

Professions of Faith

Exploring workplace themes in the Revised Common
Lectionary



June 2015

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 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 intended 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.

June 7th – Second Sunday after Pentecost

1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15); Psalm 138 ; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35
(alternatives **Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130**)

Both of today's Old Testament readings might be seen as portraying work in a mixed light. Continuing a Royal theme, Samuel warns the people that if they pursue their course of appointing a king, many of their daily labours will become engaged in supporting the monarchy. The list of professions extends from perfumers to olive growers and conscript soldiers - here is a simple reminder of the range of professions and responsibilities that is likely to reside in any worshipping congregation. But this is not so much a dismissal of work as a necessary evil to support a civic order, but a recognition that the decisions people make about civic and royal affairs will impact their working lives. There is more than an echo that the re-ordering of work and taxation under an earthly king is a reflection of how people should have responded to God's Kingship - thus there is a reminder to a contemporary congregation therefore that their working lives should be influenced by their sense of being citizens of God's Kingdom.

Adam encounters God in his workplace, yet through human failure, it is no longer a place of idyllic partnership with the Divine, but somewhere to feel ashamed. Because of what has happened, work will take on a very different identity in future. This might give cause to reflect on what aspects of work we might want to "hide away" from God; as people described as a "new creation", in what ways are we called to challenge and transform the world of work to restore it to God's intent?

The Psalms offer themselves as a means of expression for a shared commitment to place God above all things in our daily lives. The New Testament readings are a reminder that our hope, our purpose and our identity are in Christ; thus they offer a simple question - how will this affect that way I go about things on Monday morning?

June 14th – Third Sunday after Pentecost

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17; Mark 4:26-34
(Alternatives: **Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14**)

There is a very strong message in today's reading of new beginnings and new possibilities. Those who have used the Samuel reading the previous Sunday might note that Samuel, initially opposed to a monarchy, has now embraced the change and is "grieving" for a king who has lost his way. God calls him to anoint a new King. The prophet Ezekiel speaks from a very different place in Israel's history, but using poetic language of new shoots and saplings, explores a similar theme, anticipating an era of change. This might provide opportunity to reflect on contemporary examples of companies who have adapted to new technologies and developed their products or production techniques accordingly - there might be people from the world of business and industry who could share first-hand experiences of this. A congregation might also reflect on some of the new companies that have grown up and become established by embracing or offering new opportunities and experiences, or indeed those who have failed to adapt and gone under. There is opportunity here to pray for those who are facing change at

work, some perhaps struggling to cope with difficult decisions and expectations. Focussing more specifically on the story of David, there is scope to pray for those involved in recruitment; those looking for or anticipating new jobs, or indeed those faced with broader decisions that might seek the wisdom of a God who “*does not look only on the outside*”.

The Gospel reading has a clear workplace theme; like many parables of Jesus, these two stories are rooted in the working lives of the people around Him. There is an obvious application that no matter how hard we work and toil, we are ultimately reliant on the God who is creator and sustainer of all things.

At times as a Gospel community, we might feel quite overwhelmed by the world of work and commerce, where often large companies and corporations are depicted as being beyond influence and wielding unassailable power. The story of the mustard seed is a story of hope in such circumstances. People of faith may wonder what impact they have within the world; we can easily believe that our acts of righteousness are hidden and unnoticed, yet never imagine or know how they will take root and grow. This is an encouragement to live and act in faith rather than by obvious results, in every aspect of our daily lives.

June 21st - Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

(Alternatives: 1 Samuel 17:57-18:5, 10-16; Psalm 133 or Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32)

The story of David and Goliath is probably one of the best known in Scripture and is referenced in two of the Old Testament readings for today. It is a difficult story in our contemporary world; God’s presence and anointing results in one man being able to kill another. We might remind ourselves that this story belongs in a particular context, and that in Christ we believe there is fulfilment of the prophet’s words that “nation shall not take up sword against nation”. Yet for all that reality, we live in a world that is still wracked by war, and often there are difficult and troubling decisions that have to be made, even by those committed to peace. A congregation might pause to pray today for the trouble spots of the world, and particularly those military forces and commanders who are seeking to bring peace and provide safety.

With due sensitivity to its context, the story of David speaks of how he is equipped for the task through his daily work as a shepherd boy. A congregation might pause to reflect on how God has equipped them to serve the purposes of His kingdom through the skills and experiences that have been gained in the workplace. David’s whole life experience is a powerful reminder that any distinction between our faith identity and the work that we do is a false one.

The Gospel reading locates the disciples in a situation that for a number of them would have been familiar to their working lives. But they face storm that leaves even experienced fishermen terrified. Jesus has power to rebuke and calm the elements, begging the question “Who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?” There is a powerful reminder in this statement that whatever our profession, Jesus is its Lord. Yet for all this display of awesome ability, Jesus challenges his disciples, asking whether it was not sufficient that he was simply with them in the boat. For many in our congregations, work might be a torrid and stormy place; many might earnestly desire a pronouncement from Jesus that makes all things safe and calm - this story invites us to trust and find our peace from knowing He is with us, whatever the conditions.

June 28th – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

(Alternatives Lamentations 3:21-33; or Psalm 30)

The Old Testament reading records the words of public mourning that David intoned following the death of Saul and Jonathan. The various Psalms express in similar ways the sense of God’s presence in situations of struggle and despair. One way of engaging with these Scriptures might be to emphasise the importance and power of words,

reflecting perhaps on great orators or famous phrases that have inspired or come to be associated with great moments or movements in history. This provides opportunity to recognise those for whom words are an important part of their working life: authors, poets, playwrights, speech-writers, journalists and similar professions. We might also think of those who, like David, provide words on our behalf to help us better express our feelings and emotions at significant moments and events. Words continue to play an important role in our world; how and when they are shared is vital. David commanded that the words of his lament be taught to all of the people of Judah; there are those who disseminate words in our world today, printers and publishers; broadcasters and editors. A congregation might also reflect on the impact that words have in everyday life; words spoken to colleagues and neighbours can build up or destroy; some might at times feel under pressure to say things or portray issues in ways that are not entirely honest. The Gospel reading offers a powerful climax to this theme - the words of Jesus "Talitha cum" bring life - amidst the millions of pages of words that are available to us today, via the internet, printed resources, books, leaflets and brochures, the life changing and life-bringing words of Jesus can still cut through them all.

Engaging more directly with the texts - there are clear experiences of bereavement, suffering, death and fear of death. So a congregation might be invited to pray and offer affirmation for those whose working roles provide support and comfort for individuals in such circumstances.

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