

# starters for Sunday

## *Third Sunday after Epiphany*

**26 January 2014**

Rev Michael Mair, Minister of St David's Broomhouse, Edinburgh, offers his thoughts on the third Sunday after Epiphany.

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### [Isaiah 9: 1-4](#)

The passage from Isaiah is full of hope for a time that will come, but which has not yet arrived. The gloom that is being spoken of is carried over from Isaiah 8 where the invasion of the Assyrians is prophesied. Isaiah contrasts the danger of the Assyrian invasion with the promise of the Messiah. The Northern areas of Israel had suffered much during the invasion, but they would also be the areas in which Jesus would spend most of his ministry, being richly blessed in the process. The people have seen a great light because they have caught a glimpse of the promise that God had for his people and looked forward to walking in the light. When the Messiah comes, the people of Israel will rejoice as they did when the forces of Israel defeated Midian in Judges 7, where victory was won despite Israel being an underdog. So too will the Messiah win a historic victory, despite being somewhat of an underdog too.

### [Psalm 27: 1, 4-9](#)

This Psalm speaks powerfully about who God is, he is our light and our salvation, because our hope is in Him, we need not fear anyone. As in the Isaiah passage, light is a focal point of who God is. He enlightens us and the situations we face. He brings hope to dark and dreadful situations. Because we know who God is and the good things that he offers to us, we are invited to join with David's desires to live in the house of the Lord all our days. In occupying the space where the Lord resides, we are defended from some of the things that might cause us harm. This does not mean that through our worship of God we are somehow magically protected from that which causes us harm. There are no magic spells being cast, but we are instead given a promise that no matter what we face, we do not have to face it alone. The Lord invites us to seek Him, especially in the midst of life's difficulties. These final verses, (7-9) speak of David's commitment to the Lord and his resolve to depend on him, we are invited to join David on the adventure of faith that continually proves to be.



## [1 Corinthians 1: 10-18](#)

Paul does not mince his words when he writes to the church in Corinth. Disagreements and tension are part of living as a faithful Christian community, but when our opinions divide us, and our theological stances are more important to us than breaking bread with our brothers and sisters, we have missed the mark. The church in Corinth was a church that had been led by several people over time, each leader had left their mark on the congregation, but no leader had been able to unite the entire church. As a result the discord that Paul speaks of is played out in the verses of 1 Corinthians 1. When Paul hears that the church has split into factions that will not work together, his criticism of those engaged in it is quick and stinging. With words laced with sarcasm he reminds them of their baptism and does not commend even those who claim to follow no-one but Christ (presumably because they too refused to work with the Paulites, Cephalites or Apollonites).

The message is clear. We may not get on with everyone in our congregations, committees and courts, but we are called by our shared discipleship to work together. We are all to remember the foundations of our faith, that we are baptised into the One church and we worship the One God. No opinion or problem can be allowed to get in the way of the church carrying out its commission to bring good news to the world, for as Paul reminds us, the message we share is the very power of God.

## [Matthew 4: 12-23](#)

It is worth noting that this passage follows immediately on from Jesus forty days and forty nights in the desert being tempted by the devil. The time that Jesus spent in the wilderness seems to have completely focussed his mind and steadied his purpose. The wilderness period transforms Jesus from a carpenter into an itinerant preacher. Having completed his period wandering in the desert, Jesus returns to the Promised Land. With John arrested, Jesus takes on his message, preaching that those listening to him should “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.” (NIV) With this message on his lips, he begins to seek out those people who would help him to take his message further – his disciples. The calling of the first disciples marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. For the first time he invites people to join with him – not



just to listen to him and heed his teaching but rather, Jesus asks that people sign up to what he is doing. “Come, follow me”.

That invitation is posed again this, and every day. We are constantly invited by Jesus to follow him and join in the new things that God has planned for his people. We are invited to be like Andrew and like Peter, like James and like John – to be fishers of men. The first disciples were soon rewarded for their leap of faith. In choosing to follow Jesus, they were first hand witnesses to seeing the power of God at work in the world – in the healing of the sick and hearing the good news proclaimed. We too can find that when we choose to be followers of Jesus, we become first hand witnesses to seeing the power of God displayed in our lives, and in the lives of those around us.

## **Sermon Themes and Ideas**

This week’s lectionary passage hold a number of themes; light and darkness, the power of faith, faithful living in community, discipleship and calling.

As I write this, I am preparing for my own ordination and induction to St David’s Broomhouse in Edinburgh. Therefore what stands out clearly to me is the idea of calling. This week’s passages provide for us as preachers to re-examine our own callings and re-live the moments where Jesus first met us and spoke the word’s “Come, follow me”. Sharing our own stories of faith and calling can bring to the surface for our congregations a reality that God continues to invite normal people to do extraordinary things. Fishers were called to become disciples, a school-boy in Glasgow called into ministry, people sitting in pews in churches are called into faithful relationships, faithful living and faithful working, possibly (but not exclusively) into ministry themselves.

A sermon and service based on the words “Come, follow me” provide an excellent opportunity to allow people to make a commitment, or a re-commitment to serving the Living God, and promise to follow him wherever he may call them. This can be a service full of possibilities – a chance for public profession of faith (see alternative section below), an opportunity to respond to God in silence or whatever is most appropriate for your location. It could invite people into the possibility of church membership, or serving in more involved ways.



The words “Come, follow me” invite us to take a journey. When we follow someone, we go from where we are to a place that is completely different. Following involves movement. When Jesus invites us to follow him, it is precisely that – an invitation. We can choose to accept or decline, but if we accept then we must be prepared for challenges to come our way, challenges to how we think, how we live, what we do, even where we are. Following is not always an easy thing, at times we will be following uphill, not understanding why we have taken the route that we are on – but following has its advantages too. Following Jesus brings us to a place where we can see firsthand the power of God at work, and that is worth all the challenges that being a follower can bring.

### **A sermon introduction...**

There is an old Sunday School Song, it went like this:

I will make you fishers of men,  
fishers of men,  
fishers of men.

I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.

If you follow me,  
if you follow me.

I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.

These words will be familiar to many of us as we recall them from our youth, we sang them with gusto, (you could lead off an “impromptu” version if you should choose...). But did those words ring true? And what does it mean to be a fisher of men? As we heard the words of the Gospel and listened to Jesus inviting those first disciples to follow him, I couldn’t help but think that the passage speaks powerfully about the idea of calling...

### **Alternatively**

If you are using the sermon to talk about call, this could be an ideal service to either set the scene or to have a profession of faith element for young people/adults who are ready to make a public profession of faith.



You could set the profession of faith in the context of these questions based on those found in Common Order:

*Name*, in making this profession of faith do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and do you confess Jesus Christ as your saviour and Lord? **I do.**

Do you promise – with God’s help – to always make the choice that points to God? **I do.**

Do you promise – with God’s help – to ask his forgiveness when you realise you haven't? **I do.**

Do you promise – with God’s help – to live out your faith in simple and extravagant ways, loving all you come across as God loves you? **I do.**

Do you promise – with God’s help – to serve God in whatever way he may call you? **I do.**

May God help you to keep the promises you have made this day.

But the work isn't only for *Name* – each of us also has a responsibility to help him/her. So do you, as the people of God, gathered in this space and representing the global church, agree to support N in her faith? Over the coming months and years, will you pray for him/her, will you encourage him/her? Will you laugh with him/her and cry with him/her? Will you encourage him/her in the way you live out your faith? **I do/We do/Congregation Stand/Whoop/Cheer as appropriate.**



## Prayers

### Collect

### 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 Approach and Confession

Almighty God,

It is our desire to stand before you in worship and adoration. We are incredibly grateful that we are able to approach you with confidence; that we are able to stand before you and know you. As the Psalmist says, we seek out your face living God. Do not turn away from us, but accept our sacrifice of worship today. Look upon us with favour Lord God, for we know that we find our purpose and value in you.

It amazes us that you delight in our coming to you, and as we contemplate who you are, we know that we are exactly where we should be. Draw near to us in this time of worship that we might know you more.

We know that you were distanced from us but through Jesus, you have come to live life with us and through us and in us. Enable us to share the precious gift which you have granted us with all those we meet.

Lord God, we know that we are far from perfect, every day we say, do and think things which we know to be wrong. We come before you now, and humbly beg that you will forgive us for our sins as in this silence we confess them before you now.

SILENCE



God, we thank you for the forgiveness that you bestow lovingly upon us, and we ask that you will bless this time of worship as together we pray the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, Holy is your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Loving and eternal father,

We thank and praise you that you care for our world, we thank you that you listen to each of our prayers and that you answer them. Help us to listen to your voice, help us to hear your answers.

Lord, our world never seems to be far from war, tensions are strung high all over the world – in the Middle East, in North and South Korea, across Africa. We never seem to learn our lessons from history, too often we shed blood, without thinking of the consequences. Father, as war-fronts are open throughout our world we pray for all those whose lives have been shattered by the cruel reality of war. We pray for your healing on the wounded, your comfort on the bereaved, we pray for those who will come home forever changed by what they have seen, we pray for those who can never return home, grant them your peace.

Forgive us Lord for the times we have glamorised war, when we have romanticised it so that it no longer resembles the bitter, twisted stain upon your earth that it is. We pray for the day to come when there will be no more war, no more sadness and no more death. We pray that all areas of hostility will come to know your loving presence and that your peace will reign throughout earth.

Grant strength then to those who have the power and the authority to make big decisions. We pray for politicians, generals, judges and all those whose thoughts and actions will make an impact upon the world around us. Stop us from falsely believing that we can do very little ourselves. Empower us to change your world through the love you share with us.



Aid us Lord to be fishers of all humanity, casting the net of your love wide. Grant us the courage to stand up against intolerance, hatred, fear and bigotry in all its ugly forms. Cast down our false idols of superiority and remind us that you call us all as equals.

Lord, we pray for our church community, asking that you would aid us in creating a place that works tirelessly to see your will be done and your kingdom come. Help us to make this church a place that serves your name in all that it does.

Lord, as you call us to go out and cast our nets wide, we know we must also open up our hearts to those we will come in contact with. Forgive us, for we have allowed our hearts to harden, we have kept ourselves guarded against sharing our humanity and our faith with our neighbour. In this silence, we pray you will open our hearts once again as we bring to you the prayers of our hearts.

SILENCE

Father God, these prayers spoken out loud, and prayed in the quietness of our own hearts, we ask in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen.



## Time with Children

Create a fishing rod with a garden cane and some string, invite the children to use the homemade rod to go fishing for pictures of what you might catch when you go fishing. You can use hooks to make it more of a challenge or magnets to make it slightly easier. (Or you could set the scene and hide the pictures)

Have a picture of:

An old boot

A (small) fish

People

Ensure the people are the last item to be caught.

**Set the scene:** You are out fishing one day, this is nothing out of the ordinary, you are busy thinking about the enormous fish that you are going to catch and bring home to cook that night. You feel a tug on the line, so you reel your rod in and you find that you have caught...

When one of the items has been caught, explain each of the items;

**Boot** – Nobody wants to reel in the boot when they go fishing. It's smelly, it's dirty and it's completely useless! But when you go fishing, you have to take the rubbish with the good stuff. When Peter and Andrew went along with Jesus they knew that the road ahead would have its fair share of boots to deal with. They were going to have to take the rubbish along with the good stuff, and so it is in our faith life. We need to be prepared to sacrifice, to put up with things and people that we wouldn't choose to normally, because once we pull out a boot or two – we are able to enjoy the blessing of a fish so much more.

**Small fish** – Sometimes in our faith we struggle to meet our expectations of how things are going to turn out. We can have an idea in our heads that if we pray harder, or are more faithful in our personal Bible study then God would really move. But sometimes, even when we are faithful we can be disappointed with the result. While we might have been expecting to reel in a big fish, a little fish is a good start – keep going and don't be dismayed, after all there's plenty more fish in the sea.



**People** – Sometimes in our faith we are taken completely by surprise. When Peter and Andrew set off to go fishing that morning, they had no idea that their lives would change completely in a moment.

(Share a time when you were completely surprised in your faith life)

**Sum up:**

Sometimes in our faith, things don't always go to plan. We can find ourselves with loads of boots littering our lives, feeling like the rubbish is outweighing the blessings. At other times it can feel like all we are pulling out of the water are small fish, and nowhere in sight are the big fish we had been promised. But these are normal in any faith journey, and what will make it all worthwhile is when we are surprised in our faith, because that surprise will change everything for us.

It will help us to remember what this faith thing is all about.



## Musical Suggestions

CH4 22	The Lord's my light and saving health (Psalm 27)
CH4 23	The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psalm 27)
CH4 97	Oh God, you search me and you know me (Psalm 139)
CH4 145	God made me as I am
CH4 199	One thing I ask, one thing I seek (Based on Psalm 27)
CH4 291	When out of poverty is born
CH4 340	When Jesus saw the fishermen
CH4 505	All I am, all I do
CH4 523	Hands to work and feet to run
CH4 528	Make me a channel of your peace
CH4 529	Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go
CH4 532	Lord, you have come to the seashore
CH4 533	Will you come and follow me
CH4 544	When I needed a neighbour were you there?
CH4 567	Focus my eyes on you, O Lord
CH4 577	Christ be beside me
CH4 590	Holy Spirit, gift bestower
CH4 602	God speaks through words in the Bible
CH4 680	You are called to tell the story
CH4 694	Brother, sister, let me serve you
CH4 795	Take, oh take me as I am



## 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 Michael Mair 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.*

