

starters for Sunday

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

9 October 2016

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Colin Sinclair, Minister of Edinburgh: Palmerston Place, for his thoughts on the twenty-first 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](#)

[Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7](#)

Chapter 29 contains a promise in verse 11 that is often quoted to give people hope. What is not so often realised that the fulfilment of the promise lies 70 years in the future! For this chapter is written from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon. It is an encouragement to make the most of their situation and not simply wait for something to turn up. They must not mortgage the present hoping for things to go back to how they used to be. How easy it is to miss the blessings that God provides for us by looking for something else. Sometimes it is in the ordinary not the dramatic that we find God's will for us.

Jeremiah tells them not to spend their time fretting, discontented, and lamenting the passing of the "good old days". Instead they have to accept that they were where they were and get on with the business of living. They would be there for the long haul, so roots are needed to sustain life. Homes, gardens, marriage and family life, are all signs of being settled. They were to be the order of the day. More than that there was a call to be model citizens not resenting their exile but adding value to the society in which they were now part. How can this be? The answer is found in the opening sentence of the open letter. Their exile was not bad luck, not the fault of others but was in the end God's plan for them to refine them for his future purpose. This nation which was incurably idolatrous would return from exile as the most monotheistic people in the world. They went into exile as a nation and returned as a church. We need to trust God with our circumstances and live for God through them. It is not always easy but it is always right. Don't waste the time. The choice is clear. You can complain or you can be productive but you can't do both. Serve the Lord where he has put you and trust him for the rest.



[Psalm 66: 1-12](#)

It is a great relief that we can praise God without reservation or qualification. The Psalmist wants creation as well as humankind to join in the praise. The greatness of God is his theme and this is demonstrated by God's actions in history.

The paradigm miracle in the Old Testament is the deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egypt, but the second great event is the return of the people from exile in Babylon. In both cases God's greatness is matched by his grace in that he uses his power to deliver his people from their enemies. The sea parts and they are saved. The King's decree is issued and they can return. As the Psalmist reflects on those challenging years in Egypt and Exile when they were oppressed, he can see that even this time was used by God to refine his people. God's power was not used to impress or for self-display but in order to give his people that most precious gift, freedom. Of course their freedom from Egypt or exile was to allow them freedom to worship God and this Psalm, in that sense, completes the circle.

The first part of the Psalm (verses 1–12) is the song of a whole nation. It may well have been sung by the people of Israel when they returned from their exile in Babylon. The singers have been through some terrible experiences – fire and water; prison and oppression (verses 11, 12). But they recognise that God has never deserted them. The God of the Exodus is also the God of the Exile. Whatever we face, God is with us. Perhaps today you will be able to join with God's people and say, 'How awesome are your deeds.' Is there someone to whom you could say, 'Come and hear what God has done for me'?

[2 Timothy 2: 8-15](#)

Christian leadership is demanding as well as fulfilling. It doesn't happen automatically but requires lifelong learning. That involves persistence, application and gumption. A key area of leadership is the use of words (verse 15). An effective leader is called to teach and that involves taking seriously God's word and showing its truth and relevance to others. However the same mouth that can use words to enlighten and build up must be careful not to be dragged into unhelpful quarrels (verse 14). Quarrels generate heat but little light. They divide rather than unite and leave others and oneself exhausted rather than empowered.



Paul puts together some arguments to help keep his young colleague on track. He begins by pointing to Christ, our model as well as our Master (verse 8). The decisive event in history was the resurrection and that reminds us that love is stronger than hate, truth is stronger than lies, and right will triumph over wrong despite all appearances to the contrary. As well as the example of Christ others have showed their willingness to suffer for the cause of the Gospel, including Paul himself (verse 9). Paul is in no doubt that their calling to lead and teach was worthwhile as it had a transformational impact of others. Salvation and glory are the goals he holds up to view. In light of that we have to keep on keeping on. It is the call to “a long obedience in the same direction”. Stickability and faithfulness may not be the most immediately appealing of virtues but their long-term impact can be immense. In choosing this way we are simply copying the pattern of Christ who for our sake set his face to Jerusalem and never turned back. So hang on in there- it is worth it.

[Luke 17: 11-19](#)

This story finds Jesus at the margins and there he meets a group representative of both Jews and Samaritans. It should be no surprise to find Jesus drawn to those who were deemed misfits and rejects. Jesus rejects popular categories that diminish and dehumanise and gives instead dignity and worth. In this no man’s land of misery the normal boundaries between them of culture, religion and background had been put aside by their common plight- they were all now non people, lepers. They had no rights and little hope. All they could do was throw themselves on the mercy of Jesus. Whatever they had heard or seen was enough to make them cry out. Yet that is all we need to do and healing was the outcome. Taking charge of the situation, respecting the culture of the people, he points them in the direction they need to travel for both medical clearance and social acceptability. In taking Jesus at his word they found in the obedience of faith, their healing. As they moved they were healed. Beware the curse of passive religion where we do nothing! Our faith moves mountains when our faith moves us. Passive religion uses God as an excuse to do nothing. We need to step out in faith and trust God to make the difference.



Perhaps the nine who didn't return justified their action as "following orders". They wanted to put the nightmare of their experience as outsiders behind them. But with every step they took they got further from Jesus. They got healing but they didn't find life and the blessing they received meant that they felt they needed Jesus even less than before. What a warning!

Only one takes time to stop and return to Jesus. He was no doubt as keen as the rest to re-establish themselves with their family and friends. His response is one of thankfulness but it is far more than mere politeness as is shown by his public prostration at Jesus' feet. What marks him out is not only that he alone returned of the ten who were healed but of all of them, he was the only foreigner. We must remember that the people who respond to Christ are not always those we expect. The question of "taking things for granted" of "living out your own agenda" is left hanging in the air and clearly has wider application than this incident. Taking things for granted is a particular temptation for those who have grown up in the church. There are always good reasons for not taking time to worship God and they are usually on closer examination less good than they first appear. The children's chorus "Count your blessings name them one by one" is a reminder of the importance of the thankful heart when we come to worship. Do you know the religion of a thankful heart?

When you know the goodness of God it sets you free to praise, sing, give, tell and share. At that point, wonderful things begin to happen to us: What was duty is now privilege; what was law is now grace; what was demanded is now volunteered; what was forced is now free; what was drudgery is now joy; what was taken for granted is now offered up in praise to God. When it finally breaks through to us, then we come running gladly!!!



Time with Children

based on 2 Timothy 2:8-15 on perseverance

Paul wants Timothy to be a faithful follower of Jesus. That is not always easy. Timothy's job was to lead a church and to teach them about the Christian faith. He wants him to endure, to hang on in there. If you are going to endure then you have to persevere and that means not giving up. In this passage he is urging him to persevere in his ministry.

One way to share his advice with children is to introduce the word "persevere." Print it in large letters on a large sheet of paper. Practice saying it together. Then tell them that it means "stick with it" or "don't give up." Explore its meaning with one of the stories below.

Conclude by noting that Paul wanted Timothy to persevere in his work as a minister. He was to keep at it even on the days when it wasn't very interesting or exciting and on the days when it felt hard, even dangerous.

Tales about perseverance

In *Lord of the Rings* Frodo and Sam must overcome many obstacles to get their ring back to where it belongs.

The same is true of Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy on their adventures in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

While it sounds more exciting to persevere in the kinds of daring tasks they did, we are called on to do the same in refusing to give up on learning hard subjects at school, playing a musical instrument, conquering our fears, etc.

A few real life stories about perseverance

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876. After making a demonstration call, President Rutherford Hayes said, "That's an amazing invention, but who would ever want to use one of them?"

When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, he tried over 2000 experiments before he got it to work. A young reporter asked him how it felt to fail so many times. He said, "I never failed once. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2000-step process."



Many famous authors got dozens of rejection slips before their books get accepted for publication and go on to become best sellers.

Pray for perseverance. Invite worshipers of all ages to name times they feel like giving up. Either gather the list, then let a leader voice prayers on behalf of the congregation or turn the suggestions into prayers as they are offered by asking the congregation to respond to each one “God, help us to persevere.”

Prayers

Collect

Almighty God in our baptism
you adopted us for your own
Quicken your spirit within us
that we being renewed both in body and mind
may worship you in sincerity and truth
and serve you with thankfulness of heart;
through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit
One God, now and forever

Prayer of Adoration and Approach

O God our Father,
we thank you for all the many things that make life lovely.

We thank you,
for the beauty of the world which you have made,
for the changing seasons, for autumn colours and clear days,
for all that we see around us that speak of a Creator’s care.

We bless you for your gift of love in Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord,
for his life among us, his teaching and example,
his service and his sacrifice,



for his death for us, in our place and for our sakes,
and the glory of his mighty resurrection.

We thank you that now he prays for us,
and one day will return,
for the gift of his Spirit,
for worship together,
for word and sacrament,
for preaching and prayer,
for fellowship and service,
and for those who share the journey of faith with us.

We bless you,
for those who hope in us even when we have not yet justified their hopes,
for those who believe in us although we have sometimes failed them,
for those who forgive us even when we hurt them,
and those who love us even when we have wounded their hearts.

We thank you,
for unforgettable moments in life,
for moments when the burdens, the weariness, the worry and tensions of this life
fell from us and we felt at peace,
for moments of perfect understanding with a friend,
for moments when we knew the joy of loving and being loved.

We bless you,
for times when your voice came to us with unmistakable clearness,
for times in church, at prayer or in some quiet spot, you seemed very near and very close,
for times you gave us strength to keep on going.

We thank you,
for the joy which came when, after a struggle, we accepted your way,



for the calm that came to us when, after a storm, we accepted some bitter experience,
for the peace that came to us when, after all our worry, we committed ourselves and all things
to your care,
for the strength which came to us when, after we had had tried in our own strength, we cast
ourselves on you

We bless you,
for the hope which comes from you when we felt there was no hope left,
for the strength you gave when we felt we could not possibly go on,
for the comfort you brought when we doubted we could ever smile again.

Father, you never leave us, nor will you forsake us.
When we pass through deep waters you are with us.
As you have blessed us in the past, so keep us in the future
and keep us faithful to the end.
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Prayer at the offering

Living God,
giver of life and breath and all things
we have nothing to give in return,
except what we have received from you.
So, with these offerings, given in this and other ways,
help us to dedicate to you
all that we have and are,
so that you may have back
what is already your own,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Prayers of intercession

Gracious God,
help of the helpless,
draw close to those this day for whom life has been too much.

We pray for those who have succumbed to life's temptations,
who live with shame and regret for what is past,
for those who have brought heartbreak to others,
and feel they have lost the fight.

Grant them your pardon and your peace,
set them free from a sense of failure,
and cleanse them from all that has been soiled.

Grant them strength which is made perfect in weakness,
that they might start again and build on the ruins,
and make of what remains of life a lovely thing.

We pray for those who have been broken by life's sorrows,
those who have forgotten how to smile,
those who can never stop remembering happier times,
those who are haunted by the emptiness and the loneliness of life.

Wipe the tears from their eyes.

Help them to trace the rainbow through the rain.

Lift their eyes from the darkness of death to the radiance of life eternal,
and enable them to know something of the joy that no-one can take from them.

We pray for those who have been beaten to their knees by the burdens of life,
those who are unutterably weary and who yet must go on,
those who are weighed down by their responsibilities,
those whom even if the days were twice as long,
would still come to the evening with their tasks unfinished.

Help them to cast their burdens on you.



Help them to find something of the grace which is sufficient for all things.
In your strength help them to pass the breaking point and not to break,
and give them the strength to keep on going.

We pray for those who are embittered by the disappointments of life,
those whose hearts have been broken,
by someone's hardness or thoughtless disloyalty,
those who have always missed out on life's prizes,
who have never been thanked, never been appreciated,
who have never been rewarded as they ought to have been.

Tell them that somehow you work all things together for good.

Help them to believe that you have some better things for them.

Help them to believe that the new world of eternity, will redress the balance of the old world of time.

And when things are at their worst help them to remember that for your own Son there was a cross.

Bless those who have been defeated by the tensions of life,
whose physical strength could not cope with the pace of things,
whose minds could not cope with the strain of things,
those who have collapsed beneath their burdens,

Give them your peace.

Help them to relax and find in prayer the strength which comes from you,
and in the secret place give them your power to meet their daily needs.

Bless those who have lost you in their daily life,

too busy to pray,

who on the Lord's day are too weary to worship,

too caught up with earth to think of heaven,

to busy earning a living, or serving the public, or seeking pleasure to remember the things beyond.



Help them to remember that the things that are seen are temporary,
that the things that are unseen are eternal,

O God our Father,
grant to us the strength to resist temptation,
the trust to accept our tears,
the endurance to bear our burdens,
the hope to pass through our disappointments,
the peace to quieten our worries,
and the wisdom to live for ever close to you,

All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *People of the Way* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2016. *People of the Way* is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



Musical Suggestions

CH4 32	As pants the hart
CH4 200	Christ is made the sure foundation
CH4 180	Give thanks with a grateful heart
CH4 645	I'm not ashamed to own my Lord
CH4 558	Lord I lift your name on high
CH4 531	My Jesus my Saviour
CH4 352	O for a thousand tongues to sing
CH4 124	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation
CH4 70	Give thanks and praise unto the Lord
CH4 62	Sing a new song to the Lord
CH4 721	We lay our broken world
CH4 617	When all thy mercies O my God
CH4 559	There is a Redeemer
CH4 718	We cannot measure how you heal
CH4 691	Be still my soul
CH4 738	Glorious things of thee are spoken
CH4 182	Now thank we all our God
CH4 724	Christ's in the world in which we move
CH4 512	To God be the glory



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. [People of the Way](#) 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 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 Colin Sinclair 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.

