 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.

