



Third Sunday of Easter

30 April 2017

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Ian Gilmour, Minister of Edinburgh: St Andrew's and St George's West, for his thoughts on the third Sunday of Easter.

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Introduction

The Gospel passage for the third Sunday after Easter Day makes a deep impression as a most dramatic tale with an exquisite balance of action and drama. It is an important text which is not offered by the other gospel writers. It is also a key passage for our understanding of the liturgy of the sacrament of communion. It has a deep resonance across the centuries as the Christ is recognised in the breaking of bread. This story can act as a spur for God's people to continue to share the good news of the Risen Christ.

Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19

This Psalm is sometimes given the title, 'Someone Saved from Death Praises God'.

It is a tender and insightfully empathetic engagement with the feelings of a person who has been close to death and has recovered. The emotional trajectory of this prayer works well alongside today's reading from Luke's gospel. It is worth consideration of a pastoral approach to interpretation as we hear of Jesus followers terrible sadness as they leave Jerusalem, heading towards Emmaus. The Psalm leads the worshipper onward and encourages the giving of praise and sacrifice to God in the temple in Jerusalem. The two modern translations which best capture the tenderness of this Psalm are the Message and the Good News Bible and if quoting from this psalm I suggest one of these is used. The call to worship below is based on the Psalm.

Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

This rich text is crucially positioned in the Luke/Acts narrative offering key insights into the role of the Spirit in the church, so is often read at Pentecost. It is also Peter's first recorded sermon and contains many wonderful insights and thoughts. Peter assumes the leader role for the first time as he stands tall and speaks in a loud voice, using arresting phrases. He manages through his words to forge a dispirit group into a receptive congregation. He shares familiar knowledge from the prophet Joel applying it with freshness and an approach to which his hearers can relate. He hooks the whole audience with his considered and vigorous approach, then shares bluntly and boldly the core of his message -



'You must turn away from sin, be baptised in the name of Christ, then your sin will be forgiven and you will receive God's Spirit'. He is hugely successful; as many respond to this opportunity, are baptised and the church is forged and grows, all at a pace.

Isaiah 51: 1-6

This is a passage about fruitfulness. In second Isaiah, Zion's 'waste places' are transformed through God's righteousness (**'tsedeq'**) making arid, barren places into fantastic gardens in the manner of paradise. The transformation revealed encourages spiritual invigoration - Abraham and Sarah are offered as the model here (see verse 2). These famed sterile ancestors experienced a spell of achingly long barrenness which is suddenly replaced by the delight of the healthy baby (Isaac). This transformed the future for them and the wider community. At Easter, the Christian community recognises a whole new vista and future being unveiled even if many find it hard to adequately describe their experience of resurrection. Professor Stephen L. Cook says of this passage, *"When selfless love awakens in the garden of Zion, it spreads inexorably throughout the earth."* This passage invites us to make new connections between the past, present and future as God's promises flow through our limited concepts of time. Our God is simply too small until we expect a divine deliverance which is unending. This passage certainly resonates with an enlarged understanding of God's transformation discovered for Christians at Easter.

1 Peter 1: 17-23

There are at least three major thoughts in this short section of Peter's letter.

- 1) The letter is clearly sent to Christians who are suffering persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ.
- 2) It is possible to connect this passage to Acts chapter 2 and Peter's bold leadership following on from the day of resurrection and its consequences.
- 3) It talks of the blood and sacrifice of our Saviour who is described as a perfect lamb and only revealed in recent days but destined (literally 'foreknown') for all time.

The pre-existence of Christ was accepted in Paul's letters and according to Professor Ernest Best, in his New Century Bible commentary, becoming an early part of the general Christian tradition (Phil



2.6f; Gal4.4; Col 1.18; Jn1.1f;17.24). The New Testament straightforwardly presents the resurrection as a mighty act of God. The final section in verses 22-25 describes Christian love and Willie Barclay in his commentary helpfully shows the consequences of this gift from God, *“The Christian...who lives the Christ filled life, lives the life that is different; the life that never forgets the infinity of its obligation...”* This final point can easily and helpfully be connected to the changing expectations of Christian church in this post - Christendom era.

Luke 24: 13-35

There are not many awkward phrases in terms of the translation of this text and most translations offer the story in a clear, helpful fashion. Leith Fisher’s commentary ‘The Widening Road: from Bethlehem to Emmaus’ is the one I found to be most helpful. He shares insights from scholars such as Caird who notes, *“What Luke is here claiming is that, underlying all the Old Testament writings, Jesus detected a common pattern of God’s dealings with his people, which was meant to foreshadow his own ministry”*. The patterns we find in this story are essential for the future of the church, *“The good news of the resurrection does not become abstract with the event of the Jesus’ physical death”* Rowan Williams.

Sermon ideas

The Emmaus journey is a marvelously vivid story which allows the preacher to move in multiple directions. My suggestion however would be to stay close to the story and retell it focusing on just one of these possibilities.

Here are a couple of options:

1 From Fearfulness to Fearlessness

Two followers trudge home, retreating fearfully but are reinvigorated during a walk on the road away from Jerusalem - a city which had been full of fear and danger for them. They meet with a stranger who comes alongside (choosing not to disclose who he is). This travelling companion walks at their pace, explains the scriptures in such a helpful fashion, that the fire of the Spirit is rekindled within these broken souls. They are eager to hear more and desire to remain close to this source of wisdom, so invite this stranger to share their meal. As he breaks the bread scales fall from their



eyes, they recognise their risen Lord and are so inspired, they forget their hunger and their weary limbs and run back into the danger of Jerusalem to share their awesome joyous news. The fearful have become fearless.

2 From Old, Old Story to Fresh, Fresh Faith

The hymn, 'Tell me the old, old story' seems relevant as much of the Christian year we read the old stories but do not fully capture the transformative quality of our Christian faith. Whereas from Easter Day to the season of Pentecost the focal point becomes crystal clear. The resurrection of Jesus is central to our gospel and this story demonstrates that it is not just good news for a family or a small flock of followers, this is staggering news which changes minds, emboldens frightened spirits and quite simply cannot be contained. The Christian church best recalls, reflects and is remembered around the table when Jesus' words are spoken while breaking bread. Once we, like the frightened pair on the way to Emmaus recognise Jesus we can travel on an outward trajectory sharing the news in wider and wider circles with courage, joy and enthusiasm.

It would be most helpful to our mission if all Christians were to reclaim their full courage and confidence in the manner of Peter in Acts 2. Like Peter to be able to speak with clarity on faith issues. Further to recapture the integrity well known in the early days of church becoming widely known again for the quality of their work, their commitment to family, politics, charity and wider society. William Wilberforce, the world famous evangelical Christian was born in Hull, the city of culture in 2017, under his statue it says,

"The world owes to him the abolition of slavery"

Like him would it be encouraging if Christians today need to show our Easter faith at the places where it can easily turn feeble and nervous. Many people will visit Hull this summer, it would be good to suggest they undertake a pilgrimage to his house, now a free museum in the old section of the city or to Holy Trinity church where he was baptised. It is, I believe, most helpful if our Easter faith can still stir people turning sadness to delight and turning any enslavement to freedom. Such actions mirror for me the slow walk of those two followers towards Emmaus and their racing return to Jerusalem now afraid of nothing for they had met the risen Christ and life would never be the same again.



Time with Children

Hidden and Disclosed.

Show the children a loaf of unsliced bread. How could we find God in this loaf?

I wonder if it is in the ingredients? All the things that go into making this loaf?

Show the ingredients as they are mentioned.

Flour - Ask the question how is God in the flour? (Receive the answers given and make one point about the fantastic process to make flour and do the same thing for each ingredient) I would mention all the people engaged from farming wheat to packaging.

Margarine - Ask the question how is God in the margarine? I would mention that animals and humans work together to make butter and margarine in its journey from farm to fridge.

Salt - Ask the question how is God in salt? I would mention that salt is found in caves, mines and in the sea and that we need to work to extract it.

Honey - Ask the question how is God in honey? I would mention the life cycle of a worker bee. It gives its life to creating honey.

Warm water - Ask the question how is God in water? I would mention that water comes in three states - vapour seen in clouds, solid in ice and in liquid form, it is a most precious resource.

Yeast – Ask how is God in the yeast? A small but crucial ingredient. There is a point about the greatness of the small and we couldn't make bread without yeast

We have found out how to make bread and discovered a lot about God's world, but have we found God?

After Easter two of Jesus' friends were very sad and upset, even when he came close to them and spoke to them. They want to listen to him but they don't recognise him until he broke their own bread and gave it to them.

I wonder if you have found out a new way to discover God today. I have found that I can always find God afresh when we remember Jesus' words to us, which include 'I am the Bread of Life', break bread, then share it. We can choose to break bread and share it every day.



Prayers

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 116)

One: The danger of death was all round me
and the horrors of the grave closed in on me

Two: I called to the Lord,
“I beg you, Lord, save me!”

**All: The Lord is merciful and good;
our God is compassionate.**

One: What can I offer the Lord
for all his goodness to me ?

Two: I will bring a wine offering to the Lord

**All: I will give you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and offer my prayer to you**

Approach to God

Let us approach God with confidence.

Let us pray

We adore you, Lord of All
You speak to us in so many ways
In the world of nature,
through lengthening days, warmer sunshine,
colourful Spring flowers
new generations of chicks and lambs.
You speak through scripture
Your Son makes himself known today
in the breaking of bread.



God of mercy,
You sent Jesus to seek the lost.
We confess that we have strayed from you
and turned aside from your way
becoming fearful and frozen,
misled by pride.
We have failed in love,
neglected justice,
and ignored your truth.

Open the eyes of our faith,
even our precarious fragile faith
that we may see Jesus at large and at work
through this stunning Easter episode,
stimulating fearful followers to become fearless
in their thoughts, words and actions.

We pray that you will speak afresh to us this morning
as we pray together in his name saying
OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN...

Prayers of Dedication Thanksgivings and Intercessions

God of the infinite,
we thank you for the variety of blessings
that we have received from your generous providing,
including our regular commemoration of the resurrection of your Son.
We bring the gifts we have mustered today -
our time, talents and money all for your glory.

For the morning light that woke us,
the water that bathed us,
the breakfast that nourished us



and for the sights and sounds we experienced on the way to church.

We thank you;

ALL: Most generous Creator, we thank you.

For a welcome at the church door,

the faces of fellow believers,

and the symbols of faith in this sanctuary dedicated to your praise.

We thank you;

ALL: Most generous Creator, we thank you.

We thank you for music and singing,

praying and reflecting

and for the ancient readings from Old and New Testaments.

We thank you;

ALL: Most generous Creator, we thank you.

We thank you for the Living Word

that speaks to us through the words of preaching

and for the chinks of light which break through

into our inadequate understanding. We thank you;

ALL: Most generous Creator, we thank you.

We thank you for the ongoing celebration of Easter;

for Jesus who died and rose for our liberation

and for the promise that wherever as few as two or three gather in his name,

he is present.

We thank you;

ALL: Most generous Creator, we thank you.

We thank you that there will be no event in this week

that you have not foreseen and provided for

and that your Christ will be there for us,



sharing our happiness and helping carry our burden and pain.

We thank you;

ALL: Most generous Creator, we thank you.

The world with its huge need is always with us.

Yet so is the constant encouraging presence of Christ, who says,

'I am with you always'.

Let us pray now for people who are struggling.

We remember the families of (all from this week's news who are in need of our prayers)

Voice 2 We remember those making hard decisions.

Most loving God, be with those who this day are on the brink of hard decisions.

Save them from being taken in by either false appearances or subtle self-deceit. Give to your indecisive children clear heads, strong wills, and peaceful hearts.

Voice 2 We remember those who feel deserted.

God of the Christ, who was betrayed by one friend and deserted by eleven,
we pray for all people who are feeling rejected or forsaken.

Let them know that you will never leave them nor forsake them.

May they find a peace that is not dependent on fragile human loyalties,
but is grounded in your love.

Voice 2 We remember those in hospices for the seriously ill

Lord of gentle, wounded hands,

please bless and bless again, hospitals and hospices where the dying come to wait. Give to all the staff profound sensitivity

and to each patient serenity.

When death comes, may it come like a friend opening a new door.

Voice 2 We remember the peacemakers in our world.



Risen Christ, please strengthen the hand of all peacemakers on each continent.
Steer negotiators through the shoals of injustice, prejudice and pride.
Build up courage, trust and hopefulness
and teach us how to look into each other's eyes without fear or self-righteousness.

Voice 2 We remember those leaders in government.

Living Lord, we pray for our parliaments, and our councils across this country.
Keep the minds and hearts of our leaders open to Divine grace,
that they may be wiser than their personal knowledge
and have the courage to make the hard decisions
that will help our nation set a good example among the nations of the world.

Voice 2 We remember all church members.

When we think of that handful of women
and later men who gathered to celebrate your resurrection,
Lord Jesus, we marvel at your church now in every country of the world.
Whatever our denomination, style of worship, numerical strength, or influence,
we pray that we may all keep the faith with integrity and love.
Teach us that the closer we draw near to one another the closer we come to you.
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**



Musical suggestions

CH4 412	The strife is o'er
CH4 414	Come, you faithful , raise the strain
CH4 416	Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
CH4 425	The Saviour died, but rose again
CH4 433	Haven't you heard that Jesus has risen
CH4 355	You Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd
CH4 356	Meekness and majesty
CH4 363	We have a gospel to proclaim
CH4 404	I danced in the morning
CH4 489	Come down, O love divine
CH4 549	How deep the Father's love for us

And if Communion is being celebrated

CH4 673	Let us talents and tongues employ
CH4 676	Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [People of the Way](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

Quick Guide...

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](#)



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Ian Gilmour for providing us with this 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.

