

starters for Sunday

The Breadth of our Mission

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Mission Forum for their thoughts on ‘the breadth of our mission’.

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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](#)

[Acts 10: 21-36](#)

So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, 'Stand up; I am only a mortal.' And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?'

Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.'

Gentiles Hear the Good News

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.



Is there a short, curt, almost brusque tone to Peter's voice in his first interaction with Cornelius? Behind his instruction for Cornelius to “Stand up, I am only a mortal” I can almost hear Peter say “Stop it! You're doing this 'God' thing all wrong!” and he seems just slightly tetchy at having had to go and visit Gentiles, feeling the need to remind them how it is unlawful for a Jew so to do.

We must be wary of reading tone and attitude into a text, and certainly wary of using imagined additions to extract meaning. Nevertheless, we notice in the text a marked difference between the Peter who first answers a summons to meet with the Roman centurion, and the Peter after hearing of Cornelius' vision, alms, and prayers. If we consider him brusque before the revelation, Peter becomes ready and willing to proclaim that the Lord of Israel is the Lord of all.

It is the breadth of God's call to mission that is gradually dawning on Peter. Proclaiming that God is Lord of all will be words that came easily to Peter's mouth, and he even witnessed first-hand how his friend Jesus exercised a ministry that lived this message as a reality with a preference for the poor, the sick, the humble. For Peter, as with all of us, grasping the reality for our own ministry becomes quite a different matter: it extends even to this Roman centurion, a gentile, whose company it would otherwise be unlawful to keep. In this reading Peter's understanding of Cornelius is transformed from a prejudice to knowledge of the breadth of people God calls. It is a challenge to the modern reader to reflect on our own prejudices, and to allow them to be exposed and undermined by the breadth of God's call to mission.

[Isaiah 11: 1-16](#)

The Peaceful Kingdom

*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.



*He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

*They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

Return of the Remnant of Israel and Judah

*On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him,
and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

*On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of
his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from
Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.*

*He will raise a signal for the nations,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather the dispersed of Judah*



*from the four corners of the earth.
The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart,
the hostility of Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim.
But they shall swoop down on the backs of the Philistines in the west;
together they shall plunder the people of the east.
They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab,
and the Ammonites shall obey them.
And the Lord will utterly destroy
the tongue of the sea of Egypt;
and will wave his hand over the River
with his scorching wind;
and will split it into seven channels,
and make a way to cross on foot;
so there shall be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant that is left of his people,
as there was for Israel
when they came up from the land of Egypt.*

It is a vivid picture that Isaiah paints of the time after God's anointed one has judged in favour of the weak and the poor. It extends to all creation, there is a peace created between creatures whose very nature would seem to determine them mutual enemies: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." Often it is a passage preached as a promise of the peace yet to come – indeed, it is very hard to read it as much else in a world where peace is it seems a scarce phenomenon – but it is simply not an unspecific promise of the 'Some day in the future....'. When taken with verses 11-16, it reads as an injunction to the nations of that time and that place to begin to explore the peace and treaties that Isaiah decrees God has promised. To the ears of those who belong to Israel's God it is an imperative that they look beyond the boundaries they are so used to inhabiting. That they see past human divisions, prejudices, and



politics and instead work at the sort of peace that the whole of creation will one day participate in.

Isaiah, in his time and context, recognised the breadth of people with which God has dealings; those from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath and the coastlands. To today's reader, we should hear Isaiah saying that all over the world, and on the other side of any human border or boundary -social, political, or geographical – are people with whom God has dealings. In the context of mission, that means that the church is to have dealings with these people too and that it must tell of God's love, and display God's peace.

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 have built your Church
 on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
 Jesus Christ himself
 being the chief cornerstone.
 Join us together in unity of spirit
 by their teaching,
 that we may become a holy temple,
 acceptable to you;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns
 with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.



Opening Prayer

Mighty God

make us open to those around us,
welcoming to those who cross our path,
expectant for the encounters of every day.

Forgive us for closed minds

controlled by prejudice;

for hard hearts

ruled by preconceptions;

for limited vision

bound by narrow horizons;

for distorted view

dominated by bias and bigotry.

Gracious God

help us to see in Jesus

your boundless mercy

open to all;

your reckless grace

which has no limits;

your unconditional love

which knows no boundaries;

your all-encompassing purpose

which transcends all our expectations.

So may we come to you

and to others, with new eyes

ready to wonder and worship,

expecting to be changed

in the process

for Jesus' sake. Amen



Prayer of approach and confession (based on the [Mission Forum report 2014](#))

Living God

open our eyes to see the breadth of your mission.

Help us to see that mission begins with you,

for you are the God of mission

and mission is your idea,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Thank you

that you sent your Son as a missionary;

that Jesus shows us what mission looks like,

that the Holy Spirit thrusts us out in mission

for mission is Kingdom business.

Forgive us when we limit mission

to faraway places but not to where we are,

to special people and not to us,

to enthusiasts and not everyone.

Forgive us

when we have failed to be the church we are called to be:

complacent when we should have been urgent,

arrogant when we should have been gracious,

inconsistent in saying things we have not lived out.

We have sought power when we should have been vulnerable.

We have played safe when we should have taken risks.

We have failed to learn from Jesus' model of death and resurrection.

We have failed to step out and trust God.

May we see the world through your eyes.

May we hear its cries with your heart.



May we respond with faith from you
and be willing to get dirty hands in so doing
and find in dying to self that only then do we truly live.

Help us to speak for you and share the good news
act for you and be agents of mercy
stand up for others for you and be on their side.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen

Prayers of Intercession (based on the [Mission Forum report 2014](#))

Living God,
we thank you for this land in which we live
and we pray that you may fit us as the church
to serve this nation well
and to reach every part of it.

Help us to think clearly and understand better
the world in which we live
and so shape our prayers and our service to make a difference.

We are conscious that much is changing in our world.
We pray for those who think that fulfilment can be found through “things”
that they may see that “we cannot live through bread alone”
We pray for those who think that violence is the route to hope
that they may see that “those who live by the sword die by the sword.”

We pray with concern for the impact on ordinary lives
of some of the changes in our world;
for those who have become poorer as others have become richer;
for those whose loved ones have all moved away and they feel left alone;
for those who cannot keep up with the way social media impacts so many lives;
for those who feel “left behind” because they cannot use a computer.



Help the churches to build real communities
where people can belong and participate,
where people are valued and matter,
where help can be given to adjust to our technological world.

We pray for our land of Scotland
for the First Minister
and the Parliament in Holyrood
that it may serve all the people
and not just play party politics with people's lives.

We pray for those seeking employment and a living wage
for proper housing that is affordable
for help to get started for those with no home
and for all organisations that work with the homeless.

We pray for schools and colleges and universities
where people can learn and be equipped for life
for teachers, administrators and students
and all who help in forming and shaping communities of learning.

We pray for greater understanding between communities
for an end to bigotry and sectarianism
for bridges of trust to be built and walls of division broken down.

We pray for those
where cuts to welfare benefits have gone too deep
who turn to food banks for their support
who feel excluded from all talk of growth and prosperity
that help may be given to restore dignity and hope.

We pray for those
who have come to Scotland from other lands



for those who are economic migrants looking for work
for those who are asylum seekers driven from their homes and livelihoods
help us to welcome the strangers in our midst
to do what we can to enable them to adjust
to a different culture and a different climate
and find a place to live and a part to play in our society.

Help to be good neighbours in their need.
Help us to help them become part of our communities.
Help us, to share Christ sensitively with “the world at our doorstep”.

We pray for our brothers and sisters who live in other countries
For those who live with the constant fear of conflict
For those who suffer as a result of changes to climate
For those who share your Gospel in difficult situations

Help us to learn from their experiences
To share in their hopes and fears
And to support them as they affect change

We pray for those who feel isolated at this time
for single parents
for people whose marriages have broken up
for those who have been widowed
for those living alone for whatever reason
that they will find and give friendship and acceptance.

We pray
for young adults living at home longer than they expected
and for their parents who are providing for them
long after they had expected to be on their own
for a new experience of family that will be rich and rewarding.



We pray for people living longer
for those who are suffering from memory loss
and those who care for them
for those who have become frail physically
but are reluctant to surrender their independence
for dignity and protection and help in this last phase of life.

Hear us then for our world and for our land
together with all the unspoken prayers of our hearts
which we bring to you now in a moment of silence

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Offering

Take our gifts and let them speak of your grace
Take our lips and let them bless others
Take our lives and let them witness to your mercy
Take our love and fill it with your own
so that we may share it with others
for Jesus' sake
Amen

Benediction

As we have met you when gathered, be with us when we scatter
As you have spoken to us today, help us to listen for you every day
As you have made us welcome, may we shut no-one out
Go in faith and serve the Lord...



Time with Children

The purpose

To show that finding out more about Jesus means we discover more about God than from anyone else.

The object lesson

A picture of a city you have visited on holiday. A tourist map of the city brought back from a holiday or a picture on a PowerPoint.

Compare the different level of experience of finding out about a city from the illustrative list below:-

Arrive at the city and wander around enjoying what you see

Arrive at the city, wander around, purchase a map and go and see the sights of the city

Arrive at the city and go on a guided tour from one of the locals

This can be told from personal experience or explore this imaginatively. The purpose is that if we want to know more about a city, hearing from it from someone who knows the city will help us understand the place we are visiting so much more.

The story

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

At the end of our story last week we had heard that one of Jesus' followers, called Peter, had visitors sent by a Roman centurion called Cornelius (Picture of a centurion). He was a man who travelled from Italy to the country where Peter lived, called Israel. He was very important in the Roman army and was in charge of many soldiers. The Roman army controlled this country. They had invaded and won. The Romans had decided to stay and live in the country because they liked the new place where they stayed. We also know that Cornelius liked the people because he was kind to others and he liked their God. He liked their God so much he became the next best thing to a Jew, called a "God fearer". He even went to the temple to find out more about God. Even after doing all this he wanted to find out more about God, so he asked Peter to come and visit,



because Peter knew a lot about Jesus and could tell him why Jesus was so important. We can find out more next time when Peter and Cornelius met...

Application

It is good when lots of people around the world think they know God and believe that God wants them to be kind to others. Some even go to temples and churches to find out more. This is a good start but the story today tells us there is more to happen, more to find out. For Cornelius it was to find out more about Jesus. This is why Christians, who are followers of Jesus, believe that the best way to find out more about God is to learn more about Jesus. It is one reason why your parents/carers bring you to church so you can learn more about him for yourself. It is one reason why we need to share more about who Jesus is. It is not enough for people to enjoy the world they live in and are amazed. They need to find out about the God who made it. It is not enough to read about God in books. It is one good place to start but there is more. Another way is to meet people who are followers of Jesus, who should help us discover how Jesus can help us know God in a better way. It is like visiting that city while on holiday. We could find out so much more from a person who lived there and knew all about it than just walking around or looking at a map. Let us talk to God and ask for help how to find out more about Jesus and to share more about Jesus...

Prayer

Dear God, please help us to find out more about Jesus because then we will know more about you, than we ever did before. Help us to think about who we could tell about Jesus and who could be interested. Help us to be brave and wise when we talk about God and please let those we speak to listen and be pleased to hear. Help us to follow Jesus better so that our friends around us can see that Jesus is helping us to be kind and caring. 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 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.

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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.

