

Starters for Sunday

Remembrance Sunday

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

9 November 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev C Graham Taylor, Minister of St Luke's and Queen Street Church, Broughty Ferry, for his thoughts on Remembrance Sunday, the twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.

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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](#)

[Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25](#)

The key themes in this lesson are choice, witness and covenantal obedience. Whilst the people have a choice to show an obedient faith in God and his commandments, God too has a choice in who is indeed his chosen people. Here the focus is on a 'people' or grouping rather than any sense of an individual's selection by the divine; a point made clear by Joshua's calling together of the tribal hierarchy. Further, the concept of a communal salvific Deity showing preference is enforced by Joshua's opening proclamation. These concepts continue into the setting of a formal covenant and the erection of a sacred object. These acts somewhat remind of Emile Durkheim's view in his *Sociology of Religion*:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

This in turn leads to Israelites' acts of witness - witness against themselves and for the action of God. In themselves, these statements are unremarkable, but their conciseness and boldness is more noteworthy. Since, these bold proclamations of fealty follow a long history of darkness, disobedience, destruction and thence deliverance which is perceived as a divine gift. This has led [Anathea Young](#) to suggest that this strength of conviction comes from the sense of a new start - a new covenant being on offer. She goes on to remark:

While past and future remain in view, the lection focuses on the present moment.

If I were preaching this passage, I would aim to place my congregation in that moment, to show them that they stand where Israel's tribes stood, before the warning of failure and before the covenant is made and recorded. I would bring their awareness to the place where Joshua has summoned them and to the moment of decision.



Finally, the Israelite leadership are cautioned about the dangers of back-sliding from the perceived will of God summarised in the charge of worshipping lesser gods. The chosen place of Shechem is poignant as we are reminded that in the book of Genesis, Jacob instructs his household to put away foreign idols (Genesis 35: 2), which are then hidden beneath the oak at Shechem (35: 4). These foreign gods then are now below their feet both as a continuing indictment and the threat of nemesis from 'the pit'.

No matter the leaders' brazen confidence, here is crux of the covenant on offer. It is that obedience to the law is necessary if the past is to remain buried or other wrong-doing is not to be exposed.

Young continues to observe the close relationship between worship and slavery. This is what she wrote:

The threefold repetition in one verse (24: 14) of the Hebrew verb 'abad sharpens the focus. The verb occurs six more times in the lection (24: 15-18; the related noun 'abadim' occurs once). The range of meanings for this verb includes "to be a slave", "to serve", "to work", and "to worship". The conceptual link between worship and slavery may seem obscure or theologically distasteful, but it is critical for understanding the choice Joshua offers the tribes of Israel. They can and will give their whole selves to one kind of relationship only. Worship of false gods is slavery to human artifice and self-interest. Joshua calls Israel out of bondage into the freedom of life in covenant with God.

The preacher who now summons the congregation to choose worship of God must also reveal the false gods hidden like landmines in the ground beneath their feet.

At this point, Joshua demands the throwing away of the past symbols of iniquity and their commitment to serve the Lord. It is fitting now to note verse 28 - *Joshua sent the people away, each to their own inheritance* (NIV).



[Psalm 78: 1-7](#)

The psalm opens with a command to listen. 'Listen' is the Hebrew *azan* which is translated as listen with understanding. Here then is an entreaty to taking in what is being said with heart as well as mind. For the Psalmist is speaking for God and therefore we need to prick up our ears just as if a warning order has been given to a squad of marching soldiers.

Next, we are reminded that the Psalmist is addressing very much an oral culture where 'word of mouth' would be the means of both sacred utterances' geographical dissemination but also their preservation from generation to generation. It is interesting to muse what this instruction's equivalent would be today and how we would indeed obey it.

What is this divine wisdom that must be maintained? The Psalmist then requires the law be continually obeyed and gratitude expressed for God's gracious acts of national salvation. It is in the act of observance and remembrance that trust will be rooted and faith will grow.

[1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18](#)

Here Paul was addressing a community in some distress. It was also a time when the return of Christ was immanently expected. So he melds the two to offer a 'video clip' of the end of the age with one sole purpose; the affirmation of those who will stand firm in the faith. Indeed, this strategy has been the stock of those seeking hope in times of persecution and serious danger.

Nevertheless, some, twenty centuries later, find this text hard to interpret today in any literal sense. We are part of an age that is agnostic to a physical return of Christ and may even doubt life after death. The key would appear to lie in seeing the picture given to us by Paul for what it - a colourful and sharp 'YouTube clip' of what cannot effectively be put into words. The closest parallel that can be suggested is poetry. However, Paul's vision is not lessened because it is painted by 'faith artistry' rather than 'scientific knowledge'. In fact, it is the stronger because of it. Or as [William Loader](#) remarked:

Even when we live with healthy agnosticism about the future, including post mortem survival, our faith remains grounded in the being of God, whatever that will mean and there we also believe we meet the one whom we see in the refracted symbols of Christ's impact and that one meets us. There are dreams and visions and colours splashed about



the screen of our imagination, but it is not science and it is not knowledge. It is important not to believe the poetry; otherwise it loses its power. It finds its power when we live with hope and a sense of worth and do so with and for others.

[Matthew 25: 1-13](#)

It was important to recognise the territory Matthew is in when we reach this parable. He is making clear that regarding oneself as a Christian is in itself insufficient. In particular, smugness and elitism are condemned. This critique is the key to interpreting the parable of the Ten Virgins. Since essentially it is about a readiness to undertake loving action over and against enthusiastic yet baseless utterances. Once more, [William Loader](#) has insight:

Matthew is interested in enabling people to live in a relationship with God which has continuing significance and continuing life.

He continues:

Religion is frequently a distraction if not an escape from reality. Matthew keeps bringing us down to earth and will continue to do so in the passages which follow.

However, this parable also has something to say with respect to the motivation for action now. Because it has been noted that this parable is different in many ways from others; for example, it lacks humour, it does not have a twist in the tail and it neither shocks nor offers 'a way out'. Yet all of these features only further highlights the reason for being pro-active followers since that is the only method to truly honour 'the bridegroom'.

In wider prospect, G N Stanton in *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (2004) poses that Matthew was writing to a group of Jewish Christians who were breaking away from their parent community. As such, they were under considerable social stress and possibly legal sanctions. Matthew here appears to be reminding of the irreversible consequences of the individual choices being made. This uncompromising stance rings harshly in our modern ears, yet reflects the life for Christians through history and today who must have literally the courage of their convictions.



Sermon Ideas

Whilst the above lessons offer many avenues for sermon topics and development, it is highly likely that congregations will be holding Remembrance Sunday themed services on this particular day. An attempt will be made to address both these avenues of approach with an emphasis on the latter.

A Service purely based on the Lectionary

Within themselves the lessons suggest the following:

- The warning of holding practices and material objects as sacred rather than their submission to relevant and effective loving action on behalf of the whole people of God.
- The expression of faith-based hope that the Church will once more advance even in the face of social forces fixed very much on the tangible 'now'.
- The need to perceive one's own requirement to advance the Kingdom by action rather than the maintenance of a 'religiosity' based on purely verbal formulae.

Remembrance Sunday

At first look, these texts do not lend themselves to a suitable sermon to remember those who have made sacrifices for our nation. Nevertheless, there are pointers to the efficacy of defending an ethical stance that is pleasing to God such as justice, tolerance and the respect for human rights over such political, ethnic and economic issues that are often the reasons for conflict.

Similarly, we are reminded to listen to those who have fought and to seek genuine understanding of their sufferings as a result of their service. This can be coupled with a faithful hope that true healing will one day be experienced by all sides through the ultimate fulfilment of the gospel of Christ.

Finally, there could be recognition of the need to be alert to the global events amongst which we live and then to take courageous action to prevent oppression not least of those least able to defend themselves.



Time with Children

There are considerable resources for all-age Remembrance services. Very meaningful talks can be delivered by taking names from a congregation's memorial and explaining who they were, where they lived, where they went to school or worked prior to their military service. Some explanation can then be offered of where, when and how they fell.

Of course, the poppy itself has many aspects that can be brought out during a service.

There are many useful web sites not least the [British Legion](#) who offers a [Learning Pack](#). This usually includes a DVD with a very poignant video clip which has proved most effective when displayed during worship in the past. Many similar clips can be accessed via YouTube.

Similarly the [Churches Together in Britain and Ireland](#) has a valuable outline service available to download.

Finally, the [Church of Scotland](#) has published materials that could also be considered for use.



Prayers

Collect

God, our refuge and strength,
bring near the day when wars shall cease
and poverty and pain shall end,
that earth may know the peace of heaven
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(From the Church of England's *Additional Collects - Remembrance Sunday*)

Prayer of Approach

Eternal God
make us this day remember
the unseen cloud of witness around us:
Those who in every age and generation
witnessed to their faith in life and in death,
Those who by their courage and their sacrifice
Won for us the freedom and the liberty we enjoy,
Those who served their fellow humans
At the cost of pain, of persecution and of death,
Those for whom all the trumpets sounded
As they passed over to the other side,
Those whom we have loved
and who have gone to be with you
And whose names are written on our hearts.

Help us to walk in a way
worthy of those in whose unseen presence life is lived.

Help us to have in our lives:
Their courage in danger,
The steadfastness in trial,



Their perseverance in difficulty,
Their loyalty when loyalty is costly,
Their love which nothing can change,
Their joy which nothing can take away.

So grant to us in your good time
To share with them the blessedness
Of your nearer presence,
That we also may come to that life:
Where all the questions are answered,
Where all the tears are wiped away,
Where we shall meet again
Never to be separated from them,
Those whom we have loved and lost awhile
Where we shall be forever with our Lord

And so grant to us
That in this life
We never to forget
those who have gone before.

So that in the life to come
we may share their blessedness
Through our Jesus Christ, Our Lord

(Lord's Prayer)

Amen



Prayer for others

God of power and love

Bless our land and all its folk.

Give wisdom and strength

To those that govern

Those who make laws

And those who guide our common life.

Grant that together we may fulfil our service

For the welfare of the whole people

And for your praise and glory.

Bless all members of the armed forces:

Defend them in danger,

Give them the courage to meet

All occasions with discipline and loyalty,

So may they serve

The cause of justice and peace

To the honour of your name

Bless our young people

May they never experience the flames of war

Or know the depths of cruelty

To which men and women sink.

Grant that in their generation

They may be faithful soldiers

And servants of Jesus Christ.

Bless our friends

And those who were our enemies

Who suffered or are still suffering war;



Grant that your love
May reach out to the wounded
The disabled and mentally distressed
And those faith has been shaken
By what they have seen and endured.

Comfort all who mourn
And all who this day
miss the companionship of friends.

Bless those are homeless
Those who are refugees
Those who are hunger
Those who have lost their livelihood.

Help us to pledge ourselves
To comfort, support, and encourage others,
That all may live in a world
Where evil and poverty are done away
And where human life
Reflects the radiance of your kingdom.

Bless those in authority in every land
And give them wisdom to know
And courage to do what is right.

Encourage those who work for peace
Who strive to improve international relations
Who seek new ways of reconciling
People of different race, colour and creed.



Bless your church thought out the world

By your Holy Spirit.

Draw the scattered flock of Christ

Into invisible unity

And make the church

A sign of hope to our divided world

Grant that we who bear your Son's name

May be instruments of your peace

Bringing peace to our homes

Our nation and our world

And now, rejoicing in the communion of the saints

We remember those whom you have gathered

From the storm of war

Into the peace of your presence

And give you thanks

For those whom we have known

Whose memory we treasure

May the example of their devotion inspire us

That we may be taught to live

By those who learned to die

And at the last, grant that we

being faithful till death

May receive with them the crown of life

That never fades

Through our Lord Jesus Christ

Let us now turn to silent reflection

(optional period of personal reflection)

Amen



Musical Suggestions

Remembrance Sunday has its own traditional praise list. This would include:

CH4 161	O God, our help in ages past
CH4 159	Lord for the years
CH4 63	All people that on earth do dwell
CH4 704	I vow to thee my country
CH4 710	I have a dream
CH4 275	Come now, O prince of peace



Additional Resources

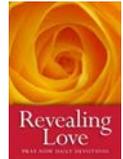
Resourcing Mission



[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

[Worship 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 C Graham Taylor 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.

