

Worship with the Gospels - LUKE

Background: These resources were first produced by Clare Amos for 'Partners in Learning' an ecumenical resource of learning resources for all ages based on the lectionary readings and themes. They have been adapted here as a resource to encourage congregations to bring 'the particular interests, topics and concerns of each gospel writer' into our worship. We would be delighted if you want to use and adapt the material for use in worship or in Christian education. Please can you ensure that Clare and The Bible in the Life of the Church project are credited

Series Introduction

We have four gospels, each of which sheds different light on our portrait of Jesus. In these resources for worship we seek to experience the feel of each of the gospels, enjoying them as we use them to lead us closer to God in worship. The philosophy that undergirds these resources is that there should not be a rigid separation in church life between 'worship' and 'learning' and that ideally worship can be a means and tool for learning about the Christian faith.

The resources explore each of the gospels within the context of worship. It is one of the glories of the Christian faith that the story of Jesus is told in four different gospels - the words of each emphasizing different features of the portrait of Jesus - whose portrait they are all seeking to paint. Way back in the early history of the Christian church Irenaeus, one of the greatest theologians of the second century AD, commented that it was appropriate for the church to have four (rather than one) gospels because there are 'four winds' and 'four corners of the earth'. And though today we might put things slightly differently - none the less Irenaeus' words, though quaint, have a ring of truth. The person of Jesus Christ is so multi-faceted and so compelling that no one human author could hope to give us a total picture. We need the different insights of the four gospel writers to fill in the brush strokes and varied hues and colours that would be too great a task for one writer alone.

Taking the gospels into our worship

So each of these four resource outlines takes one of the gospels and looks at the particular interests, topics and concerns of that gospel writer. But we do so in what we believe is a particularly unusual and creative way. We use the topics and interests of that gospel writer to provide the actual structure for worship. As the worship develops we travel with that gospel writer through his presentation of the life of Jesus. In doing this we believe we are being true to the purpose of the gospel writers. They were not interested in writing a narrowly 'historical' life of Jesus. Instead they wanted their readers to soak themselves in the story of Jesus in such a way that they too became part of that story, positioning themselves alongside Jesus' first disciples, and equally so that the life of Jesus did not remain as something in the past, but became present and even future in the living experience and worship of the church.

There is a view held by some biblical scholars that the gospels themselves came to birth through the retelling of the story of Jesus in the weekly worship of the early church. Whether or not this is precisely true (and it may of course be true for some but not for others) the structure of the gospels does resonate with the typical pattern of Christian worship: beginning with a call of challenge, they then present the good news of what God has done in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and finally move towards commissioning the disciples to go out and continue the ministry of Jesus in their own lives.



What each writer tells us about the Eucharist

At the heart of our worship, and a model established by Jesus himself, is the service of Communion or the Eucharist. So perhaps it is not surprising that as we explore the gospels through worship we find ourselves led each week towards a celebration of Communion, and have the chance to discover the distinctive insights that the individual gospel writers have to share about this central act of Christian worship.

- **In Mark** we discover that Communion leads us back to remember more deeply the death of Christ and live the marks of the Cross in our own lives.
- **In Luke** we are encouraged to experience Communion as a sign of the hospitality and fellowship that friends of the risen Jesus are called to show to each other.
- **In Matthew** we are helped to understand that Communion also has a forward looking emphasis - it is a foretaste of the heavenly feast with which God will one day feed all people.
- **In John** we see the church's celebration of Communion acts as a link between time and eternity.

The Communion focus of each week is not essential to the resources. Churches that would not wish to celebrate Communion each week can draw from the prayers and readings offered to develop an interesting theme that can teach a great deal about the special concerns of each of the gospel writers. While these resources are primarily about the four gospels churches that wish to explore together more deeply the meaning of Communion could also use them.

Each 'resource file' provides an overview of the way the gospel writer was trying to get his message across; ideas and suggestions for how these ideas might be incorporated into a Communion service; and suggestions for hymns, songs, prayers etc that might be used. As the original writing was for the British churches there may be better material for your context. These outlines are offered with the invitation to adapt them to your situation so that, wherever we are, we might hear Scripture speaking into our context more clearly.

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Luke - Supper on the Road

Overview of Luke's Gospel

Luke is perhaps the most obviously pictorial of the gospels, and was written by a consummate storyteller. It is no accident that the parables that people tend to love the most such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan are to be found in this gospel. His cherishing of the outsider or the downtrodden, whether they be Gentiles, Samaritans, women or the poor is another reason why this gospel is so loved. All these themes are picked up during the prayers this week.

But above all the worship attempts to suggest the way in which Luke's gospel is one act, albeit the central and key act, of a three-part drama. Luke both leads us back to the Old Testament, where he believes the gospel story has its roots, and encourages us to move onwards through the pages of the book of Acts and the story of the early church. (Luke of course is the author of Acts as well as of this gospel.) Light - an important motif for Luke - springs out of the pages of the Old Testament, and then is experienced in Jesus' life eg the story of Simeon, and in his resurrection, as the eyes of the disciples are opened on the road to Emmaus. Then this light flickers into the story of the early church: Saul-cum-Paul is temporarily blinded yet at the same time is 'enlightened'. The words that he hears during his conversion emphasise that his role will be to share this light among the nations (eg Acts 9.1-19, 22.3-16, 26.12-23). The main passages from Luke that we focus on this week are Luke 2.22-32, as Simeon sings that Jesus is 'a light to the nations', and the exquisite story of the meeting on the road to Emmaus and the supper at which the invited guest suddenly becomes the host (Luke 24.13-35). However as usual within this theme other biblical passages, from the Old Testament, the gospel itself and Acts are also referred to.

Taking Luke into our worship - some suggestions

The narrator plays a key role in this presentation - staying with the story from beginning to end as a continuity person. They will need to be somebody different from the minister presiding at Communion, since that person represents 'Jesus' and only appears later in the worship, walking towards the altar/communion table during the reading of the Emmaus story. In the first half of the service a number of people gather in a semi-circle surrounding the altar/communion table. They can help with the distribution when it is time for Communion.

As we will discover from this week's material a particular emphasis within Luke is to understand Communion as an expression of hospitality and a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. It is linked in his mind to the community and resurrection meals of the early Church that Luke tells us of in the first chapters of Acts. Luke believed Jesus was present with the community as they ate together, both as host and as an invisible guest. Such shared meals were one important way in which the mission of the church could be furthered.

Call to worship

Veni Creator Spiritus (from Taize - play a recording or sing. The table can be prepared for communion while this is happening.)



Introduction

This would be an appropriate point for the narrator to introduce the service theme so that from this point onwards the worship can 'flow' as smoothly as possible.

Prayer

Use a collect or prayer referring to Luke.

Bible reading

A reading based on the Old Testament, which is read by someone standing up in the middle of the congregation, who is holding a lit taper.

Voice:

This is the word of the prophet to a people who dwell in deep darkness:
Arise, Shine, for your light is come, O Jerusalem,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples,
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Hymn

Use an Advent-style hymn that includes the motif of light

During the singing the already lit taper is taken by the reader of the Old Testament reading to light a candle near to where the Luke 2 gospel will be read. It would be appropriate to place nearby either a nativity set or an icon picturing Mary.

Bible reading

The Narrator reads Luke 2.22-32 (or if wished to 2.38) standing at the lectern.

Prayers of confession

Narrator: Let us listen to Luke's voices of penitence

There was once a son who demanded his share of property from his Father, and journeyed to a far country, and squandered his property in loose living.....and there came a time of famine so great that he would gladly have eaten food fed to swine. But he came to himself and said:

Voice 1: *(in congregation)* 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and say to him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'



(moves forward to semi-circle)

Narrator: And he arose and came to his father, but while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. *(Voice 1 sits in semi-circle)*

Narrator: Also a Pharisee and a tax collector went into the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes, but beat his breast saying:

Voice 2: *(in congregation)* 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

Narrator: I tell you that this one went down to his house justified rather than the other. *(Voice 2 moves to semi-circle)*

All: Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done, through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love, and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who died for us,
forgive us all that is past, and lead us out from darkness to walk as children of light.

Prayers of intercession

Narrator: Let us listen to Luke's voices of prayer and petition. As Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath, he encountered a woman who had been bent over for 18 years: she could not straighten herself. And Jesus saw her and called her and said, 'Woman you are healed from your infirmity.' But the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath. *(Voice 3 moves to semi-circle)*

Voice 3: Let us pray for the sick and the suffering, for those with physical and mental infirmities.

Let us also pray for ourselves as members of the Church, that we may not hinder the gospel of good news and liberation, that we may never try and bind those whom Christ would set free.
Lord in your mercy:

All: Hear our prayer.

Narrator: Jesus entered a village, and Martha and Mary received him into their house. Martha was distracted by much serving, while Mary sat at the Lord's feet. The Lord loved Martha for her anxiety and her care, yet he also said: 'One thing is needful, Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.'*(Voices 4 and 5 move to semi-circle)*

Voice 4: Let us pray for women everywhere, but especially for those who know poverty, who live in places where a woman's lot consists of grinding hardship.

Voice 5: Let us pray also for ourselves, giving thanks that we have time to listen to the word of



God, and asking that we may gradually deepen our own lives of prayer, and learn more of stillness, and listening and waiting. Lord in your mercy:

All: Hear our prayer.

Narrator: Now a traveller was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among thieves and was robbed and left for dead. A priest went by, and also a Levite, and they passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed had compassion, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and brought him to an inn and took care of him . Which of the three, priest, Levite or Samaritan was neighbour to the man who fell among thieves? (*Voice 6 moves to semi-circle*)

Voice 6: Let us pray for the victims of this world's violence and extortion, for the homeless and the stranger. Let pray for those from whom we expect hostility, but who can also surprise us by their kindness.

Let us pray also for ourselves, that we may minister to others in such a way that traditional barriers may be broken down, rather than erected. Let us give thanks for this story, and its power throughout history to change people's lives. Lord in your mercy:

All: Hear our prayer.

Narrator: And as he came into sight of Jerusalem, Jesus wept over it and said , 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But no, it is hidden from your sight. Truly, you never knew the time of your visitation.'

Voice 7: Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem, city called to be a vision of peace, yet so often a theatre of war. Let us pray for all the peoples of the Middle East.

Let us pray for those things which Jerusalem represents so powerfully , humanity's yearning quest for God, which can so easily be perverted by humanity's desire for possession. Jerusalem was the place where God was crucified by the desires and aspirations and passionately held beliefs of men. Let us pray for ourselves that we may not share in crucifying Christ anew. Lord in your mercy:

All: Hear our prayer.

Narrator: And as Jesus was being led out to be crucified, a great multitude of women followed weeping and lamenting him. And he said to them , 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children: for if they do this when the wood is green , what will happen when it is dry?'

Voice 8: Let us pray that we will never be afraid to weep when we encounter injustice and suffering. May our tears release and heal the hard and bitter memories, the hardened hearts. May we sow in tears, so that we can begin to reap the joy of transformation and of resurrection. Lord in your mercy:

All: Hear our prayer.

Silence, leading straight in to the following hymn:



Hymn: *When I survey the wondrous cross*

Bible reading *(This follows immediately after the hymn)*

Narrator: On the evening of the first day of the week two of them were going to a village named Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. *(Cleopas and Cleopas' friend move forward.)* While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. *(The minister representing Jesus moves behind the other two).* But their eyes were kept from recognising him.

Jesus: 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?'

Narrator: Then one of them named Cleopas answered

Cleopas: Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

Jesus: What things?

Cleopas' friend: Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early this morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see.

Jesus: O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

('Jesus', Cleopas and friend move nearer to altar)

Narrator: And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him:

Cleopas: Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.

Narrator: So he went in to stay with them *(Jesus, Cleopas and friend move behind altar)*. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him...
('Jesus' holds up communion plate and cup)

Candles on the altar/communion table can now be lit (perhaps by the Narrator) from the light previously lit. The Narrator now disappears from view until near the end of the service.

Jesus: May the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calls you, who also will do it.



Let us greet one another with a sign of peace.

After the giving of the peace the minister moves straight into the Communion Prayer. If there are alternative prayers that can be used pick one that best fits the theme and 'feel' of the service.

(We suggest that all those sitting in the semi-circle are asked to help with the distribution of communion.)

Possible hymn during Communion

Each human life has joys to share.
Like wine our lives brim in the cup:
But matched with them are pains to bear,
Rough, broken bread we gather up.

These things which make your life and mine
Were changed by Jesus when he said
His love was flowing in the wine,
His body broken in the bread.

In his new Covenant we live
Transfigured by the Spirit's breath.
Scarred hands remake the gifts we give,
He fills our life, we die his death.

As he accepts the selves we bring
Our shadowed eyes awake to sight:
The cup becomes a healing spring
Our hands receive his glory's light.

(© Michael Hare Duke, Suggested tune: 'Folksong', HP,RS, AMNS)

After Communion

Narrator (*at back*): Now Paul was journeying to Damascus, with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday he saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round him and those who journeyed with him. And when he had fallen to the ground he heard a voice saying: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' And Saul said, 'Who are you Lord?' And the voice replied: 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet: for I have appointed you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and those in which I will appear to you. I am sending you to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.'

Sing a version of the Nunc Dimittis/Song of Simeon (e.g. Taize version) while the clergy, choir and other ministers leave.

