

# starters for Sunday

## *Third Sunday after Epiphany*

**26 January 2014**

The Mission and Discipleship Council offer their thoughts on the third Sunday after Epiphany.

This week's material, from our archives, was prepared by the Rev Dr Ian McLean, Minister at Montrose: Old and St Andrew's.

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### [Isaiah 9: 1 – 4](#)

Many people will be familiar with verses 2, 6 and 7, read in most churches during advent and in the majority of people's minds linked to the coming of the Christ child. There is a tendency to gloss over the darkness and the troubles and jump too quickly to the joy and relief of restoration and salvation. These early verses (1 – 4), take seriously the painful realities associated with invasion and occupation before touching on the welcome promise of God's justice which would lead to punishment for the oppressors and bring joy to the oppressed. In the Hebrew Bible verse 1 comes as the final verse of the previous chapter though Matthew 4 (see below) makes it the opening of this passage. Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to fall to Assyria – they would be the first to benefit from the restoration. There is a clear contrast between the gloom and anguish of oppression and the more positive prophetic message of a secure future when God's reign is renewed. Such is the prophet's confidence in God that he is able to speak of the future re-establishment of God's reign as if it had already come about. In anticipating this joyful state of affairs the prophet encourages us to delight in the saving work of God and to offer God the praise that he richly deserves.

### [Psalm 27: 1, 4 – 9](#)

The psalmist expresses great delight in the Lord as “my light and my salvation.” The declaration that “I will fear no one” and “will never be afraid” might be seen as boasting but it is important to recognise that this confidence, while being prompted by faith, is actually based upon the Lord. Any confidence the psalmist has, rests not on personal worth, but on the faithfulness of God. The passage indicates that he is not unaccustomed to troubles - enemies are all around. The Lord's protection does not grant exemption from the slings and arrows that inevitably come the way of us all. However, these buffetings will never shake his faith that God is with us always and that we are secure in the Lord. The “one thing” that he desires above all else is to live in the house of the Lord for ever. The ultimate aim, the goal to which the psalmist aspires, and which keeps him faithful through the troubles of life, is to worship God or in the words of the catechism – to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. The psalmist looks to the Lord to keep him through trouble and to vindicate him and punish those who oppress him – and that simply adds to the incentive he has to worship God and to rejoice in his marvellous deeds.



## [1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 18](#)

Paul touches on the thorny issue of dissention among God’s people. He appeals to the Corinthian Christians to agree and to have the “same mind and the same judgment.” – in essence, to be united. Various factions had grown up, each associated with the names of key figures Paul, Apollos, Cephas, even Christ. They had different emphases and were causing confusion and undermining the unity of the body of Christ and harming its witness. What matters is not who baptises, who is instrumental in introducing us to Christ but the integrity of the gospel. Paul sees his prime role as being to preach the gospel – he did baptise a few people but never with a view to establishing a personal following, far less a clique. The word of the cross might be folly to some but “to those who are being saved it is the power of God.” He points to the cross as that which binds them together. His appeal “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” for them to do away with their dissentions and to be united indicates the seriousness with which he takes the issue of division.

## [Matthew 4: 12 – 23](#)

Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, living in Capernaum “in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.” The passage points to Isaiah 9 and sees Jesus’ ministry as a fulfilment of the Isaiah prophecy. Jesus’ central message was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” His challenge was for people to turn away from sin, turn towards God who was in their midst working to re-establish his reign and to live in the light of the proximity of God’s reign. The invitation was to associate with him and share together in extending his reign. The call to participate in God’s mission is earthed for us in the call to the fishermen – Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John and we are given the example of their readiness to leave everything to follow him.



## Themes for preaching

Several themes come to mind from the passages:

- Darkness and light
- The “one thing” – for the Psalmist, for Paul, for us
- God’s faithfulness in good times and bad
- Jesus’ call to the disciples and to us
- Looking forward to coming of the kingdom but being prepared to share in the pain of its birth.

For me, these stand out:

(A truth that we try to duck) - life, including the Christian life, involves pain and suffering, there is no avoiding the cost of discipleship, though God is absolutely committed to being with us through our troubles. There is certainly cause for joy and celebration though it may well come after times of desperate trouble.

Another uncomfortable thought – perhaps we assume too readily that right is on our side – that we are the oppressed and our opponents are the oppressors but being fallen we have to be open to the possibility (probability?) that sometimes the opposite is true. We also need to repent – thankfully, the offer of forgiveness is for us too.



## Prayers

### Call to Prayer

The Lord is my light and my salvation; I will fear no one.  
The Lord protects me from all danger; I will never be afraid.

[Psalm 27: 1](#)

### Collect

Almighty God,  
by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service.  
Strengthen us by your Spirit and make us worthy of your call;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Who lives and reigns  
With you and the Holy Spirit  
One God, now and for ever.

### Prayer of Adoration

Lord God Almighty, from the beginning of time you have demonstrated your readiness to bring light into our darkness and salvation in place of our gloom and anxiety.

We acknowledge you to be our light, our salvation, the one to whom we owe everything.

Lord of the nations, we worship you as supreme over the rulers of this age - heads of state, of governments, councils, parliaments, of big business, of sport and the media and all who appear to hold sway over us.

We worship and adore you, holy and gracious God, whose majesty and dominion exceed by far all the powers that be.

We have known you to be faithful in our troubles and you have sustained us in our distress.

We praise you for your faithfulness and love shown exquisitely in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus your Son whom you have given to be the light of the world, the means of our salvation.

Gracious heavenly Father, we confess that we are not worthy of your favour.



Even when we have attempted to do the right thing our motives have been at times false and insincere, and all too often we have sought to advance our own cause rather than seek your glory.

Forgive us, we pray, for the sake of your dear Son and dispel all that is dark in our lives and in our world with the light of the gospel.

Send your Holy Spirit upon us that we may be able to rejoice in your presence and be equipped to share with you and with one another in proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Jesus in word and action to the praise of your glory.

Like the psalmist, may our delight be to live in your presence for ever and to marvel at your goodness.

Our prayers we offer in Jesus name and further pray in his words saying: Our Father...

Amen.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Heavenly Father, we are not altogether convinced that darkness is a thing of the past. Many people in this world of ours feel their world is one of darkness and gloom. Pressures crowd in upon us and get us down.

The causes are varied – bereavement, illness, money, worries about family, trouble at work or not having work, drugs, drink, boredom, doubt, weariness, futility.

Then there are the world issues – war, poverty, climate change, disease, unfair trade and so on.

It does not help when we feel that as Christians we should be doing so much better than we are.

Gracious and loving God, we rejoice that you are with us in our troubles, you know us and you love us – always.

Even though we have made a mess of things personally and collectively you remain faithful.

We rejoice that your Son came not to a perfect world, but to a broken world, our world.

To bring light to the darkness, our darkness.



We pray for our dark and dreary world, a world in need – in need not just of a technical fix, but in need of love and grace, forgiveness and new life, hope, peace and fellowship, in need of renewal, in need of YOU.

We pray that you would come alongside us and all those for whom we pray, that you would show us Jesus, the light of the world, the one who came (and who comes) to rid us of sin, to give us life and health and peace, peace that passes all understanding – not a temporary respite from trouble but the strength to overcome it and ultimately to receive life eternal.

You don't wave a magic wand for everything to be sorted instantly – you require us to exercise our faith and to respond to your call to preach the gospel and to seek to live it out, to look to you for the strength that we need to share your love and grace. Help us to share the good news in word and action – the same good news that the fishermen were called to proclaim that there is a Saviour, a merciful king who loves us and whom we can love and adore.

We have been set free, let us use our freedom to share in bringing in the kingdom.

In the light of this we have something to celebrate, something to shout about – for even in our trouble and pain, even in our loss Jesus is with us.

Hear us as in a moment of silence we pray for those in darkness (of whatever kind) – let us pray that they may see and know the light of Christ:

SILENCE

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Hear our prayers Lord, spoken and unspoken and answer them for Jesus' sake.

Amen



## Time with Children

Toddler learning to walk – falls down a lot; child learning to ride a bike - will fall off getting scrapes bumps and bruises in the process. You will almost certainly be shown the latest plasters and battle scars, etc. Positive results: independence, freedom, fun. Jesus wants the very best for us, but before the celebrations there is often hardship and sometimes pain. (He went to the cross!)

We know that the Commonwealth Games are to be held in Glasgow in 2014 – some children have ambitions to be on the winner’s podium – but it doesn’t just happen – they will need to train. Comment on what they might have to do eg early morning training sessions, travel to competitions, choosing between training and parties... No one is “beamed in” to be awarded a medal, they have to work for it. While Jesus freely accepts us into his team, he calls us to share in his work, and sometimes the pain.

What is your greatest ambition? The one thing? Jesus called the fishermen to follow him and they left other things behind. Sometimes we can fulfil our ambitions AND follow Jesus but when they come into conflict what will we choose? Will we make Jesus No 1? He is THE celebrity



## Musical Suggestions

### Psalms

CH4 22	The Lord's my light and saving health
CH4 23	The Lord is my light and my salvation
CH4 34	O send thy light forth and thy truth
CH4 35	O send thy light forth and thy truth
CH4 52	How lovely is thy dwelling-place

### Hymns

CH4 485	Dear Lord and Father of mankind
CH4 199	One thing I ask
CH4 426	All heaven declares
CH4 448	Lord, the light of your love in shining
CH4 193	God is love
CH4 258	When the hungry who have nothing share with strangers
CH4 705	It is God who holds the nations
CH4 397	In the cross of Christ, I glory
CH4 509	Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
CH4 251	I, the Lord, of sea and sky
CH4 255	Father, hear the prayer we offer
CH4 340	When Jesus saw the fishermen

The following extra choices of hymns and songs were selected by the Music Panel, from the Worship and Doctrine Task Group:

### Isaiah 9:1-4

CH4 290	The race that long in darkness pined
CH4 264	Judge Eternal, throned in splendour
CH4 304	O little town of Bethlehem
CH4 705	It is God who holds the nation



**1 Corinthians 1: 10-18**

- CH4 690          When the bonds of love are breaking  
CH4 720          We lay our broken world  
CH4 397          In the cross of Christ I glory  
CH4 438          The head that once was crowned with thorns  
CH4 669          O thou, who at thy Eucharist didst pray  
CH4 673          Let us talents and tongues employ  
CH4 714          Gather us in, thou Love that fillest all!  
CH4 739          The Church's one foundation

**Matthew 4: 12-23**

- CH4 261          Father Eternal, Ruler of Creation  
CH4 288          Creator of the stars of night  
CH4 404          I danced in the morning  
CH4 485          Dear Lord and Father of mankind  
CH4 533          Will you come and follow me  
CH4 350          When Jesus the healer passed through Galilee  
CH4 532          Lord, you have come to the seashore  
CH4 360          Jesus Christ is waiting

**Short songs**

- CH4 757          Come all you people  
CH4 772          In the Lord I'll be ever thankful  
CH4 788          Know that God is good



## 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 Ian McLean 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.*

