

## Second Sunday of Easter

### Second Sunday of Easter – 8 April 2018

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev David McNeish, Minister of Milestone Church – serving the people of Birsay, Harray and Sandwick in the West Mainland of Orkney, for his thoughts on the third Sunday of Easter.

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.

You will find the sheet music, lyrics and MP3 file for Rev David McNeish's song *When Someone Has a Problem* on the Church of Scotland website (in the [Year of Young People Resources](#) section).

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## Introduction

The challenge and the promise of Easter is how to help a community of fearful dismay realise they are a community of the resurrection. That is why Easter is both an event and a season in the church – it takes time to come to terms with the enormity of the event and what it means, then and now.

This second Sunday of Easter is therefore an opportunity to let the events of the previous weekend sink in a little deeper. The scripture passages lend themselves to that – celebrating unity of purpose, care for one another and acknowledgement of our need of God’s peace and forgiveness in the midst of distress and brokenness. Falling as it does in the middle of the Easter holidays, on this Sunday there will likely be regular worshippers who are absent as well as possible visitors present. What follows therefore includes suggestions for an all age service, since Sunday School will likely not be meeting.

### [Acts 4: 32-35](#)

This brief passage offers a snapshot, rather like a photograph in the scrapbook of the early church. It is both compelling and challenging – here the believers were “of one heart and soul” (v32) and pooled their resources to ensure “there was not a needy person among them” (v34). Some commentators have said that this represents an idealised picture of the early church that was more about the desire of the author to see this happen than the reality of what was going on. This seems an all too easy way of dismissing the challenge it represents, particularly to wealthy, individualised Westerners. Rather like Kierkegaard’s comment that the reason there are so many commentaries about Jesus is because we don’t like what he is saying. The community may have been influenced by the belief that it would not be long until Jesus’ return, but this does not diminish the fact that their faith impelled them to practical acts of sharing for the good of the whole community.

It is also of note that at the heart of the story is the fact that the apostles testified “to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (v33). This focus on Christ was marked by two characteristics – great power and great grace. It is arguable that the radical discipleship of the early church, with its determination to place eradication of need above accumulation of wealth, was only possible because of the great power and great grace they received through Christ.

This is a passage that has influenced generations of generosity and if there are not stories in your local community of those who have either given help or received it because of this passage, it is perhaps time to ask the Spirit of God for power and grace to help write some

new stories. As Charles Cousar says: “The resurrection of Jesus Christ was (and is!) the proclamation of a new understanding of God’s activity in human life.” (1).

[1 – p.279 - Texts for Preaching – A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year B – Walter Brueggeman, Charles Cousar, Beverley Gaventa and James Newsome]

## **Psalm 133**

This short psalm of ascent gets straight to the point – unity is good and pleasing (v1), both in theory and practice. But unity is often in short supply, especially when families gather together. Joseph and Mary’s experiences of pilgrimage with a young Jesus in Luke 2 point to the tension and disagreement that also marks many of our own family experiences. The psalm therefore serves as a reminder that unity is desirable, but also has long lasting benefits, or blessings. Goldingay (2) says “In the Old Testament ‘blessing’ is concrete and down to earth; it suggests the fruitfulness of human beings and animals and the flourishing of the crops, and it is easy to see that the absence of unity and harmony would imperil the work of the family and thus threaten its having enough to eat.”

Two metaphors are used to describe the blessing – oil and dew. Unless your congregation includes a lot of hipsters, oily beards (v2) may need some explanation. Oil was a precious commodity that would be used sparingly – except at festivals. Anointing with oil was the sign of a community able to “luxuriate when it is festive, secure and prosperous” (3). For the oil to reach the collar was a sign of abundance, an abundance that depends on a harmonious family to gather the harvest in.

The second picture is of dew on Mount Hermon (v3), an inland mountain about 100 miles from Jerusalem. In arid lands the flow of water is especially vital – the outworking of harmony is a flow that reaches well beyond the starting point. It also describes the movement of the pilgrimage people themselves – flowing to Zion from the surrounding lands and bringing blessing with them.

In both images there is a juxtaposition of stillness and motion that characterises unity – the stillness of a bowed head, the motion of oil flowing down the beard, the stillness of dewfall, the motion of water flowing towards Jerusalem. When the family of God is in agreement, peace and purpose come together and blessing flows.

[2 – p.186, Psalms for Everyone Part 2 – John Goldingay, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014]

[3 – p.280, Texts for Preaching – A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year B – Walter Brueggeman, Charles Cousar, Beverley Gaventa and James Newsome]

## **1 John 1:1-2:2**

It should be clear that the writer wishes to emphasise what they have seen and heard. In each of the first three verses he repeats himself, saying over and over that they are passing on what they themselves saw and heard and wish to make known. The purpose of all this seeing and hearing is to have fellowship; fellowship with one another and with God.

The impediment to such fellowship is the denial of darkness. Light and dark are key themes in this letter, and the central claim in this first chapter is that God is light (v5). Sin must be confessed in order to move from darkness into light, since without such confession we deceive ourselves (v8). Conversely, when we acknowledge our own darkness we are cleansed from it and can have fellowship, with one another and with God. As Beverley Gaventa notes ““God is light”” is not a theoretical claim but a profoundly practical one.” (4).

The implications of sin’s effect on fellowship are further emphasised in the recap at the beginning of Chapter Two. Christ is the atoning sacrifice not only for our sins “but also for the sins of the world.” (v2). This sentence should hopefully confound everyone’s theology a little – too much emphasis on the sins of the individual neglects the impact of Christ on the whole world, whilst too little emphasis on the sins of all neglects the need for Christ to come in the first place.

[4 – p.283, Texts for Preaching – A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year B – Walter Brueggeman, Charles Cousar, Beverley Gaventa and James Newsome].

## **John 20:19-31**

Jesus appears to the disciples through a locked door, underscoring “the trauma and fright of the disciples, who have good reason to think that they may be the next victims” (5). This fear is something Christ transcends and transforms and which they too will transform with the help of the Spirit. Note that Jesus asks them here to receive the Holy Spirit (v22) – Pentecost (Acts 2) was not the first activity of the Spirit amongst the disciples. But a week

after receiving the Holy Spirit the doors are still locked (v26). It is very much a journey of faith rather than the instant arrival of fearless followers.

Thomas gets a hard time for not believing without seeing for himself, but there is an interesting parallel with John 1 – Jesus' first words to the disciples are "Come and see" (John 1:39). Thomas wants to see as the other disciples have seen. Here at the end of his ministry on earth Jesus bestows a blessing on those who have not seen and yet believe. In other words, us, along with the rest of the church since that time. We have the testimony of Thomas to help us, but still need to decide how to respond to the accounts of resurrection.

The purpose of John's book is also made explicit in what Moody Smith says: "looks very much like the original conclusion of the Gospel" (6). Whether intended as a conclusion, or not, it makes clear that rather than being a full account of everything Jesus did, it is an account designed to encourage belief that the Messiah is Jesus. Though translations often structure it the other way around (that Jesus is the Messiah) Wright points out that the Greek grammar echoes back to chapter 1:19-51 in the "surprising discovery that the Messiah, the son of God, is none other than Jesus of Nazareth." (7).

Arguably the purpose of the Gospel of John is also what should inform us gathering as church – to come to believe in Jesus as the Christ and to have life in His name.

[5 – p.285 - Texts for Preaching – A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year B – Walter Brueggeman, Charles Cousar, Beverley Gaventa and James Newsome].

[6 – p.44 - The Theology of the Gospel of John – D. Moody Smith, Cambridge University Press, 1995.]

[7 – p.154 – John for Everyone Part Two– Tom Wright, SPCK.]

## Sermon ideas

There are rich pickings here – Psalm 133 and Acts 4 mirror the impact of unity whilst the resurrection is of central importance to all three New Testament readings. Here are two suggestions for sweeping across the passages – there are plenty of existing resources on each of the four passages in isolation. If there are children present throughout the service (possibly Lego building, see below) you may wish to have two or three shorter reflections interspersed with hymns to break the sermon time up whilst still providing plenty of food for thought.

*Fear and the Flow of Faith* – a sermon on the gradual dawning impact of the resurrection on the early church and on our own faith journey.

**Situation:** A description of Mount Hebron, 100 miles from Jerusalem and the dewfall upon the mountain. It seems so distant to our concerns. Let this thought hang unresolved.

**Crisis:** Shift to Acts 4 and the problem that we don't like what it says. What if we have to sell a house or land? What if our church should sell property or land? All the practical reasons we cite for why this shouldn't apply now.

**Resolution:** Perhaps we are trying to jump in the river downstream. Faith has more tentative beginnings. Cite John 20 and the locked doors. Fear is the dominant narrative and Jesus comes bringing peace and the Holy Spirit. If we are honest fear is often behind our responses to the challenge in texts such as Acts 4 or John 20. Was Thomas more fearful than doubtful? But Christ is not fearful.

**Celebration:** Jesus asks the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit, and it takes a while for what they receive to have an impact. It is more like a dewfall than a deluge, but it all accumulates. By Acts 4 they are in full flow, a river of grace and power that transforms their community. Let us acknowledge our fear, but not be bound by it. Let us instead receive peace and grace and power. And not despise small beginnings.

An alternative approach would be a first person narrative from the perspective of Barnabas in Acts 4:36.

**Introduction** – name was Joseph, brought up in Cyprus as a Jew, a Levite.

**Encounter** – with the apostles and the stories about Jesus. Here the narrative can be descriptive of John 20, moving between the apostle's testimony and Barnabas's reactions to their stories.

**Conviction** – of sin (referencing 1 John) and of the Messiah being Jesus.

**Response** – why he felt moved to sell his field, what happened to the money, those that it helped. His change of name. The unity of purpose he experienced – finishing by quoting Psalm 133.

Some practical questions for either sermon:

- How easy do I find it to consider sharing wealth with those in need?
- Are there ways we as a church might be more generous with what we have?
- In what ways might I keep my faith behind locked doors?
- What does it mean for Jesus to meet me in the midst of fear and uncertainty? What change might that lead to?

## Time with children

One of the great joys of children's ministry is it enables you to challenge the adults through the readiness and receptiveness of children to God. Today's passage from Acts is one that arguably children grasp more easily than adults (perhaps because they are not grasping as much?!). More easily does not mean easy however, as the following activity is designed to expose.

*Key message:* everyone finds sharing difficult but with God's help we can lend a hand.

*In advance:* hide individual Lego bricks in bags around the sanctuary – some obvious, some less obvious. Each bag should have only 1 brick in it, except for 1 bag which should be full to the brim with lots of bricks. You want to have roughly enough for 1 bag per person, it's better to have too few than too many.

*All age address:* explain today's challenge is to find what has been hidden. BUT – each child can only find one item – there is one bag per person. Once the children return with their bags ask them to build the best Lego model they can from what they have. Pretend to ignore any protests at this point, explain that you hope by the end of the service they will each have built the best model they can. Finally attend to the howls of unfairness. Ask them what can be done about the fact one person has most of the Lego. Hopefully they will suggest some means of sharing!

Explain that the early church did this – whenever someone was in need, someone who had plenty would help out. Explain it still goes on – even in the kirk, wealthier churches help support those who are in need, though there's always room for more to be done. When Jesus rose from the dead it inspired His early followers to live differently and it should inspire us too.

At this point you may wish to sing the song *When Someone Has a Problem*. You will find the sheet music, lyrics and MP3 file for this song on the Church of Scotland website (in the [Year of Young People Resources](#) section).

*Optional:* You can invite the children to build something that would help somebody else, to build something that would meet a need. You can return at the end of the service to see what has been made and even invite the children to say what they have made and why.

## Prayers

**Call to worship: [can be said responsively as below or entirely by the worship leader]**

Christ is risen

**All is changed**

Christ is risen

**All are changed**

Christ is risen

**All may worship**

So let us join with the church throughout time and around the world, proclaiming the risen Lord and his great love for everyone.

**Prayer of thanksgiving and confession:**

Almighty God

The world reverberates with Your praise,

Resonating with Your love,

And with the wonder of Your resurrection.

Death could not hold You and in Your life is our life,  
Decay is not the final word, for You are the everlasting word  
The eternal source of all goodness and all kindness  
All mercy and all love.

Thank You that You sing over us this morning,  
Quietening us with Your love,  
Enlivening us with Your grace,  
Encouraging us with Your tender care.

Remind us again to be grateful  
For all You are, and all You have done  
And for all You are doing through us and through others  
To bring Your kingdom closer.

Yet You know that sometimes we drown out Your song.  
We sing a different tune, of discord and division.



We don't want to hear of Your harmony or Your help.  
And turn down Your accompaniment in our lives.

Forgive us God, for the ways in which we hurt and harm those around us.  
The ways in which we hurt and harm ourselves, in word and deed.  
And damage the life of Your world.  
Forgive us too for the ways in which we have failed to say and to do  
Those things that would have brought life to ourselves and to others.

Cleanse us and restore us,  
Refresh us and inspire us  
That we would realise again  
Our need of each other and of You

That we might be Your community of the resurrection.  
Abundant in Your grace and power  
To tell of Your wonder and sing of Your care.

[and hear us too as we join with Your church around the world and throughout the ages in  
saying words You first said with Your disciples: Our Father...]

### **Prayers of Intercession**

It is suggested that the prayers of intercession are interspersed with verses of CH4 583 (see musical suggestions below). The last line of the tune can be played or sung as the cue to sing the next verse.

Loving God  
You know full well the worries and fears we bring with us today.  
Those thoughts and concerns that burden us and weigh us down.  
In the stillness we offer them to You now, believing that You not only hear, but attend to all  
of them.  
[pause for silent prayer]  
*Spirit divine...*

Gracious God, You know that our belief wavers,  
our faith is fickle and our loyalty fleeting.  
You promise not to snuff out the smouldering wick –  
take our lives as they are and fan into flame all that they might be,  
for the sake of Your kingdom.

*Come as the fire...*

Merciful God, our world is full of strife and conflict,  
claims and counter claims, demands and lies and aggression.  
We pray for peace even when peace seems such a distant hope.  
We pray for all those working to bring healing  
and life in places where there is little of either.  
We pray too for Your church, here in Scotland, and around the world.  
Heal hurts and disappointments, bring unity where there is discord  
and refresh those who are weary.  
Take from us our fear and let Your church be built up in courage and love.

*Come as the dove...*

Wild God, forgive us when we tame You,  
put You in a box marked safe or keep You at arm's length.  
There are so many in our neighbourhood who don't know You,  
don't know Your peace or comfort,  
don't know Your courage or hope,  
don't know the relentless tenderness of Your love.  
Work through us and in spite of us to make Your love known.

*Come as the wind...*

Wonderful God, we pray for our children.  
Those who have grown up and have worries and concerns of their own,  
which we find ourselves sharing.  
Those who are still young, and who weary and delight us in equal measure.  
Those we have lost or never had and whom we still mourn.  
We pray too for those children around us,  
those secure in their love and those fearful, hungry and anxious.  
For all who work with children and for children,  
all who seek to protect children and nurture children.  
May their work be blessed and may those who seek to harm  
be frustrated in their efforts.  
Hear these prayers and those not yet formed upon our lips,  
in the name of Christ we pray.

*Spirit divine*

**Blessing:**

Go in the peace of Christ, to bring His mercy and love close to those in need,  
and may the oil of the Spirit flow through you  
and be your abundant help in all you face and fear this week,  
in the name of the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of the world, Amen.

## Musical suggestions

- CH4 459 – “Crown him with many crowns” – For opening worship it is suggested to sing a celebratory Easter hymn – see last week’s suggestions for other possibilities
- CH4 90 – “How good it is when God’s will is done” – An Argentinian setting of Psalm 133, easily learned and playable on a variety of instruments
- CH4 432 – “How often we like Thomas” – A beautiful reflective response to the resurrection
- CH4 583 – “Spirit divine, attend our prayers” – Can be sung before intercessions or a verse can be sung in between each section of intercessions – see prayers above
- CH4 221 – “Saviour again” – Echoes the peace theme of John 20
- CH4 413 – “The day of resurrection” – Fits well as a concluding hymn but even so you may want to use the lower setting of ELLACOMBE at 367
- CH4 113 – “God the Father of Creation” – Another good hymn to finish on, locating our unity within the Trinitarian love of God
- CH4 172 – “Sing for God’s glory that colours the dawn of creation” – Sometimes we can be too clever fitting every hymn to the theme. It can be good to include a hymn that is just there because it inspires worship and this certainly does that
- “When someone has a problem” – An all-age worship song based on Acts 4:32-35 and John 20:20. You will find the sheet music, lyrics and MP3 file for Rev David McNeish’s song *When Someone Has a Problem* on the Church of Scotland website (in the [Year of Young People Resources](#) section)
- *Psalms for All Seasons*, a Complete Psalter for Worship (Faith Alive Christian Resources) 133A – “Behold the goodness of our Lord” – Another setting of Psalm 133 in a haunting minor melody from a 19th century Kentucky Hymnal

# When someone has a problem

David McNeish

♩ = 160

C

F

C



When some - one has a pro - blem we can lend a hand the  
some - one else is toi - ling we can see them right to -

4

F

C

F

G



ea - rly church would do this they'd e - ven sell some land and  
ge - ther we can help them get through the dar - kest night and

6

C

F

C

F

C



though we find it tri - cky it's what our faith demands so when some - one has a pro - blem  
though we find it tri - cky it's what our faith ig - nites so when some - one else is toi - ling

9

F

G

C

F

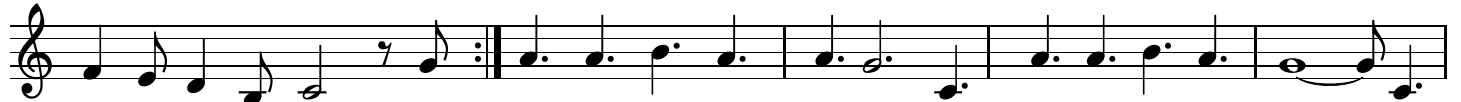
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we can lend a hand When Je - sus said "Don't wor - ry my peace I give to you as  
we can see them right

14

F

G

C

G

G7

C

G



God sent me so now I'm sen - ding you Je - sus help us love more like you

19

C

G

C

C

F

C



do When some - one is in trou - ble we can help them out the

22

F

C

F

G

C



church can ral - ly round them so they don't have to shout and though we find it tri - cky it's

25

F

C

F

C

F

G



what our faith's a - bout so when some - one is in trou - ble we can help them

## **When someone has a problem**

When someone has a problem,  
we can lend a hand.  
The early church would do this,  
they'd even sell some land.  
And though we find it tricky,  
it's what our faith demands...so  
When someone has a problem we can lend a hand.

When someone else is toiling,  
we can see them right.  
Together we can help them,  
get through the darkest night.  
And though we find it tricky,  
It's what our faith ignites...so  
When someone else is toiling,  
we can see them right.

Jesus said "Don't worry-  
My peace I give to you,  
As God sent me so now I'm sending you."  
Jesus help us love more like you do.

When someone is in trouble,  
we can help them out.  
The church can rally round them,  
so they don't have to shout.  
And though we find it tricky,  
It's what our faith's about...so  
When someone is in trouble,  
we can help them out.

**David McNeish, 2018 stonemusic**