

starters for Sunday

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

26 October 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Russell McLarty, Co-ordinator of the [Chance to Thrive Pilot Project](#) within Priority Areas of the Church of Scotland, for his thoughts on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost. Russell is also a storyteller with the [Scottish Storytelling Centre](#).

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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](#)

Introduction

Theme - Loving God, loving your neighbour and loving yourself.

With this week's passages it is difficult to look beyond Jesus' 'Great Commandment' in the Gospel passage while the other passages relate in different ways as suggested below.

A pivotal point in my faith-life journey was hearing someone speak on the radio while I was driving the car. In a very simple way they said that I needed to love myself if I was to love others and that as God loved me it shouldn't be impossible for me to do the same. Until that point I was constantly trying to live up to a standard of Christian life while always reckoning myself as needing to push myself harder with little care for myself. I began to have a better life balance attending to my own body, mind and spirit. Undoubtedly this turning point in mind-set changed the way I related to other people – loving other people with all their failings more gently and graciously as I had learned to love myself that bit better.

[Deuteronomy 34: 1-12](#)

Verse 10 - 'There has never been a prophet in Israel like Moses; the Lord spoke to him face to face' - ends the account of the death of Moses. We hear how a special burial infers great honour to Moses as the leader who brought the 10 Commandments and led the people to the edge of the Promised Land.

In the Gospel we are invited to consider Jesus leadership and authority as he gives bold teaching with the challenge of the leaders of his day.



[Psalm 90: 1-6, 13-17](#)

Verse 14 - *'Fill us each morning with your (hesed) constant love'* - strikes a very positive and expectant note that God will bless his people. In Hebrew 'hesed' is the special word speaking of a completely undeserved kindness and generosity done by a person who is in a position of power. This was the Israelites' experience of God. He revealed himself to them when they were not looking for him, and he kept his covenant with them long after their persistent breaking of it had destroyed any reason for his continued keeping of it. Like many Hebrew words 'hesed' is not just a feeling but it is an action even towards the underserving.

In the Gospel Jesus evokes the command that we are to love our neighbours as we love ourselves and we love ourselves in the confidence that God loves us (hesed) and will bless us. This Psalm is one of these marvellous pieces where we can open ourselves to receiving God's (hesed) love. I can certainly relate to this and it is in accepting God's wonderful unconditional love that I can love others in God's way.

[1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8](#)

Verse 8 - *'Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the good news but even our own lives'* - is part of Paul's stressing how our behaviour towards each other shows Jesus love in action.

[Matthew 22: 34-46](#)

Verses 37-39 - *'Jesus answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'* These words set out Jesus' priorities which he gave when challenged by the religious leaders of his time. Without doubt they weren't new words as *'love your neighbour as you love yourself'* can be found in [Leviticus 9: 18](#) but Jesus' teaching gives them new focus. In Leviticus the words from a section on laws of holiness and justice are sandwiched between teaching on harvesting, cheating and cross breeding domestic animals while Jesus stresses that *'All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'*



Sermon Ideas

As a storyteller I would always look for good examples from life to show how this teaching works out in real life and try to relate the bible passages to these examples. You might want to use these in a traditional sermon or involving other people as suggested below. Here are a few stories from present experience you may wish to think about and I encourage you to find your own which ought to be present in every parish in the land:

- I heard the account from a Priority Areas parish of what happened while a local family was away on Iona with 30 other families at the brilliant Priority Areas Holiday Week. The family home reflected a really difficult life experience in that it was poorly and chaotic and so the church folk gave it a ‘makeover’ while the folk were away. The mother phoned on her return very tearful and the minister worried that she was angry at their interference but it was much more that she was overwhelmed at the love shown to her and her kids, both on Iona and by this wonderful action (hesed) in the ‘makeover’. She was upset that the children had the new cushions on the floor and were jumping on them until she was told that they were to enjoy their home. The church folk, secure in the sense of God’s love, were able to extend that love in a very practical way... ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’.
- I am often bored listening to my mother (aged 84) telling me about all the ‘old people and friends’ she visits who are housebound and in hospital or residential homes... and then I am shamed and admire what she does in a very practical way. It all started through a church visiting scheme and my Mum is amazing in the way she visits folk every week who seem so demotivated about life... even persuading my Dad to bring in a bottle of whisky each week for one lady in a residential nursing home. Esther Rantzen started Child Line in 1986 to provide a vital voice for children who were abused and then after the experience of loneliness with the death of her husband she launched [Silver Line](#) in November 2013 as a way for volunteers to provide a bit of company for lonely elderly people. The Silver Line is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. It seems to me to be a deep and important response to loneliness in older age where there was a call to Silver Line every 2 minutes... ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’.



- Maryhill Parish Church took a determined lead to set up [Greater Maryhill Foodbank](#) which is a collaboration of over 20 community groups with a couple of important features. Firstly the Foodbank is very oriented towards those who come to use the service where they are given choice of what they want rather than given a bag with goods and secondly the operational base moves to different host organisations each month. All of this builds up a stronger community networking and to my mind one of the best ‘champions’ of the Foodbank was a young girl, Darcey, who asked people on her 6th birthday to donate to the Foodbank instead of giving her a present. The [Facebook posting in December 2013](#) was ecstatic... *More than 3,000 of you have checked in to the joy that is wee Darcey asking her birthday party guests to bring food instead of toys. Darcey said she thought about asking for "Squirt the Whale" for her birthday, but had seen hungry children on TV and thought food was a better idea! Thanks again Darcey!... ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’.* You can also find coverage of this story on [westendreport.com](#).
- We also have Paul’s example in Thessalonians which might be fleshed out a bit as a great story with lots of drama. It is enormously inspiring to see how Paul travels around the Mediterranean world supporting himself by his trade and taking every opportunity to plant, support and develop local churches and to share the Good News of Jesus... and why is that... because he loves God with all his heart, he knows God’s unconditional love for himself and he can therefore share that love with so many others. He certainly ‘walks the walk’... ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’.
- ‘[Finn’s Place](#)’ at Langside Parish Church is a ‘wellbeing’ project looking to help people care for themselves better in body, mind and spirit. It is important if we are to ‘love ourselves’ that we take time and space to be better connected... ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’.

Instead of a traditional sermon

- you might want to have other people tell one or more stories which are relevant and raise questions related to our main passage
- or you might interview someone with experience of (say) prison visiting or volunteering with The Samaritans



- and/or you might have a café-style service where stories are told then the groups at café tables are asked to discuss the stories and here it is often helpful to give some starter questions eg
 - How does the combination of the two great commandments provide the link between religious faith and ethics (behaviour)?
 - How do you see the word love (hesed) as being a verb, something with action, rather than a feeling?
 - What is the relationship between loving God, loving others, and loving self? Is one of them primary? Why or why not?
 - If your neighbour was a drug addict dealing from home – how could you love that neighbour?

Time with Children

A story I love to tell about two neighbours featuring garden gnomes and it is good when telling it either to have a few gnomes to pass about or to project pictures of a few gnomes in different poses. The story really came to life for me when the new houses in our parish in Glasgow's East End replaced the old tenements and quite a number of the gardens were filled with gnomes! You can develop the story for yourself from this outline:

Mr Murphy's Gnomes

This story is adapted from a resource book *Stepping Stones* (1988) by Linda Allen.

I give the beginning in full then a synopsis.

There was a man called Mr Murphy who collected garden gnomes. He had a big garden with a pool and rockery and little paths winding among the bushes. At every turn in the garden there stood a gnome. It seemed that Mr Murphy couldn't get enough of them and no two of them were alike. Mr Murphy went all about the country looking for new garden gnomes. It was his hobby and a harmless one. He was fond of all his gnomes and each one had a name – like they were his children – and when he was in his garden he would talk to them and pat them on the head, almost believing that they would respond. Of course they never did because they were only made of plaster, but that didn't stop him.



Next door to Mr Murphy lived a man called Friddle, who was very envious of Mr Murphy's gnomes. There was no reason why he should be as he had just as much money to spend as Mr Murphy had and there was no reason to stop him going out to buy as many gnomes as he wanted, but Mr Friddle didn't think about that. All he could think about was that Mr Murphy had all these gnomes and he had none, and he was so jealous that he made lots of little holes in his garden fence so that he could peep through and jeer at Mr Murphy. 'How ridiculous!' he would mutter to himself when he heard Mr Murphy talking to the gnomes. It amazed him that his neighbour looked so happy with his little friends.

next Friddle creeps round at night and takes a gnome locking it in his garden shed

then Friddle & Mr Murphy have a conversation next day... 'I expect he's run away...'

then Friddle goes indoors and has a laugh while Mr Murphy is sad

next more gnomes disappear in following nights... 'fancied a change of air I expect...'

then Mr Murphy tells his neighbour he is starting his collection all over again

'Don't you think that is a bit silly... to keep buying gnomes when someone keeps taking them?'

but Mr Murphy returns with a gnome and a parcel for Mr Friddle... a present... a plaster bird
'I thought you might like to start a collection too.'

Mr Friddle didn't know what to say... he put it in his garden and kept going out to look at it.

He called his bird Flapper.

That night all Mr Murphy's gnomes returned and Mr Murphy was not surprised!

then Mr Murphy said

'Mr Friddle, I'm going out to look for another new gnome today.

Perhaps you would like to come with me?

Maybe you would like to find another bird for your collection

A great load seemed to be lifted from Mr Friddle's mind. 'Yes, thank you Mr Murphy. I think I'd like that very much indeed.'



Prayers

Collect

O God our redeemer,
you heard the cry of your people,
and sent your servant Moses
to lead them out of slavery.
Free us from the tyranny of sin and death,
and by the leading of your Spirit
bring us to our promised land;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Call to Worship

Minister: We come to show our love
Congregation: We come to learn as disciples
and to follow Jesus' way
Minister: We come in humility
Congregation: We come to rekindle our faith
and to be prepared for service

Opening prayer with response

Minister: Hear us we pray
Congregation: Hear us Jesus
our Lord, our Saviour,
our Brother our Friend

Lord of all being, we love you with all our hearts and souls and minds.
We love you because we see your love in every part of our lives.
We sense that your love is woven into all the joys and the pain,



there in the glories and in the heartbreak.

You are indeed Lord of all we know.

Response

Saviour, we know fine well how we need your help to live to our best.

We look to you because you offer us forgiveness and new beginnings each day

We hear your words of forgiveness to the thief on the cross

and your words to all who can hear them.

You are certainly our help and our protector.

Response

Jesus, you call us sister and brother

We know this to be the greatest thing, to be part of your family

You call us friends.

So we look to come closer to you,

sharing all our lives with our very best friend

Response

Prayers for others

Through the Prophet Ezekiel God says, 'I will seek out the lost, and I will bring back the strayed.'

God of each and God of all

we are challenged to love as you love

and so we offer our prayers and our time, talents and wealth

to look out for those who are lost and those who have strayed.

Where our love is limited and often lacking

we ask you to give us a share of your inexhaustible love for those we struggle to understand.

We pray for projects and organisations which provide support to those in need

We think particularly today of the groups we know and are involved with

(... either name as appropriate or leave silence...)

Help those who offer services to do so with careful consideration of the dignity of each individual.



God of each and God of all

we know the desperate need so many people have of healing of body, mind and spirit

and so we pray for your healing for those who are in pain

that they would know your healing though medical help or a word, or a touch of your spirit.

We cry for peace between neighbours and between nations

Bless and strengthen the work of all who offer mediation in troubled places.

We despair for the spoiling and destruction of creation in the sea, the earth and the skies

Bless and strengthen the cause of all who work for conservation.

Hear these our prayers.

In Jesus name we offer them.

Musical Suggestions

CH4 478 Behold the amazing gift of love (A good hymn to open the service)

CH4 54 Lord, you have always been our home (Psalm 90) (Our Psalm for today might be sung by choir as an introit or if the congregation don't know the tune the choir might sing verse 1 as an introduction)

Mission Praise 1 A new Commandment (This song focuses on Jesus' words and is a meditative piece which might be sung seated and repeated after sections of a prayer.)

Mission Praise 325 I'm Special Because God has Loved Me (Graham Kendrick's tune and words are compelling though the words will not suit everyone.)

Love is Something if you Give It Away - The '[magic penny](#)' is a simple children's song which can easily be taught or shared by children

CH4 500 Lord of Creation, to You be all Praise (This is a good hymn to sing before, during or after collection of the offering)

CH4 566 When I receive the Peace of Christ (this English carol melody offers a good tune to end the service)



Other Resources

The [Scottish Storytelling Centre](#) offers training at different levels for those who want to develop skills.

The aims of these workshops are:

- To enhance our capacity for life by assisting people to understand, interpret and influence the world around them.
- To enrich our experience by bringing colour, passion and intensity to our emotions, thoughts and imaginations.
- To provide a supportive environment in which people can build their skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- To enable all those who live and visit here to share in Scotland's culture, celebrating diversity and hosting an international web of folk connections.



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 Russell McLarty 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.

