

# starters for Sunday

## *Second Sunday after Epiphany*

**17 January 2016**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr Abi T Ngunga, Minister of Newton Wallacetown, for his thoughts on the second Sunday after Epiphany.

### **Contents**

Isaiah 62: 1-5 .....	2
Psalms 36: 5-10.....	3
1 Corinthians 12: 1-11.....	4
John 2: 1-11 .....	4
Sermons ideas.....	5
Prayers.....	7
Musical Suggestions.....	9
Additional Resources.....	10



## 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 62: 1-5](#)

These five verses, which look forward to Zion/Jerusalem's salvation being accomplished and bestowed, are part of a small section (Isaiah 61: 10 - 62: 12) that can be entitled "See, your Saviour comes!" (62: 11). The section itself belongs to a series of speeches from a large section of this book of Isaiah (beginning at 49: 14 ending with chapter 66) that brings reassurance to Zion/Jerusalem's future restoration from her ruins by ending her exile. While it is true that Zion/Jerusalem was forsaken (because of her rejection of God's messengers and his words that resulted in her being carried into exile (see 2 Chronicles 36: 15-20) as echoed in her complaint (49: 14), nevertheless, according to Yahweh her Redeemer, it was not true that she was forgotten (see 49: 15-18; also 54: 7-8). Her restoration to glory features prominently throughout that large section, ending with a vision of something even more wonderful as Yahweh is going to create new heavens and a new earth (see 65: 17-25; 66: 22)!

It is within these immediate and large contexts that our reading (62: 1-5) is to be understood. One of the key issues in seeking its interpretation is to identify first and foremost who the speaker is. Sudden shifts in speakers even within a small passage are not unusual in Isaiah, as in the case within 61:10 - 62:12. While "Zion's personified" is seen most probably as the speaker of 61: 10-11 (although there is a lack of explicit indication expressed within the text), commentators are divided when it comes to 62: 1-5. Some point to the prophet Isaiah himself as the speaker. Here he is seen as uttering a single voice praying for Jerusalem, for nations and kings to see Zion/Jerusalem's salvation and righteousness (vv.1-3). Others, however, are of the opinion that it is Yahweh who is speaking. This is perhaps more plausible, bearing in mind that the phrases: "I will not keep silent" and "I will not remain quiet" (v.1) can be understood as Yahweh's reverse action now, when at times he had been silent (see 42: 14; 57: 11; also 64: 12). Given this view then, for the sake of Zion/Jerusalem, Yahweh is determined to see her coming glory (vv.1-3).



This glory is revealed in both the shining of “her righteousness” like the dawn (v.1a) and “her salvation” like a blazing torch (v.1b), as well as in her being called by a “new name” (v.2; also v.4), her receiving of a new status and destiny (cf. Genesis 17: 5,15; 35: 10-11; Matthew 16: 17-19) and her being crowned with “splendour” and “royal dignity” (v.3). The reasons given for Yahweh’s ceaseless actions for Zion/Jerusalem’s sake (v.1), including all the changes to be made in her - changes related to her new names (vv.2-3) are none other than that Zion/Jerusalem’s sons will marry, ie they will be committed to the covenant relationship with Yahweh (v.5a) and that Yahweh will rejoice over the transformed Zion/Jerusalem (v.5b; v.4b).

### **Psalm 36: 5-10**

This text immediately follows David’s oracle [a revelation from God, in which he is given some insight into the characteristic and behaviour of the wicked (Psalm 36: 1-4)]; and comes directly before his prayer for both Yahweh’s people that they continue to know his steadfast love (v.10) and for himself that he will be protected from the wicked/proud (v.11), whose fate is stated in the closing verse of this psalm (ie v.12). That is to say that the reading under consideration (ie vv.5-10 as a passage that should normally end at v.9) is sandwiched between David’s oracle and his prayer.

In this reading, David as the servant of Yahweh (see the heading of this psalm; cf. Psalm 18 as the only other place within the Psalms where the heading also contains the phrase “David the servant of the Lord”), who knows Yahweh and describes himself also as an upright in heart (v. 10), takes any reader of this passage to see God’s immeasurable attributes (vv.5-6). These are set in stark contrast to the depravity of the wicked. David explicitly mentions four of them:

1. Yahweh’s love (v.5a)
2. Yahweh’s faithfulness (v.5b)
3. Yahweh’s righteousness (v.6a)
4. Yahweh’s justice (v.6b).

Each of these is reach in meaning if one were to study them as David himself struggles to find words to describe them. In addition to these four attributes, David also reveals implicitly other characteristic of God (see v.6b; 7b; 8a; 8b; 9a; and 9b). Above all, it is the thought of Yahweh’s



“unfailing love” (the Hebrew word “*hesed*”, which is not simply love, but love with super-glue on it; or, as in the words of a Glaswegian hymn writer—George Matheson, “Love that wilt not let me go”!) which takes David’s breath away as he ponders on all Yahweh’s characteristics mentioned here. He further describes this love (“*hesed*”) as “priceless!” (v.7a). It is this love that David pleads Yahweh to continue to pour out on those who know him (v.10).

### [1 Corinthians 12: 1-11](#)

The opening verses of this chapter, together with 12: 12 - 14: 40 bring to light a major problem that faced the Corinthians church then. These verses are perhaps better to be read as an exposition on “the spiritual” or simply “spiritual experiences” (note the absence of word “*gifts*” in v. 1 in the original text!). The believers of this church misunderstood “spiritual experiences”, which they associated with the more noteworthy spiritual gifts. After reminding them that not every claim to religious frenzy is necessarily Christian (vv.1-3), Paul as the apostle of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2; also 2 Corinthians 1:1) goes on to explain the spiritual gifts in more detail (vv.4-11). He does so by underlining four important things. First, he helps his readers to see the inclusive scope of the [Spirit’s] gifts-of-grace (*charismaton*, see v.4). This is made clear as one reads the following terms: “in all men” (v.6) and “to each one” (v.7 and v.11). Second, the apostle draws their attention to the rich diversity and use of these gifts (see the expression “different kinds of gifts” in v.4). Third, he reminds them that the Spirit is sovereign in giving these gifts “to each one, just as he determines” (v.11). Last but not least, he spells out clearly the intended invariable purpose of these gifts (see the phrase “for the common gifts” in v.7), ie for the edification of the church and the advancement of God’s kingdom.

### [John 2: 1-11](#)

As per its heading in the NIV (and in many other English translations), the passage before us speaks of Jesus being at a wedding where he turned water into wine. This, according to the last verse of it, was “the first of his miraculous signs [in the presence of his disciples], Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee” (v.11). It is important to remember that, all the miraculous signs (including this one) recorded in John “were written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing we may have life in his name” (20: 30-31). This intended aim



is also obvious even in this first miracle as John writes at the end of this account that “He [ie Jesus] thus revealed his *glory*, and his disciples *put their faith in him*” (2: 11).

While this was the end product of this miraculous signs, Jesus is seen here as one who *sustained the joy* of this very important occasion as the running out of the wine at a wedding festivity like this (which lasted for seven days, cf. Genesis 29: 27; Judges 14: 17) would be a serious embarrassment to the bridegroom and his family who were responsible for providing the food and drink. One of the pictures that any reader of this account is left with is that of seeing Jesus as a Saviour who meets, in His time, the crucial daily needs of people wherever they are.

## Sermons ideas

With the thoughts related to the celebration of Epiphany a few days ago still fresh in the mind of many, it might be possible to focus only on either the major theme - “See, your Saviour comes!” - as pointed out while studying the passage from Isaiah, or the idea of Jesus coming (as per invitation) to bring transformation to life itself as well as to its crucial events which (as displayed in the text of John’s Gospel) could end up in chaos, embarrassment and disaster if his presence is not needed.

In both of these topics, of course each taken in its own right and context, there are massive changes (that can be traced as you look at each text closely) associated with the idea of the Saviour coming! In this way, your sermon will help your audience or the congregation, not only to keep on focusing their attention on the taught related to Epiphany or the manifestation of God (through the Saviour) to our world of need and impending chaos/disaster or longing for redemption, but also to see some of the wonderful effects to be wrought upon it.

Another approach would be to offer a solid exposition of the attributes of God (ie the nature and character of Yahweh), which were briefly outlined in our study of the Psalm 36. This could be a challenge as there is a temptation in thinking that such a discourse could be a waste of time, given the assumption that, as J I Packer says, “a study of the nature and character of God will be unpractical and irrelevant for life” (see J I Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 17). However, such an exposition could be so rewarding. For it could help strengthen your audience/congregation/church (where people are filled with a modern mind/spirit that, again as Packer correctly sees it, “spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts



of God”). For, as Packer goes on to argue that “ignorance of God - ignorance both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him - lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today” (see Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 8). Besides this outcome, your audience will also be able to see, paraphrasing a statement from Dale Ralph Davis, that “Yahweh is so much more than they at first realise or can express!” (see Dale Ralph Davis, *Slogging Along in the Paths of Righteousness, Psalms 13-24*, p. 90). This will, ultimately, help people develop an exuberant love for God.

One may also be interested in tracing one or two particular link between all of these readings set for this Sunday. Although this approach can be demanding, one possible idea from these readings that one might explore is that of Divine Trinity. In other words, one might look at the thought of the “unfailing love” (*hesed*) of God (as implicitly and explicitly spoken of in both the Isaiah passage and that the Psalm respectively) linked to both the idea of the “coming of the Saviour” (as predicted to some degree in the passage of Isaiah understood in its immediate and large context; and seen in action in the text from John’s Gospel) and that of the work of the Holy Spirit in the passage of 1 Corinthians 12. Given this approach, the trio (or the Three Persons in One) will be viewed as being in action with a single goal, namely our salvation and the perfection of the church.

Last but not least, it might also be possible to focus mainly on the text from 1 Corinthians. If one chooses this approach, then this is a given opportunity, besides Pentecost Sunday, to look at an aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit! It has been observed that this is a neglected subject, especially within our Reformed tradition and yet it is an important one as we hear from Pope John before he died saying that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is “a church doctrine most needed reemphasis today”. The same thought was articulated by the noted Swiss Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, as he expressed without hesitation that the next emphasis on theology should be that of the Holy Spirit. As stated in the study of our text from 1 Corinthians, a proper understanding and exercise of the Spirit’s gifts-of-grace would definitely lead to the edification of the church and the advancement of God’s kingdom.



## Prayers

### Gathering

Loving God, as we gather today in this place,

We thank you for your unfailing love

We pray that we may be rooted and established in your love.

We pray that we have power, together with all the saints,

to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and

to know this love that surpasses knowledge –that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of you.

### Morning Prayer from Living Stones week 5

Sometimes, Lord, it seems

my faith is mere gravel flying against the wind

of lovelessness and pain.

Yet You have chosen and placed me here;

laid Your grace deep within my being

used my fragments in Your kingdom-building plan

I pray, Lord, that today

even my shakiest stones

might be a safe place for others to tread

In Jesus's name. Amen

### Meditation from Living Stones week 38

A church becomes a night club

or furniture salesroom

What's the difference?

We fill ourselves with whatever

scraps we can find:

dance-high or perfect home



through which we twist  
our mortal bodies

We boogie in one shadow  
of death or another  
We eke out personal hollows  
*My God, my God, why  
Have You forsaken me?*  
We are dead stones  
shouting aloud psalms  
of protest and abandon.

But that voice shouting  
is the death of Jesus  
so that His life may also  
be seen in our bodies.

#### **Before the Sermon – from hymn MP 545**

Open our eyes, Lord  
We want to see Jesus—  
to reach out and touch Him  
and say that we love Him  
Open our ears, Lord,  
and help us to listen:  
O open our eyes, Lord,  
We want to see Jesus!

#### **Blessings**

May the God answer you when you are in distress  
May His love continue to be shown to you  
May He protect you and send you help from the Sanctuary





And now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,  
 according to his power that is at work within us,  
 To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,  
 for ever and ever! Amen.



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *Living Stones* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2015. *Living Stones* is available from [St Andrew Press](http://www.standrewpress.co.uk).

## Musical Suggestions

CH4 28	Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens
CH4 111	Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty
CH4 132	Immortal, invisible, God only wise
CH4 167	Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah
CH4 192	All my hope on God is founded
CH4 320	Joy to the world the Lord is come!
CH4 559	There is a Redeemer
CH4 595	O Breath of life, come sweeping through us
CH4 619	Spirit of the Living God



## 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 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 Dr Abi T Ngunga 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.*

