

starters for Sunday

First Sunday in Lent

9 March 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Roddy Hamilton, Minister of Bearsden: New Kilpatrick, for his thoughts on the first Sunday in Lent.

Contents

Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7	2
Psalm 32.....	2
Romans 5: 12-19	3
Matthew 4: 1-11.....	3
Sermon Outlines	4
Setting the scene	5
Prayers.....	5
Additional Resources.....	16



[Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7](#)

How do you hear well known stories again for the first time? We are so familiar with this story of creation we can almost repeat the words as they leap off the page but what we hear is bound up in tradition and culture. We hear how the first creature formed from the soil is to till the ground. This is the interpretation of the King James at its best written in an agriculturally based society. It is very much about having the power to control the land. We thus approach it from a position of power imagining we make the land more effective by keeping it under control. The Hebrew, however, uses the everyday word 'serve'. This is significant as the word 'serve' has different power implications for it grows out of the idea of working in partnership with the land to increase the harvest. Environmentally this is a big difference.

We also hear the idea of Adam 'keeping' the garden which again is an image of power. The Hebrew word is far closer to 'guard' or 'protect' which works in partnership with creation rather than controlling or owning it. Again a huge significance environmentally.

Then there is the serpent. Another way of looking at the serpent is to see this as a continual challenge to our faith. We can isolate ourselves in our own garden's of Eden or we can engage in a robust and engaging dialogue with the world. Those 'serpents' who ask questions of us can either destroy our faith or increase it and if we are interested in a faith that ever grows then we need serpents to continually challenge us and hone us and enable us to face the questions of faith and our experience of the world.

[Psalm 32](#)

The psalmist knows that confession is good therapy. The writer opens with almost a thesaurus-worth of alternative words for sin which opens the idea that no sin of any kind is beyond the forgiveness of God. The Psalmist urges that we talk to God about our sin for he found that when he kept silence 'his body wasted away.' Perhaps this is an allusion to some disease they may have had for disease and sin were strongly linked. Perhaps also it may simply be the recognition that some things just 'eat away at us' and it is better to voice them and confront the problem.

It is this that brings relief. The Psalmist then invites the whole community to celebrate. This relief is not just a personal issue for the consequences of both sin and forgiveness affect the whole



community. We aren't isolated, nor should we feel so, but that our new joy that comes from confession and the new confidence that comes with it is a gift that builds up the whole community.

[Romans 5: 12-19](#)

There is a danger of reading this passage and imagining some kind of automatic action here: just as we are sinful so Christ's goodness cancels that out. QED. Paul, however, does not think we are dealing with some kind of easy formula but that we are in real relationships that have choices and consequences. In these personal relationships, personal responses matter.

The sin Paul talks of does not need to be understood only as personal but systemic and institutional. We are all part of the sin that keeps people poor, and makes power rest with the powerful, even the sin that passes through generations. We can easily pass on negativity to different groups through prejudice and fear. Equally, the salvation Christ brings is not limited to the individual. Salvation is found in the destroying of the forces that bind us, that brings dull living and limits people.

The law does not help here, according to Paul, for what we need is love to free us fully. Paul is quick with the Law and we cannot fully unpack it but the full transformation comes through love.

[Matthew 4: 1-11](#)

Whatever we imagine the devil being: real or mythical; the evolution of the Satan from Hebrew lore; a very real presence in our lives, the story might be understood as the balance between worldly power, mainly the Roman Empire, against the Reign of God.

If you want personality, the devil clearly wins. The devil is far more charismatic and enthusiastic but greedy to show off. Jesus stands against that show of power. The big question is, if this is one of the founding stories of the church, a story so clearly against the show of power, then why has the church chosen the power route so often?



The wilderness time is possibly more about finding those important times of introspection and is what the church ought to have done more of throughout its history. Indeed all those great big hymns of the church triumphant seem to fly in the face of a quiet, unassuming, almost transparent Christ in the wilderness.

Lent offers a time to draw back and reflect on the power we have as an institution and individually and throw it into the mix of the temptations and see which side it gravitates towards.

Sermon Outlines

Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7

At the beginning of Lent there is the unique opportunity to enter a short season where we might be able to responding in a new way to the world. Many psychologists suggest 6 weeks is the ideal length of time to break a habit and pick up a new one. It is as if God invented Lent specifically to give ourselves the perfect chance of renewal and transformation. Perhaps, given the environmental theme of Genesis, reaffirming a way of living in balance with the earth, the Garden of Eden if you wish, might be a possible approach to the first Sunday in Lent.

Matthew 4: 1-11

A narrative sermon might be possible today to give new insight to the story of the temptations. Imagine a monologue that is a debrief with the devil after the failure to tempt Jesus.

Alternatively, contextualise the story by using contemporary powers that relate to the words of the devil for Jesus is engaging the powers of the world then, and equally now. There is hidden evil in some of these temptations: no one wants war but the war goes on; no one wants hunger but we can't do anything about it etc. This is the greater temptation to feel we can do little about the imbalance of power. Where are there examples of people speaking peace into power?



Setting the scene

A table ready to receive a pile of sand, a cross, a purple cloth, a candle blown out, a bible and some pebbles. Place these on the table during these words.

The dust that shapes the journey,
the cross that guides it,
the colour that surrounds it,
the light that fades through it,
the word that foretells it,
the wilderness that invites it.

This is Lent,
and into it's wilderness
God calls us.

Come,
brothers and sisters,
Christ is heading for Jerusalem.

Prayers

Collect

Almighty God,
your Son Jesus Christ
fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are but did not sin.
Give us grace to discipline ourselves
in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Call to Worship

when the world is no longer a paradise
and creation shows its full power over us still
and we are brought down to size on this small planet of ours

we worship

when the memories linger of the past
and war shapes us beyond our knowing
and conflict becomes a story of life

we worship

when the way is more barren than beautiful
when the path is more a climb than a stroll
when the desert expands and the horizon stretches

we worship

we worship

because we can

we worship

because we hope

we worship

because we know our vulnerability

when things shift

and we need to hold on

we worship

it is the only strength we have for the journey

welcome to Lent



Lenten Prayer

God of purple and passion
of the pathway and the promise
God whose footsteps take shape in the dust
and lead us onwards

May we be your travellers through this landscape
of silenced alleluias and purple shadows
in a land devastated
who choose to walk on
turning towards the horizon
believing the sun will rise
and so journey,
heads down
into what is yet to be
weighing the hope of heaven
on our held breath
and the passion of love
in our souls
and the way of justice
in our footsteps
that speaks to those who dare listen
about the redeeming of the world
the promise laid bare
in an honest faith
and with Eden behind us
long not for what is past
but towards the coming wholeness of life
grown from a faith that has grown up
that faces and is challenged
by life's questions



and a belief that speaks
in words made of hope and compassion
and in the barrenness of the season
with the clutter gone
may we hear once more
more clearly and more daring
the story of love
the sound of a cross
the echo of a stone
rolling
and the rumour of sunrise

God of purple and passion
of the pathway and the promise
God whose footsteps leave a shape in the dust
lead us onwards

So be it

Amen

Prayer of Confession

Tempted God

O how good it is to say that

Tempted God

not so different from us

Tempted God

in the wilderness

Entrapped God

caught between the theology and the reality

Entrapped God

caught between the devil and the deep blue sea



Entrapped God

caught up in the wilderness

Inveigled God

facing choices to decide the kingdom way

Inveigled God

facing the lure of the world or the passion of heaven

Inveigled God

facing wilderness

World-walker

may it be that the wilderness becomes our journey too

the choices we make are made with you

and we find ourselves

in a thinner place

a more wild place

where the glamour is stripped

and the faith echoes raw

with a fragility of belief

and hesitant trust that is often all we have

may we turn away from what is mortal

and turn towards what is eternal

leaving behind that which does not befit a cross

and speaking into the vastness

'I choose to follow'

know we speak into you

So be it

Amen



Prayer of Intercession

We step into Lent, O God
and we are faced with real desolation

Hear us as we pray
at this time
prayers that groan in our souls
that know God doesn't mean someone who steps in
and sorts it all out
like some tooth fairy
but that you stand in the desolation
and weep
at loss and suffering
and all that brings it

and so we pray for the people of the world
not knowing what else we can do
but live in relationship
with silence
that we may we feel our humanity with each other
for the sake of that humanity

and in places of conflict
and the continual suffering there
governing our humanity
and the shock of what we become
and who we do deals with
in the name of economy and trade

God
may we hold your silence
that speaks into this week



may we recognise who we have become
in the conflicts of this week

may we perceive ourselves as we really are
compared to creation's power

And bring those people
who hold us in that life
in relationships with each other
our family and friends
those ill and those recovering
those worried and those anxious

Hear us

O God

as we pray
that we return to right relationships
with the world and with each other

So be it

Amen

A Contemporary reading

For various voices based on the Genesis passage

A bowl of apples where one is removed at the beginning of each stanza and placed by the cross
at the end of the stanza.

Lord, help us say no
when the voices speak of building up investments
in the things of the world
when you want us to invest our selves
in the ways of heaven



Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Lord, help us say no
to what the world tells us we need
in the accumulation of stuff
when you want us to let go the stuff
and rely on you instead

Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Lord, help us say no
to the quick fix and ready made answer
that patches the cracks
when you long for us to take a lifetime
to live and explore the questions

Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Lord help us say no
to throwing money at every problem
of feeding the hungry with direct debts
when you wish we would live in a more equal relationship
with those who are hungry in the world

Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Lord help us say no
to the easy way the world wants
that involves no pain or hardship



when you call us to carry crosses
and trust the love that bears all

Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Lord help us say no
to conflicts that show humanity at it's worst
in blitz and repression
when you know we can live
ways that show the magnificence of humanity

Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Lord help us say no
to a faith that speaks empty words
and is borne by hollow actions
when we know of a word
that brings the fullness of life
and is carried by actions shaped by justice

Lord, help us say no to the world
and yes to you

Contemporary reading

on the Temptations

Voice 1

Jesus, you're hungry
God's son doesn't need to be hungry
Here are some stones
They could be loaves
Your word could change them...



Voice 2

I break a twig
 For the hunger we cause and the hunger we have
 This brokenness that leaves a longing for justice

I break a twig within this longing
 A sign of confession
 That shapes a silence
 Long enough for us to choose
 Between banquets
 Or justice.

Break twig and leave silence

Voice 1

Jesus
 You're on the highest point of the holiest place
 Below are all those who are waiting to believe
 If only you would give a sign
 So throw yourself down
 And let angels catch you
 It's the sign they are waiting for...

Voice 2

I break a twig
 For a religion full of miracles yet bereft of works of justice
 A brokenness that leaves God's kingdom undone

I break a twig for this undoing
 a gospel of signs rather than works
 A sign of confession
 that shapes a silence
 Sharp enough for us to see
 The sign of the cross
 And who chooses it's work



*Break Twig***Voice 1**

Jesus
Look out from this mountain
All I have is yours, my friend
Just bend the knee
And worship the power

Voice 2

I break a twig
For the longing of power that has the powerless longing
A brokenness that leaves a vacuum of justice

I break a twig for this void
For life bound up
And never lived fully
A sign of confession
That shapes a silence
Deep enough for us to know
Who chooses binding
and who unbinding

*Break Twig***Benediction**

May we find the road that leads to life;
may we take the turns that brings right relationships;
may we pause to accompany others on the way;
and may we journey with God through Lent,
and long for the horizon and dawn.

And the grace



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 Roddy Hamilton 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.

