

# starters for Sunday

## **Second Sunday after Christmas**

**3 January 2016**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Tina Kemp, Auxiliary Minister and member of the Pray Now Writers' Group, for her thoughts on the second Sunday after Christmas.

### **Contents**

Jeremiah 31: 7-14 .....	2
Psalms 147: 12-20 .....	3
Ephesians 1: 3-14.....	3
John 1: (1-9), 10-18 .....	3
Sermon Ideas .....	4
Time with children .....	5
Prayers.....	6
Musical suggestions .....	11
Additional Resources.....	12



## 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](#)

### [Jeremiah 31: 7-14](#)

The hope and promise contained within these verses contrast with the first 29 chapters of Jeremiah which prophesy the punishment the people of Judah and Israel will receive for their sins.

Here, in the second chapter of the passages known as the Book of Comfort, Jeremiah announces a great reversal in God's plan for his people. God's people have been chosen out of love to be a great nation.

'The chief of nations' (v7) may be a strange description for a broken people, exiled as slaves in a foreign land. Yet here is the evidence that the wanderings and waywardness of the past 40 years will give way to a 'straight path' (v9), that restoration will come out of destruction, homecoming will replace exile and grief will give way to joy. The nation may indeed be in a mess but God's promises remain intact. God is loyal even when his people are not.

All of this is a reminder of God's absolute faithfulness to his people who he will bring out of exile in Babylon and to whom he will give a new covenant.

The blessings God will bestow are symbolised in the traditional images of bounty – grain, wine and oil. Note to the emphasis on the whole community – women, men, and old, young, healthy and the infirm, the priests and the lay people. This is to be an inclusive community in which all are to be regarded, and cared for, as God's own children.



### [Psalm 147: 12-20](#)

This hymn of communal praise emphasises throughout God as creator, provider and carer of his people. This final section teaches that his word is the key factor in the created order and is the distinguishing mark of his people.

God's word is the only secure basis for life (vs15-18). His word alone brings order to the world and blessings to his people. He alone is what they need to survive and thrive. Verse 20 again stresses that God's choosing of his people, his care of them, his revealing of his power both as judge and saviour, is what makes them unique.

These verses demonstrate that God's work in creation cannot be separated from his saving work for humankind. God's rule over the natural realm is inextricably linked with his salvation of Jerusalem and, ultimately, all people through the incarnation.

### [Ephesians 1: 3-14](#)

These verses focus on what God has done for his people and continues to do in his great eternal plan. Paul talks about what we have received through Jesus, what we are experiencing through the Spirit and what blessings are yet to come '*in the fullness of time*' (v10).

These future blessings, which we have already begun to encounter in Christ, are assured through our having been chosen, even before creation, to be God's people. What we receive now is a foreshadow of what is to come in the final redemption of the world by God, begun in Christ - a time when we will fully inherit all that he has promised us.

### [John 1: \(1-9\), 10-18](#)

The opening of John's Gospel is reminiscent of the beginning of Genesis when God's Word as a creative force, the references to light and darkness, are emphasised. We are reminded of the continuity of God's purpose for the world which began even before time itself.

John describes three reactions to the incarnation – first those who do not know him, suggesting lack of knowledge, secondly those who did not accept him and finally those who receive him. These '*children of God*' are not distinguished by race, colour, creed or gender but by their trust in the one God has sent into the world to reveal his nature. God chooses flesh and blood so that we



who are flesh and blood might recognise ourselves as his children. He literally pitches his tent (tabernacles v14) with us in order to fully enter the full flow of human affairs.

John concludes this section with the statement that there is no other way of knowing God other than through the Word, Jesus Christ. ‘No-one has ever seen God’ (v18) has echoes of the Old Testament where God did not reveal himself to even one person. In the revelation of Jesus, therefore, God has been made known to all.

## Sermon Ideas

The common theme of today’s passages is the reality of being the ‘children of God’, a community open to all; one which reveals God’s all-powerful and loving nature; one which is founded on the belief that God’s word alone can bring order to a disordered world.

The profound declaration of God’s incarnation in John invites us to reflect how it shapes our understanding of God and our relationship with him and one another.

The preacher might want to explore the idea that we are “*his own people*” (John1: 11) and explore in what ways we recognise God’s gift of grace to us in Jesus, and also the ways in which we fail to show hospitality towards one another.

There are many times in life when we are made keenly aware that we simply cannot see God. In Jesus, God becomes accessible to us. There is no problem too small, no challenge too great, that God is not eager to share it with us, as he shared our humanity. God’s decision to come to us in a form we recognise empowers us to reach out to those around us who, for whatever reason do not know, cannot accept or have lost faith in him. In that way, perhaps, we participate in God’s plan for all of humanity, and glimpse the future blessings promised to us.

The celebrations of the season may be ending, but what remains is an eternal promise that requires our active involvement every day of the year.



## Time with children

Explore with the children what they think God looks like. Ask them (if they remember) about the closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014 (you can even show a photograph).

At the beginning of the ceremony, there were hundreds of tents all over the pitch at Hampden Park. No-one knew what they were for until the ceremony began and all the athletes who had competed emerged from the tents to celebrate the special event. If you watched the television coverage, or were lucky enough to be there, perhaps like me you tried to identify as many famous faces as possible as they came out of their tents.

The Bible tells us that God 'pitched his tent' among us. What might that mean? When people least expected it, God opened himself up and revealed his Son Jesus. Some people didn't recognise him but others did and became his followers.

We don't know what God *looks* like. But we do know what he is like because Jesus has shown us. And not only has he shown us, he has asked us to share in the special plans he has for the world.

The Commonwealth Games athletes came together like one big family. We have our own families – parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters. But we are also part of the family of God. That means God lives alongside us, caring for us as his children. That is something to celebrate not just at Christmas but all the time.



## Prayers

### Call to worship

Leader: In the beginning was the Word.

People: **A Word for all generations.**

Leader: In the beginning was light.

People: **Light which shines for eternity.**

Leader: In the beginning was life.

People: **Life for all people.**

Leader: The Word, the light, the life that is Christ has come.

People: **Christ has been, Christ is, Christ will be. Let us worship him.**

### Call to Prayer

The Psalmist says: I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples, and I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens, and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

### Prayer of approach and confession

God of creation,

You breathed life into the void

and the world was born out of nothing.

You kept your promise.

Living God,

your voice whispered love

and the Word came to life

and was everything.

You kept your promise.



Spirit God,  
you move among us in our ordinariness  
and our lives become extraordinary.  
You keep your promise  
and you hold us within it  
each new day, each new year.

Today, gracious God, we praise you  
that darkness has given way to light,  
that prophecy has made room for the truth,  
that waiting has made room for arriving.

We praise you  
that silence has been filled with good news,  
that fear has been overcome by joy,  
that death has been defeated by life.

We praise you  
that old has moved over for the new,  
that past has given way to future  
and that you are in the midst of it  
and in the midst of us gathered here.

Most of all we praise you, gracious God,  
that you have been faithful to us in our lack of faith.  
At those times when we have doubted your presence  
and failed to notice you.  
When we have blindly followed our own path  
and failed to see you.  
When we have condemned and criticised others  
and failed to acknowledge you are among them.  
When we have not loved you as you have loved us.



We leave behind us a trail of broken promises, Lord.

Rough and ragged, used and useless.

Yet there you are, coming behind us

to pick them up and, in spite of us,

make something out of them.

For your grace never wanes

with the new year's first moon.

Your love never falters

when the world hesitates.

Your compassion never runs out

as time slips through our hands.

You keep your promise

and we are a forgiven people once again.

May we, loving God,

leave this place knowing that our story

has begun anew here

and that you wait,

ready to shape it, and us,

that we might share your goodness,

show your kindness,

and work for your justice;

that all everywhere

might hear your promise

and come to know your peace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



**Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession**

You are the one we talk about, Lord.

You are the one whose blessings  
we seek and we share.

You are the one  
for whom the world willed  
and waited and watched.

You came,  
first a tentative flicker,  
then a steady glow,  
and then a blazing fire  
coursing through the earth's veins.  
And eternity was.

You came,  
first a gentle whisper,  
then a constant call,  
then a bold declaration  
of divine intention.  
And love was.

You came,  
first to friends and strangers,  
then to a nation,  
and then to a world  
ignorant and unwelcoming.  
And promise was.

Lord God,  
there can be no light  
without darkness,



no love  
without hatred,  
no promise  
without betrayal.

And so we pray now for a world  
which gropes for the flame  
of your compassion,  
which craves for affection,  
and which needs to believe  
that you are  
who you say you are.

May the people who walk in darkness –  
those who are in pain, who are lost,  
who are depressed and who are lonely –  
feel the warmth of your light drawing them home.

May the people who live with and in hate –  
the power addicts, the abused,  
the grudge-bearers, the war-mongers –  
be engulfed by a love stronger than evil.

May the people who have been let down –  
by themselves and by others -  
in love and in life,  
learn what it means to trust again.

You are the one we talk about, Lord.  
You are the one whose blessings  
we seek and we share.  
You are the one



for whom the world willed  
and waited and watched.

Come, Lord.

Show your face in us,  
touch the weary through us,  
speak your truth  
in all that we say and do  
that all the world  
might recognise you.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.



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 103/Mission Praise 147	Fill your hearts with joy and gladness
CH4 521	Children of God, reach out to one another
CH4 522	The church is wherever God's people are praising
CH4 528/Mission Praise 456	Make me a channel of your peace
CH4 543/Mission Praise 1201	Longing for light
Mission Praise 652	The light of Christ has come into the world
CH4 739/Mission Praise 640	The Church's one foundation



## 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 i 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 Tina Kemp 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.*

