
Welcome to Professions of Faith. These notes and reflections are offered as a resource for preachers, leaders and clergy to provide ideas and suggestions for how Sunday worship can relate to the working lives of a congregation. They seek to offer connections between the set lectionary readings for the day and key workplace themes. We recognise that these do not always represent the key thrust of the passages, or indeed the intent of including them within the lectionary schedule. They are offered as a companion for more overtly exegetical and liturgical resources, and while every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the Biblical references, we can accept no responsibility for errors or omissions, and recommend the use of recognised publications produced for that purpose.

February 7th - Last Sunday after Epiphany

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

Holiness and the glory of God are the defining themes of today's readings. At first sight, these might appear to point us away from the mundane and everyday of life to seek higher spiritual plains. But throughout these readings there is an inescapable connection with the world around us. Moses radiates the holiness of God, but he appears with the tablets of the law in his hands - a law that engages with scores of everyday issues and situations, that embraces the working lives of God's people; their land, livelihoods and every other aspect of being. Peter is keen to build shelters and preserve the moment of glory when Jesus is transfigured, but their focus is quickly returned to the realities that surround them.

Our encounters with a Holy God are not a means of escape from life's challenges and experience, but are intended to equip us to engage with them afresh. As Paul reminds his readers, our faith is displayed not by removing ourselves from the world around us, but engaging in its endeavours with values and attitudes that are shaped and defined by the faith that we share. We persevere without losing heart, renounce that which is shameful, refuse to practice cunning and live by the truth. Holiness is not expressed by removing ourselves from this world, but by living differently within it; our workplaces might be one of the most challenging environments in which to fulfil that calling, but can also be the place where it becomes most evident.

February 14th - First Sunday in Lent

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

The Old Testament passage roots today's readings in the world of work. The workforce of an agricultural community present before God the most vital outcome of their skills and enterprise - the first-fruits and seed-crop of next year's harvest. This is a recognition of God's provision and a declaration of faith, expressed through the symbols of work and fulfilled through the success of their endeavours. It is a condemnation and rejection of work being used a tool of oppression and a celebration of work that provides well-being and prosperity for the community as a whole. The people come together to celebrate their shared success, they do not worship as individuals set against one another in competition. The applications for today's world of work are numerous.

We are called to celebrate and recognise successful outcomes and prosperity as a gift from God.

We are invited to place our trust in God, above our own resourcefulness and acumen.

We can recognise how work and worship can be deeply connected and interdependent.

We can challenge and condemn situations where work remains a tool of oppression and injustice.

The reading from Psalms echoes the realities that are expressed through the enacted sacrifice of the early Israelite community, and also provides a context for Jesus' temptations. Echoing the reflections from Jeremiah earlier in the month, we might recognise how Jesus too, takes time to seek out the will of the Father at the outset of his ministry

and vocation. He is tempted to choose pathways that are expedient and deliver short term results, but they are not the directions of God's purpose. Like the Old Testament people before him, he puts the will and purpose of God above earthly values. The success of our working lives lies in the hands of our Creator and Provider, today's readings present an opportunity to embrace this reality afresh.

February 21st - Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

The Old Testament account from the life of Abram is in many ways an enactment of the key themes from last week's readings. Like the Israelite farmers, he is invited to look to God for his security and assurance, fulfilled for him not through successful harvest, but the promise of a son and countless descendants. Like Jesus, he is faced with the temptation of achieving these ends through means other than those that accord with God's purpose, but God makes His promise real through the ritual of covenant. This is further reflected in the language of the Psalm, the writer seeks his strength and security from God, yet salvation is assured "in the land of the living;" within the realities of this life, not simply the promises of the next. To "dwell in the house of the Lord" is not perceived as finding a place of escape, but being surrounded by hope in the face of enemies and accusers.

The New Testament readings serve as a powerful reminder that our faith is called to be lived out in the "real world". Whatever we make of them, the Pharisees were the product of a culture in which religious leadership and political responsibility were seen as belonging hand in hand. The fact that Herod is disturbed and concerned by the ministry of Jesus further underlines this - Jesus is no mere shaper of religious opinion, his teachings and actions impact the political arena. The Epistle warns us against making a God of the things of this world - offering a clear challenge to some of the aims and values that prevail within the world of business and commerce; our calling is to live as citizens of heaven within the activities of earth. A congregation might usefully pause to reflect on their Monday to Saturday lifestyle and responsibilities and ask themselves the question - *what does it mean to live as a citizen of heaven within my own work context?*

February 24th – Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

The story of Moses at the burning bush is foundational in the faith journey of God's people; God the nation builder reveals Himself as God the Redeemer, commissioning Moses to lead the Israelites from slavery to a land of promise. What might not be immediately noticed is that this encounter takes place while Moses is at work, tending the flocks of his father in law as part of a community of nomadic shepherds. Some might argue that this story diminishes the place of daily work - Moses is called from this task to a more "spiritual" vocation; but this misses some important realities. It is through working as a shepherd that Moses has matured as an individual, and perhaps it is no coincidence that David and other later leaders, reflect on the lessons learned as a shepherd in their leadership of the people of God and nurturing their own relationship with Him. For a community of people to travel through the harsh desert landscape would require a leader who was familiar with it and used to surviving there; Moses' work was important in God's purposes. The Gospel reading is also rooted in a workplace situation as two growers discuss how they might respond to a tree that has not yielded - there are obvious deeper meanings to this, but it is the world of work that provides the backdrop to understanding God's purposes. Reflecting on these realities a congregation might be asked to consider:

Where might you encounter God within your workplace?

Whatever we make of the burning bush - what might God need to do to catch our attention while we are at work?

What lessons and images might we encounter at work that help us better understand the nature and purposes of God?