

starters for Sunday

Our Call to Mission in a Changing world

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Mission Forum for their thoughts on 'our call to mission in a changing world'.

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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](#)

[Isaiah 60: 4-9](#)

Lift up your eyes and look around;
 they all gather together, they come to you;
 your sons shall come from far away,
 and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant;
 your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
 because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
 the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you,
 the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
 all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
 and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you,
 the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
 they shall be acceptable on my altar,
 and I will glorify my glorious house.

Who are these that fly like a cloud,
 and like doves to their windows?
 For the coastlands shall wait for me,
 the ships of Tarshish first,
 to bring your children from far away,
 their silver and gold with them,



*for the name of the Lord your God,
and for the Holy One of Israel,
because he has glorified you.*

“Your God is so much bigger than you ever care to imagine!” Could we summarise Isaiah's prophetic message to Israel in this way?

No, not really. It wouldn't do Isaiah's poetry justice (and in Isaiah, poetry is far more than pretty presentation of the message: its meticulous structure and rich imagery carry the real depth of the message), and might unhelpfully glance over themes of justice, of giving glory to God, of Israel's deliverance and judgement, of Israel's rightful place in a world that looks increasingly past borders and boundaries.

However, something like the above paraphrase is a prominent theme in Isaiah, and in this passage it is used to remind Israel that God's glory is intended to shine for the whole world: Israel may be the chosen people, but chosen only so that the light lent to her should act as a beacon for all nations. The image is rich, of all people – across the social strata and from all directions – gathering to behold God's glory shining in Israel. The imagery of young women with babes in arms, of shepherds coming from their flocks, and of men on camels with gold and frankincense resonates with the later nativity narrative, again a narrative which speaks of God's favour and glory to Israel spilling out for all people.

In the Isaiah reading there is a sense that the mass pilgrimage of the nations to behold Israel's glory in God is of 'sons coming home'. At the time, this almost certainly spoke of those returning from the Babylonian exile, but there does not seem any sense in which this 'coming home' is ethnically or socially restricted. There is a wider theme of 'coming home to God' in which anyone – child of Israel or not – is invited to respond to revelation of God's light, a response elicited by those who have already acknowledged God's work in the far off lands.

[Acts 10: 1-21](#)

Peter and Cornelius

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people



and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?'

Two different visions. Two very different people. And a match made in heaven.

The story is told to us from the two separate perspectives. If it were a film, the camera focuses first on Cornelius, the new character in the book of Acts. Cornelius is a fascinating figure. At once the pinnacle of all that stands for social status and power as a Roman centurion and also a double outcast, rejecting the Roman pantheon in favour of the God Jesus taught about, while the predominantly Jewish sect of Jesus-followers maintained a high suspicion of his Roman heritage. Cornelius is not someone who fits in, despite his status and power. Yet Cornelius is a faithful man, 'praying to God always', and is quick in his obedience to God. The vision, instructing



him to send people to Peter, is not questioned. And he sends one of his soldiers – presumably at considerable professional risk – with two of his slaves to go and find Peter. It is very clear in Cornelius, however unlikely it would seem to Jesus-followers, God is at work and has found a faithful and obedient servant.

At which point the film shot swings away from the scene with Cornelius to find Peter praying on the roof of Simon the tanner (which is an interesting location for Peter's residence – the process of tanning contains much to make a Jew ritually unclean). In the hot noon sun, and feeling very hungry, we would see Peter falling into a trance before his vision unfolds. On a sheet that might lay a banquet table are all the creeping crawling animals that are anathema to Peter's kosher diet. If Cornelius' response to God's vision was unquestioned obedience, it is surprising and perhaps deliberately ironic that Peter, the foundation of Christ's church, refuses God's instruction to “kill and eat.” To be fair to Peter, his lifetime of kosher living, and his reading of the Torah would leave him absolutely convinced that it is not God's will for him to 'defile' his body with food which was outside God's law. Yet, it is obvious to the reader, from the privileged view 'behind the camera' that it is absolutely God's will that Peter 'defile' himself in this way: in a grand, and slightly strange, metaphor the impurity of the non-kosher food is likened to the ritual impurity of Gentile believers. Peter is to learn that God has chosen to have dealings with these people, because “God has made clean.”

If we in the church were to see it solely from Peter's point of view, the passage reads as a warning never to discount any aspect of God's creation as unclean or worthless; but that is only a part of the truth. The very fact that we have the first part of the narrative, with the 'camera' pointing at Cornelius, tells the second, fuller truth: that God is already at work in the places and people unseen to the Church. If the Church is to engage in mission it must not be blind to the action of God that is already present in those to whom we reach out. To ignore that fact is not only patronising, not only short-sighted, not only ignorant and prejudiced towards those we seek; but it is to imagine that God cannot and does not work unless we are there to witness to it, which is at once an idolatry of the Church and a blasphemy of God.



Prayers



Living Stones is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It is also the theme for Heart and Soul 2015. *Living Stones* will be published on 30 April 2015. Pre-orders and discounts are available from [St Andrew Press](#).

Collect

Almighty God,
 you created the heavens and the earth
 and made us in your image.
 Teach us to discern your hand
 in all your works
 and to serve you
 with reverence and thanksgiving;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns
 with you and the Holy Spirit,
 One God, now and for ever.

Opening Prayer

From every direction,
 from near and from far,
 we gather in this place, Lord God.

With our hopes and our longings,
 our troubles and our fears,
 we gather in this place, Lord God.

With the little that we have
 and the riches we possess,
 we gather in this place, Lord God.



For you call us to yourself
and summon us to worship.

As we offer our service to you,
draw us towards your light.
may your radiance search our hearts,
illuminate our lives,
and transform our living.

Amen

Prayers of approach

Eternal and everlasting God,
Maker of all that is,
seen and unseen,
you encircle the earth
in your gracious embrace
drawing it to yourself.

Lord Jesus Christ,
your limitless love
transforms the hearts and minds
of all who seek you,
and of those who do not yet
know you by name.

Holy Spirit
your boundless energy
infuses the world,
transcending human barriers,
and bringing goodness to light.



Father, Son and Holy Spirit
To you be all honour, glory and praise.

Holy God, giver of life and love,
forgive us when we think
that your mission begins with us,
placing ourselves at the centre of the universe,
rather than your scandalous cross
and empty tomb.

Holy God, present where we are not,
forgive us when we impose
our limited vision upon you,
when we restrict your saving life
to the confines of the Church,
stubbornly refusing to believe
where we cannot see.

Holy God, source of energy and power
forgive us when we lack imagination
in our search for your kingdom.
when we are no longer curious
about your activity in our world
settling down in what we know,
instead of discovering you anew.

Welcoming God
as we trust in your gracious mercy
and generous love,
so lift our eyes
towards your expansive horizon.
Help us to venture forward
in excitement and expectation,



ready to recognise and greet you,
as we proclaim you Lord of all.
Amen.

Offering

Bountiful God,
we offer you these gifts
not out of duty,
but willingly, with open hearts;
rejoicing in your goodness,
and endless generosity.
Work through them and us, we pray,
that your love may be shared
and your life giving hope revealed.
Amen

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

God in all places
and in this place,
with all people
and with each one of us,
hear our prayer.

We bring our thanks
for the times when we reach out
and find you waiting for us,
when we face the unknown
only to discover that all is known to you.
when we take an unfamiliar path,
only to find that you have travelled
there before us.



We bring our thanks
for every encounter which
brings fresh understanding
and reveals once again
the depth of your love
through Jesus Christ.

We bring our thanks
for voices which challenge us
and lives which inspire us
to share the joy of the Gospel
in the power of the Spirit,
in this time and place.

God, ever active in our world,
hear us as we pray
for those who live your good news
in the war torn places of the earth,
who reveal your presence
even in the midst of horror and fear.

God, ever moving through our nation,
hear us as we pray
for all who show your love in action;
speaking out with those who live in poverty,
challenging superficial perceptions of others,
living with compassion among those in despair.

God, ever working in our community,
hear us as we pray
for all who extend your welcome
through acts of kindness and generosity,
in dedicated service and quiet faithfulness.



God, ever living in the life of the Church,
hear us as we pray
for the world- wide body of Christ
of which we are a part.

(see [World Council of Churches Prayer Cycle](#))

We bring our thanks
for them and for faithful folk
who have gone before us,
heard your call,
joined in your mission
and made known your love.
For those whom we have known and loved,
we give thanks.
Send us out
into your ever changing world,
ready to share your constant good news
in the power of the Spirit
and the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Benediction

Go, serve the Lord with joy and gladness
And the blessing...



Time with Children

The purpose

To show that God cares for everyone in creation and we should too.

The object lesson

A visual or an object of between 3 to 5 animals/creatures e.g. lion, elephant, a cow, a crocodile, snake (the number of animals depends on the age group of the children).

The best option is to use toy animals on a table or five large cards with drawings of animals each held by a child.

Ask one child to put them in order, starting with the one they like the most and then followed by the one they like next until the last one they like least. Ask the children if they agree with that order, if one volunteers another option, ask them to come up and show us their preferred order. During this time it would be good to hear what might be the reason for their choice. Avoid making any judgement on their choice.

After the last child returns, go behind the table and scoop up all the toy animals into your hands (or collect the drawings on card) and share with the children that God has no favourite animal. He likes them all because they were all made by God.

The story

NB: A visual whether drawn by you or someone in your congregation or sourced from a website such as [Good Salt](#) which has a vast religious image gallery can add to a child's interest in the story.

One of Jesus' followers, called Peter, who had become a leader of the church after Easter, was having a sleep on a flat roof in the middle of the hottest part of the day. He had a dream about animals. Animals he liked and some he hated. In the dream God told Peter that he should like them all. Peter didn't like that idea but God told him that was wrong. When Peter woke up he knew what the dream meant. It wasn't just about animals, it was about people. Peter knew he could not just like some people and hate others he had to be caring to everyone. There was a knock at Peter's house, he had visitors sent by a Roman centurion, called Cornelius, who wanted Peter to come and tell him about Jesus. Peter now knew the dream had made him ready to go. We can find out more next time what happened...



Application

What can we do so we can learn the same lesson as Peter to be caring to all people and not just to the ones we like? When we are with our friends at school, it would be good that others in our class were not left out when playing a game. If you are chatting with a friend let others join in who are on their own.

When we do something like this it shows to others that we are learning to care for everyone. If you have not done this before or you find it hard ask help from God to change. We can do that now...

Prayer

Dear God, help us to learn this week what it means that you care for everyone. Sometimes it is hard to like others who are not our friends. Sometimes it is hard to be kind to our brother or sister when they annoy us. Help us to change, to stop being nasty back but rather be kinder and friendlier. Amen



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 to pre-order now 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 Mission Forum 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.

