

starters for Sunday

Easter Day

27 March 2016

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Wendy Young, Christian Aid's Worship and Theology Partnerships Co-ordinator for her thoughts on Easter Day.

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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](#)

Notes on the readings

Themes of new creation, newness of life, new ways of doing mission come through in these readings for Easter Sunday. Ideas for a sermon have been interwoven with each of the biblical reflections and a more developed sermon idea has been offered for the gospel reading from John 20. There are many Easter hymns to choose from; the few offered here echo the theme of new life.

[Acts 10: 34 - 43](#)

This reads as a familiar passage on first encounter, a wonderful condensed overview of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Reading it reminds us of all that was accomplished that first Easter. However the beginning and the ending of this passage indicates that these words are being said in a far from familiar setting.

These words are spoken to those whom Peter might have previously dismissed as profane or unclean. However, through a vision from God, Peter has come to realise that ‘God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him’ (34b-35a) and ‘all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’ (43). Perhaps it took the two day journey to the home of Cornelius for Peter to get his head around the vision and to resolve the great puzzle of verse 17. This journey was a paradigm shift that radically transformed the mission of the church.

For Cornelius, as a Roman Centurion, to receive the message of ‘peace by Jesus Christ’ and accept that Jesus is ‘Lord of all’ was an equally significant conversion. A paradigm shift from the way of arms and all hail Caesar! As we consider the most radical paradigm shift, from death to life, this Easter Sunday maybe this encounter of Peter and Cornelius can serve as inspiration and



challenge to us all. What more radical response could there be but to make ourselves willing to be led by the God of resurrection to newness of life.

[Isaiah 65: 17-25](#)

Reading this passage today - Resurrection Sunday - serves as reassurance that God is at work, creatively establishing the peaceable kingdom. This passage describes the fulfilment of the prayer Jesus taught to pray: 'Your Kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven.' This describes the kingdom as 'creation healed' (Hans Kung).

It is perhaps slightly surprising then to see in this vision that while life is long it still ends in death. On this day when we celebrate the overcoming of death in the resurrection of Jesus, particularly in the following passages, this vision of Isaiah doesn't seem to go quite far enough. Or does it? The idea of abundant life here and now was a more present idea in the Old Testament than eternal life. The understanding of shalom is deeper than we can adequately translate.

And for a people in exile it was perhaps enough to hear these words of Isaiah to hope for more. To hope for a long and healthy life than to endure what already felt like an eternal life of suffering. To hope for the joy of bearing a child without fear of them dying after a few breaths. To hope that their weeping and cries of despair might be hushed with comfort.

So too for those today in the majority world where still too many babes die in arms, where life expectancy is still scandalously low, where the needed change here and now is as much as can be hoped for, let alone the life beyond... where little is earned for long hours of back breaking work to feed the overfed... where rich resources are stripped away and little is given in return... where the weeping and cries of despair in Gaza, in Syria, in Burundi, in South Sudan go uncomforted.

Today, as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, we believe that the new creation has already begun. It is this hope for, and glimpses of the new creation, that sustain us in the work of Christian Aid. Today we can celebrate that the number of people living in extreme poverty has fallen to less than half of its 1990 level. Over two billion people now have access to better drinking water. We continue to participate in the work of God's new creation when we work for abundant life for all here and now. We still believe in life before death.



The vision of Isaiah ends with a picture of peace, of domestic contentment where the natural order is one of harmony. In a time where conflict is rife and millions are on the move seeking refuge, may we be renewed in our commitment to be ambassadors of reconciliation in a world that is in much need of the message of peace.

[Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24](#)

This Psalm was once used as a celebration of deliverance from Egypt and exile and is now used to celebrate Easter and the deliverance from death. The Psalm features a number of times in the New Testament ([Matthew 21: 42](#); [Acts 4: 11](#); [1 Peter 2: 7.](#)) as a means to understand the significance of Jesus as the cornerstone of verse 22.

What was overlooked as insignificant was in fact the chief cornerstone in the architect's perfect plan. Deliverance has come through the one who was overlooked and disregarded. It is a challenge for us still to not overlook or disregard those who are often on the margins of our society and our world, because even there and in them we may find our own liberation.

[1 Corinthians 15: 19-26](#)

Verses 19 - 26 are just a segment of a long and persuasive argument being made by Paul to those in Corinth who did not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Sometimes the church has been met with the criticism that it is too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good. Paul's challenge was the opposite. He is going out of his way to stress how essential believing in resurrection is to Christian faith. Without it - if we only hope in Christ for this life - then we hope in vain. He draws on the ancient traditions to make his argument. Jesus' resurrection is but the first fruit of this new creation. By denying our own bodily resurrection we are saying Jesus wasn't raised. His resurrection is the first fruit of the new creation that we are already in, though not yet in fullness. For Paul, believing in the resurrection is one of the load-bearing walls of faith, according to Paula Gooder. Far from then letting the pendulum swing to the other side where this earth and our time here do not matter - we get to practice resurrection now. We practice resurrection by taking care of our bodies and the world that we live in now, we practice resurrection 'by visiting prisoners, feeding the hungry, working for justice, loving our enemies, raising our children, doing our everyday work to the glory of God.' (Eugene Peterson)



[Luke 24: 1-12](#)

‘He went home amazed at what had happened’ (vs.12).

How do we recapture the amazement of the resurrection story? Has it become for us an idle tale that is difficult to believe (vs11)? How do we become the messengers that startle with the truth that you will not find the living among the dead, he is not there - he has risen (vs5).

Where are we in this story? Are we with the ten who did not get up and run with Peter to the tomb thinking it an idle tale? Why is it only Peter who believes the women enough that he must check the tomb out for himself? What must have been going through his head and his heart as he got closer?

This was Peter who had been sifted like wheat, who had wept with bitter regret at denying his Lord. ([Luke 22: 61-62](#)) His heart was pounding with hope, regret, grief and fear as he ran to the tomb. Perhaps that is why he, unlike the women, didn’t go in - he just stooped and looked in. Perhaps it was now light enough to not need to go in in order to see. Perhaps by Jewish custom he was avoiding the uncleanness of the place of the dead.

Whatever the reason, stooping and seeing was enough. He saw the linen cloths by themselves and for him that was enough. Maybe he thought anyone stealing the body wouldn’t have gone to the trouble of taking off the clothes and leaving them behind. Were the cloths folded up or were they still lying in the form of a body now departed. Whatever he saw and whatever reasoning he used - he went home amazed at what had happened.

His faith had not failed after all; he had turned back and could now return to strengthen his brothers. (cf. [Luke 22: 32](#)). This was the resurrection not just of the body of Jesus but of the faith of Peter his follower.



[John 20: 1-18](#) - Ideas for a sermon.

‘The world is more full of weeping than you can understand,’ (William Butler Yeats)

Some have called her crazy – crazy for standing at the foot of the cross and risking association with this enemy of the state who is being executed; crazy for getting up and coming to the tomb, in the dark and on her own, according to John’s account of the resurrection.

Whatever craziness Mary Magdalene has been accused of, she comes up with a very rational explanation of events as she approaches the open tomb. Even in the darkness she can see a deeper darkness where the stone has been removed from the entrance. For her, the stark reality is: ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him.’

The body that had been flogged, crucified and pierced; the body that had been anointed in life by Mary of Bethany with perfume and tears; the body that had been anointed in death by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus with myrrh and aloes, wrapped in linens and laid in a new tomb – this is the body that has been taken.

No body to grieve over, to be near, to help the reality of the last week of events to sink in. Without the body to grieve over, Mary weeps all the more.

‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ It seems like an obvious question to ask this woman by an empty grave? These are tears of grief and loss. ‘Why are you weeping?’ is a question that can be asked of many women across the world.

Many women, like Mary Magdalene, are marginalised; they bear the brunt of much loss – loss of dignity, loss of choice and even loss of life.

Dr Singha, executive director of Christian Aid partner Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK), in Bangladesh, tells the story of a woman who came to sign the deeds for her new home – a home built to resist the increasing incidence and intensity of flooding caused by a changing climate. She was asked her name, in order to complete the paperwork, and she began to weep. She was asked: ‘Why are you weeping?’, to which she replied: ‘No one has ever asked me my name. I have always been the daughter of someone, the sister of someone, the wife of someone, the mother of someone.’



‘Women, why are you weeping?’ Mary hears a voice tenderly ask her the same question a second time. John gives us a reader’s view and we, along with Jesus, will her to the moment of recognition. One word is enough.

In hearing her name, Mary knows and is known. Today, all those who weep are invited to listen, to hear their name and to know that they and their circumstances of grief and experiences of suffering are known as they are known.

Their weeping has not gone unnoticed or without understanding. Jesus also once stood by a tomb and wept. He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved when he saw the tears of Mary and Martha by the tomb of their brother Lazarus. He was grieved by the hold of suffering and death in the world.

There is indeed a time for weeping, but today is not that day, unless they are tears of joy. Today, Jesus’s words: ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ ([John 11: 25](#)) become flesh. Today, we are willed to the moment of recognition that every tear will be wiped away, that death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

‘Christian hope begins where every other hope stands frozen stiff before the face of the unspeakable,’ according to Thomas Merton. Even in the face of the unspeakable suffering of the world, we are given the hope of another possible world; a world that is free from extreme poverty and suffering.

This is not an escapist hope but a hope that we put into practice every time we give, act and pray with Christian Aid. It is the embodied hope that Christian Aid partners – the many partners we have journeyed with through Lent’s Count Your Blessings –put into practice on a daily basis, when they challenge injustice and empower communities across the world to lift themselves out of poverty. It is the hope that while weeping lasts for a night, joy will come in the morning.

Today, we are willed to look beyond what may seem to be the stark reality of things and recognise the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Hallelujah!



Time with Children

Provide an opportunity for the children to connect the baby of Christmas with the man Jesus at Easter- and to connect both festivals with the theme of new life. In some churches the Christmas tree is used for the cross to highlight this connection. Or you might choose to wrap up an Easter Egg in Christmas wrapping paper. Open questions might help introduce this connection: For example: in what ways is Easter different from Christmas? How is Christmas similar to Easter? While they seem very different celebrations they are both about new life; new life in a little baby and new life in the resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today.

Or:

Create an Easter Garden with the children while telling the story of John 12 or Luke 24.

Songs with the children

CH4 194	This is the day
CH4 692	Jesus puts this song into our hearts
CH4 433	Haven't you heard that Jesus is risen
CH4 751-753	Alleluias



Prayers

Approach

This is the day of new creation.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day of resurrection.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day of peace restored.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day of life abundant.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Confession

O Christ, today, gloriously, joyfully, you live for ever
in the life of the world,

in the hearts of those who love you,

in the power of the Spirit to transcend even death.

May we who find in you our hope,

bear witness

that your risen body still carries the marks

of the world's violence, injustice and greed,

and as we remember and rejoice,

help us to keep faith with all who today,

suffer the outrages of violence, injustice and greed.

O God, you are on the side of justice

and you call your people to be on that side too.

Where people are turned off food-growing land



so a few can make big profits,
where children work in factories for coppers,
where women ruin their health to feed their families,
Lord have mercy/**Christ have mercy**

O God, you are on the side of justice
and you call your people to be on that side too.
Where crippling debt reduces whole countries to destitution,
where habitats are degraded,
where violence and profiteering are an ever-present threat,
where subsistence pay is anything but a living wage,
Lord have mercy/**Christ have mercy**

God, forgive us if we profit from the suffering of others.
Remind us that we have power in our choices
if we act together.
Lead us to choose justice,
in our politics, in our economics, in our churches.
Justice, beginning where we are,
In our actions, in our prayers, in our choices and in our commitment,
teach us the true meaning of good news to the poor.
In the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

Intercessions

Living Lord,
In the glorious hope of this day,
We raise up into your resurrection light all who are excluded from fullness of life
by poverty, unemployment or stigma
by cruelty, criminality or neglect
by homelessness, landlessness or war
remembering in particular the peoples of the Middle East,



of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, of Ethiopia and South Sudan

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We raise up into your resurrection light all whose lives are shadowed

by the bleakness of bereavement, betrayal or loss

by the pain of illness, separation or exile,

by the bonds of imprisonment, addiction or despair,

remembering in particular any known to us.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We raise up into your resurrection light all new beginnings;

children being born,

plans coming to fruition,

choices being made and new directions being taken.

today, may your clarity and glory surround those who are dear to us.

We pray in your name,

Risen Lord Jesus.

Thanksgiving

Christ our life,

You are alive in the beauty of the earth

In the rhythm of the seasons

In the mystery of time and space

Alleluia

Christ our life,

You are alive in the tenderness of touch,

In the heartbeat of intimacy

In the insights of solitude

Alleluia



Christ our life,
You are alive in the creative possibility
of the dullest conversation
the dreariest task
the most nerve-racking event

Alleluia

Christ our life,
You are alive to offer new creation
To every unhealed hurt
To every deadened place
To every damaged heart

Alleluia

You set before us a great choice.
Therefore we choose life.
The reality of resurrection soars and surges
Through the whole creation.
This is grace,
Dying we live.
Therefore let us live.

Alleluia

Prayer of response

When we are all despairing,
when the world is full of grief,
when we see no way ahead
and hope has gone away:

Roll back the stone.



Although we fear change,
although we are not ready,
although we'd rather weep and run away:

Roll back the stone.

Because we're coming with the women,
because we hope where hope is vain,
because you call us from the grave
and show the way:

Roll back the stone.

Janet Morley, Christian Aid

Blessing

May the God who shakes heaven and earth,
Whom death could not contain,
Who lives to disturb and heal us,
Bless us with power to go out and proclaim the gospel.
In the name of Christ,
Amen

Janet Morley, Christian Aid



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *Living Stones* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2015. *Living Stones* is available from [St Andrew Press](#)



Musical Suggestions

CH4 413	The Day of Resurrection
CH4 416	Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
CH4 417	Now the green blade riseth
CH4 420	Earth, earth awake!
CH4 422	Christ is alive, and the universe must celebrate
CH4 430	Christ has risen while earth slumbers



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. [Living Stones](#) is available 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 Wendy Young 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.

