

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – 12 August 2018

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Asia Committee of the World Mission Council for their thoughts on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writers and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

Introduction	2
2 Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33 – The defeat and death of Absalom	4
Psalm 130	5
Ephesians 4: 25- 5: 2 – Rules for new life	6
John 6: 35, 41-51 – Bread of heaven	7
Sermon ideas	8
Time with children	9
Prayers	10
Musical suggestions	16

Introduction

Today's reflections have been developed by members of the Asia Committee of the World Mission Council. Since 1988 the World Council of Churches has designated the Sunday before 15 August as a common day of prayer for peace.

The materials that follow come from our engagement with partner churches in Korea, who invited the Church of Scotland to participate in the Peace Treaty Campaign, to join with ecumenical partners around the world in praying for and advocating for sustainable peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. We have included and adapted prayers and stories from the Korean church.

The lectionary readings naturally provoke many thoughts and can be creatively developed in a variety of ways:

- **The defeat and death of Absalom** in 2 Samuel 18 invites consideration of the impact of conflict on nations and on individuals. Sunday 12 August will be the day of the Global Prayer for Peace on the Korean peninsula, which is always marked on the Sunday before 15 August.
- This passage also speaks about the intensity of **a father's grief**, which is a constant presence within our congregations, yet not often examined.
- **Psalm 130** employs **the metaphor of depth**, which informs many spiritual traditions, and reflects heartfelt cries of praise and lamentation.
- **The rules of living** in Ephesians 4:25 ff. illustrates radical and transformational behaviours that encourage harmony and peace, whether within churches, families, communities or between nations.
- The familiar passage of John 6 introduces **Jesus as the bread of heaven**, invites reflection on the challenge of discernment and of the connection between the sacred and the secular.

Scripture passages overview

The group has wrestled with each passage, using a template which opens horizons of insight and understanding. Derived from Jane Leach and Michael Paterson's *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook (2010, 36-41)*, the 'three levels of seeing' template also informs Ewan Kelly and

Michael Paterson's innovative work, *Values Based Reflective Practice (VBRP)*, which is widely used within healthcare chaplaincy (Paterson, M. and Kelly, E. 2013 *Reflective Practice: a method developed for healthcare chaplains in Scotland. Practical Theology* 6(1): 51-68).

The template is based on the three levels of seeing in John 20, reflected in three different Greek words, *blepo*, I see, *theoreo*, I wonder, and *horao*, I understand. Each word represents a deeper level of insight.

Three levels of insight

- 1) On the surface: **I see it just as it is.** 'I see' is the first level of seeing and works with the incontrovertible, the facts of the matter. **I see, what is right there before my eyes in the biblical text.** Sometimes we can neglect this level of seeing since it appears to be too simple and offends the need to appear sophisticated. Being able to state the obvious can result in a breakthrough of insight.
- 2) Curiosity: **wondering is the second level of seeing and focuses on whatever arouses curiosity.** Stories provoke our imagination and cause us to wonder and to turn things over in our minds. Wondering is not the same as interpreting. Whereas interpretation tells people what they *should* be thinking, and constricts the imagination, wondering opens horizons and enlarges the space for exploration.
- 3) Depth of insight: **'I understand'**, I get it now, is the third level of seeing and focuses on making connections between the biblical text and living out one's faith. It's about making connections between biblical texts, experiences, self, values, wisdom and God. It looks for the penny to drop, for things to fall into place, the fog to lift and clarity to dawn. Realizing the impact of the biblical text on faithful practice lies at the heart of this method.

2 Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33 – The defeat and death of Absalom

Background:

David wanted to be in the heat of the battle with his troops, but was advised not to because 'he was worth ten thousand of them'.

I see

- David asks his commanders to 'deal gently with Absalom'
- The battle was fought in the forest, the slaughter was great, and the forest claimed more lives than the sword
- Absalom's head caught the branches of a great oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth
- A man witnessed the event ... but would not raise his hand against the king's son for silver
- Joab had no time for such niceties in the heat of battle and thrust three spears into the heart of Absalom
- The Cushite, good news to you David; The Lord has vindicated you ... in victory
- David asks, Is it well with Absalom?
- Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son

I wonder

- About the place of mercy in battle
- What are the costs of victory?
- About the intensity of grief that overwhelms

I understand

- In Korea, we have traces of hope for reconciliation ... sharing a flag at the PyeongChang Winter Olympics and the Olympic Truce.
- The summit meeting between President Moon Je-in and Kim Jong-un in April
- High level discussions with Mike Pompeo and potential meeting with President Trump

Psalm 130

Background

The psalms are a poetic response to the depths of life.

The psalms are a theology of the heart. Brueggeman (1984) constructs a schema in the psalms of 'orientation, disorientation, new orientation' to meaningfully locate experiences of loss; such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the crucifixion, and the holocaust. Disorientation is often expressed through complaints and doubts, such as the opening words of Psalm 22, 'My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?' At first glance these complaints seem problematic, born in disarray, disruption and dislocation, but when held in tension with 'new-orientation', the unexpected surprise of the new or the little resurrections in life, they may actually be positive, hopeful and creative. *'The reason darkness may be faced and lived in is that even in the darkness, there is One to address'*. The psalms allow for 'dark nights' and for 'courageous doubts' to belong within faith. An honest facing up to the moment of pain or the silence of suffering may lead to a new way of seeing, being and believing. Psalms 'bring into speech' the 'mismatch' between reality and the core narratives of God's story. Ultimately out of the rage, the lament and the longing is born a new vision of God.

I see

- The psalmist cries from out of the depths
- The psalmist longs to be heard
- The psalmist knows that no one can stand before God faultless, but is consoled by the appreciation of God's forgiving nature
- The psalmist is prepared to wait; and waiting is hoping
- Waiting for God is like waiting for the dawn
- With God there are endless possibilities of renewal and refreshment and new beginnings

I wonder

- Whether when we are connected to our inner depths we come close to the language of God
- Whether the tradition of lament is a forgotten art in faith
- What the impact is when hope springs eternal like a stream of living water, for individuals, for communities and for nations?
- What happens if the decisions of the church are made on the basis of hope

I understand

- The psalmist needs God to bear witness

An example of witnessing from the holocaust

'If in my lifetime I was to write only one book, this would be the one. ... Why did I write it? Did I write it so as not to go mad or, on the contrary, to go mad in order to understand the nature of madness, the immense, terrifying madness that had erupted in history and in the conscience of mankind? Was it to leave a legacy of words, of memories, to help prevent history from repeating itself? Or was it simply to preserve a record of the ordeal I endured as an adolescent, at an age when one's knowledge of death and evil should be limited to what one discovers in literature?

... However, having survived, I needed to give some meaning to my survival. Was it to protect that meaning that I set to paper an experience in which nothing made any sense? In retrospect I must confess that I do not know, or no longer know, what I wanted to achieve with my words. I only know that without this testimony, my life as a writer – or my life, period – would not have become what it is: that of a witness who believes he has a moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory.

... It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women and children, but also against Jewish religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, and therefore Jewish memory.

... I knew that I must bear witness.' **Wiesel, E. 1972 *Night* London Penguin Books**

Ephesians 4: 25- 5: 2 – Rules for new life

Background

I see

- An appeal to put aside falsehood and speak truth (Prayer of St Francis of Assisi)
- Neighbours are in truth members of one another
- Do not let the sun go down on your anger
- Do not let the devil in
- Change behaviours ... thieves labour rather than steal; build up, don't put down
- Do not grieve the holy spirit
- Exchange wrath, anger and slander for kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness
- Be imitators of God, live in love, as Christ loves us

I wonder

- Lines in the sand are shifting
- Where the sacrifice of love leads

I understand

- *This has been deliberately left blank to allow you to discover your own insights*

John 6: 35, 41-51 – Bread of heaven

Background

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'.

I see

- The Jews complained about what He said, that He came down from heaven. Is He making claims for himself that are beyond the pale?
- They see Jesus in earthly terms, with a father and a mother that they know ... does familiarity breed contempt?
- How is it possible for someone to come to earth from heaven?
(NB Nicodemus to be born again)
- Jesus says do not complain: Only the Father's intervention will open the eyes of the faithful and everyone who hears and learns from the Father will come to Jesus. It is inevitable
- The only one who has seen the Father is the one who is from God.
(NB the stories of face to face with God ... Moses God passed him by / Elijah, still small voice/ Jacob wrestled)
- Belief leads to eternal life
- A comparison between the ancestors who ate manna in the desert and died; with the bread of heaven which allows people to live forever
- The living bread is the living Christ

I wonder

- What allows people to see Jesus as both human, yet also at a deeper level, as one, in unity with his Father
- How we are drawn and attracted to Jesus, ... the Spirit? The Father?

I understand

- *This has been deliberately left blank to allow you to discover your own insights*

Sermon ideas

- Explore the idea/characteristics of “fake peace,” a phrase from South Korean Christians to describe how it feels to live under a foreign-controlled military security umbrella, or on one side of the most highly militarised border on earth.
- How Christians are called to pursue a different kind of peace, a “just peace” or “genuine peace”.
- Peace means understanding and respecting without agreeing, respecting life.
- We want peace but wanting peace means looking at “me”, “ourselves” and peace beginning with me/ourselves.
- Can peace bring reconciliation or does that mean compromising? Is compromise only a good place to start or means to an end of disunity?
- Explore ideas/characteristics of “just peace” or “genuine peace”. God's peace and justice is based on the belief that without justice for all everywhere we shall never have peace anywhere. Indeed, peace in the world depends on realising peace on the Korean Peninsula. Like the persistent widow in Luke 18, we can claim hope as the fruit of our persistence, described in a conference organised by NCKK as a “fierce patience.” Paul's letter to the Galatians encourages us to “not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9). We recognise the political events of the day present us with a Kairos moment. We stand at the edge of possibility, and with God's grace we proclaim that the time for peace on the Korean Peninsula is now.
- Draw on insights from the Korean peninsula. Rev Dr David Kwang Sun Suh, now in his 80s, was a teenager during the Korean War. He tells of the hatred he felt towards North Koreans after he found the body of his father, a Presbyterian minister, who had been executed by Communist fighters. He vowed to avenge his father but when he later heard that many in South Korea had been killed after being wrongly accused of being Communists, he saw that pain came from the division caused by war and he began to work for peace, a work he has continued until the present day.
- What does the Peace of Christ mean for North and South Korea? What does it mean for us as part of the worldwide church? The division of Korea – and the suspended but unresolved state of war – is itself the root cause and rationale for ongoing

military confrontation, the arms race and the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. Therefore we must remove the unresolved conflict and division as a source of tension and confrontation.

- What does peace entail? Ultimately it means no longer being at war but how do we practice peace? Stop retaliation. Unclenching fists to shake hands to “eliminate any structural elements of violence.”
- Does peace only come when humanity is reconciled to God?

Time with children

Invite the children to offer suggestions of signs of peace.
(a kiss ; hug ; signing a document ; giving a gift ; handshake).

A handshake is a sign recognised all over the world – and used in our churches – to show we are offering peace to and receiving peace from one another.

Invite two children to come out and give a handshake as a sign of peace – BUT BEFORE THEY DO SO explain you’re going to make it a little more challenging.

Using a scarf (or similar) tie their hands behind their backs – loosely! – and ask them to shake hands. They should not be able to do so.

Ask for another two volunteers.

Before they are able to shake hands, have them clench their fists and keep them clenched. Again when asked to shake hands they should not be able to do so.

Ask for a third set of volunteers.

Place them as far apart as possible and tell them they may not move. Again ask them to shake hands. Again they should not be able to do so.

Sometimes we make it hard for ourselves to give peace to one another.

Sometimes countries make it hard for themselves to show peace to one another.

Today we’re thinking about two countries, both with Korea in their name, which are right next to each other but where it is difficult to find the sharing of peace.

Sometimes people from each side of the border of North Korea and South Korea are so suspicious of each other that they cannot give or receive peace (a bit like when we clenched our fists).

Sometimes the governments of their countries impose rules that mean they cannot share peace (like having our hands tied behind us).

Sometimes people are kept so far apart (physically or in their thinking) that they cannot share peace (like when we were standing apart from each other).

Jesus asks us all to live in peace and to help others know the peace he brings. The churches in Korea – north and south – try to help people do that in very difficult circumstances – and there are signs that peace is beginning to come. We can pray that this continues.

And we can try to live at peace with one another here, reaching out to others as Jesus asks – for we are all part of God’s family, called to care for one another and called to share the peace that Jesus gives’

Invite the volunteers to untie their scarves; unclench their fists and walk towards each other so they can shake hands.

And... you might want to ask the whole congregation to share a sign of the peace Jesus gives by shaking hands with one another.

Prayers

‘Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. Lord hear my voice’. *Psalms 130*

Prayer has played a prominent role. Don’t say “All we can do is pray” but “The first thing we should do is pray.”

Call to Worship

God of creation, You brought life to all that we see.

You set the boundaries of the universe and placed us within its care

Creator God, breathe life into Your creation

Holy Spirit, You bind Your children together in community.

Your bonds transcend borders created by humankind.

You kindle the fire within us that stirs our passion for faith, justice, and reconciliation

Spirit God, inspire us to reconcile

Jesus the Christ, You came to teach and to lead. You showed us the cost of discipleship when You stood up against the powers of the world, and they tried to suppress Your truth by sentencing You to death. Your life was more powerful than death and Your truth lives on in us.

Jesus the Christ, help us reflect Your light of truth and peace

Approach

Early in the morning,
as creation stirs,
as birdsong resonates
and as the first rays of light break through the hanging mist,

we wait upon You.
in the right time
in this safe space.
Out of the depths of our hearts and souls,
we cry to You.

Stretching out of our slumbers,
we are grateful for the rest and refreshment of a night's sleep
and that angels have watched over us and protected us.
We open our eyes in delight at the gift of a new day,
eager to discover the unexpected delights You have in store for us.

We wait upon You
in the right time
in this safe space.
Out of the depths of our hearts and souls,
we cry to You.

Turning our thoughts to those we love, near and far,
we take comfort that we do not travel through this world on our own,
for we have companions, friends and family who stay close,
and more so we remember Your promise,
"Lo I am with you to the close of the world".

We wait upon You
in the right time
in this safe space.
Out of the depths of our hearts and souls,
we cry to You.

Because above all we know You listen
to all that matters in our lives.
Because You do not hold our failings against us,
but see our best,
and forgive us when we stray.
You give us the confidence to share our vulnerability,
to open up in the confidence that You will heal our wounds.

We wait upon You
in the right time
in this safe space.
Out of the depths of our hearts and souls,
we cry to You.

Because we believe You watch over
and witness all that happens in our lives.
Because we believe You not only listen
but You can shape and sculpt our lives
so that we may walk closer,
love deeper
and behave more like You would have us.

Because we believe that even though
we incline to go our own way
still You are our constant and lasting hope.

We wait upon You
in the right time
in this safe space.
Out of the depths of our hearts and souls,
we cry to You.

Thanksgiving

We give You thanks and praise at all times
O God our Maker and Redeemer,
for you are the Creator of all
and the one who fills us with hope.
You have brought us from death to life
and from darkness into Your light,
through the Resurrection of Your Son, Jesus.
He was put to death on the cross by those who feared Him
and whose hearts were filled
with jealousy, anger and hatred.
Yet You raised Him from the tomb
that we might all be saved, and brought safely
into Your kingdom of joy and peace.

We thank You that in Jesus
we have seen Your promise
of fullness of life for all peoples
made flesh and come among us,
and that in Him
we see what we must do
to bring your peace and justice to this world
through the proclamation of the gospel
in word and action.

To You we lift up our hearts, O God,
and give You thanks and praise
through Jesus Christ, who with You
and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns
one God, now and for ever, Amen.

Confession

God of Compassion and mercy
we turn to You in confession,
seeking Your healing for our broken lives
and our broken world.

We acknowledge before You
and in the presence of our sisters and brothers,

that we have not listened for Your word,
neither have we obeyed Your commands
to love as we have been loved;
to seek Your peace, and the unity of the church;
to forgive as we pray we may be forgiven.

We have allowed distrust and fear to rule our heart
and diminish our lives,
and have created division and hurt
when we should have sought each other's good.

Forgive us all that is past,
and renew us for all that lies ahead
reconciling us with each other
and with You, our God.

The Good News is this:
Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation;
who we have been is gone; who we are yet to be,
God is revealing to us day by day,
as we are shaped by the knowledge
of God's mercy and reconciling love.
Know that in Jesus' name you are forgiven,
and be at peace.

Intercession

(If you wish, the congregation can sing a Taizé *Kyrie Eleison* after each petition)

God our Father and our Mother,
You gather us into the communion of Your church:
give us life by Your love.

God, our loving Parent,
You never take back Your call and Your gifts:
give us life by Your love.

Son of the living God,
Your faithfulness enables us to remain always faithful to You:
give us life by Your love.

Holy Spirit,
in our lives You stimulate a desire for peace and justice:
give us life by Your love.

Holy Spirit,
Your road leads us towards all who suffer in our society:
give them life by Your love

Holy Spirit,
You have placed gifts in our hearts to make us creators of communion:
give us life by Your love

Or

For peace throughout the world,
especially in the Middle East, in Sudan and South Sudan, in North-East Asia,
for the victims of war, violence and oppression, for refugees,
Lord, we pray.

For all those who work for peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula,
for the separated families in North and South Korea,
especially for those who are old and sick,
Lord, we pray.

For the people of North Korea, for our Christian sisters and brothers,
for the churches in Pyongyang and house churches throughout that country,
for the Korean Christian Federation and its leaders,
Lord, we pray.

That we may learn to share more fairly the resources of our planet among all,
Lord, we pray.

That we may find light and courage in the mystery of communion that is the Church,
Lord, we pray.

Musical suggestions

Songs of the World Church and for mission

- CH4 787 – “May the Lord mighty God” – A stunning, hauntingly beautiful melody from Asia that brings alive the ancient words of the Aaronic Blessing from Numbers 6:24. A short song that longs for God’s protection, which can be used with prayers.
- CH4 275 – “Come now, O Prince of Peace”
- CH4 252 – “As a fire is meant for burning”
- CH4 572 – “So much wrong and so much injustice”

Songs of spiritual depths

- CH4 87 – “Lord, from the depths to thee I cried” – This comes from the tradition of the Scottish Psalter, and as a congregational song you may enjoy a verse or two sung unaccompanied, to hear in its rawness the human voice.
- CH4 782 – “Lord of Life, we come to You”
- CH4 537 – “We do not hope to ease our minds” (especially verse 2)
- CH4 536 – “May the mind of Christ my Saviour”

Songs for peace

- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace” – The famous words of the prayer of St Francis of Assisi never tire and always inspire hope.
- CH4 259 – “Beauty for brokenness”
- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations”
- CH4 707 – “Healing river of the Spirit”
- CH4 786 – “May the God of Peace go with us”
- “Let there be peace on earth (by Jill Jackson-Miller and Sy Miller) – can be found on the internet

Songs of grief

- CH4 726 – “When we are living, we are in the Lord” – This lovely Spanish traditional melody and Mexican lyrics conveys a trust and surrender that in all of living and in all of dying we belong to God.
- CH4 686 – “God weeps” (as an anthem)
- CH4 168 – “God weeps”
- “O Lord hear my prayer” (Taizé chant)
O Lord, hear my prayer,
O Lord, hear my prayer;
when I call answer me.
O Lord, hear my prayer,
O Lord, hear my prayer;
come and listen to me.
O Lord, hear my prayer,
O Lord, hear my prayer;
when I call answer me.
O Lord, hear my prayer,
O Lord, hear my prayer;
come and listen to me.
Let there be peace on earth