

Prisoners Week Worship Resources — Who do you say that I am? (2018)

1. Intro

Prisoners Week is an initiative of the Churches that aims to stimulate discussion, highlight concerns and share hope in prisons and communities across Scotland. It takes place in the third week of November, liturgically a month for remembering. The invitation is, in the words of the author to the letter of the Hebrews, to “remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them” (Hebrews 13:3, Good News Bible) together with all who are affected by imprisonment and crime.

Each year a different theme is chosen. The theme for 2018 is ‘Who do you say I am?’ Echoing the question Jesus asked of his disciples in Mark 8:29 it invites us to reflect on the significance of the labels, tags and names that other assign to us – and we assign to others. Sometimes they mean more than they should. Sometimes they are just downright wrong, even abusive. Reflecting on who we really are helps us to see ourselves in a positive light and encourages us to follow our dreams. Likewise, it helps us to see others in a different light.

Chaplaincy Teams, Prison Visitors Centres, and others arrange for both prison and community events during Prisoners Week and a wide range of events are organised. Many local community and prison events celebrate the week, ranging from Quiz Nights to Concerts, Discussion Groups to Worship Services, Inter-Faith visits to Coffee Mornings, art competitions to sports.

More details about Prisoners Week are available on the website www.prisonersweek.org.uk The website includes Prisoners Week information, a calendar of events, details of organisations that offer help and advice, discussion ideas, reflections, and worship resources which include prayers from the Christian and Islamic Faiths.

The Prisoners Week Planning Group includes Prison Chaplains and representatives of the Churches, The Society of Friends, Families Outside, The National Prison Visitor Centres’ Steering Group and Prison Fellowship. Prisoners Week Trust is a charity, registered in Scotland, No: SC043431

Although Prisoners Week lasts but seven days the hope is that these concerns carry forward through the year ahead and offer our communities and people affected by imprisonment and crime opportunities to reflect on developing the support that’s needed as people pick up the pieces again.

2. Scripture Passages Overview

Mark 8:27-33

Mark 6:1-6

See below under sermon ideas.

Psalm 139:13-18

This Psalm is often used to reassure people in prison of God’s presence with them no matter who they are and no matter what people say about them. Its roots are whole being in the creative and loving power of God. It assures us of his knowledge of our true selves and of his presence and care throughout our lives.

1 John 3:1 Children of God

This year’s Prisoners Week leaflet invites us to think about who we really are once we strip away all the labels, tags and names that others might call us. When we see ourselves as beloved children of God it gives us a whole new outlook on life.

3. Sermon Ideas

THE LION IN THE MARBLE

There was once a sculptor who worked hard with hammer and chisel on a large block of marble. A little child who was watching him saw nothing more than large and small pieces of stone falling away left and right. He had no idea what was happening. But when the boy returned to the studio a few weeks later, he saw, to his surprise, a large, powerful lion sitting in the place where the marble had stood. With great excitement, the boy ran to the sculptor and said, “*Sir, tell me, how did you know there was a lion in the marble?*”

It takes true vision, true sight, to see a person as God sees them. The story of the lion in the marble reminds us that God sees the potential in each of us and is able to bring forth that reality through his transforming love. People may look at us, people may look at a person convicted of a crime, we may look at others, and all we see is a lump of marble. We see a lump of marble with all its rough edges and unformed shape and call it just that 'a lump of stone', 'a piece of rock', 'a waste of space'. But words have power. Naming has power. Calling a person a criminal, a delinquent, a thug, a sex offender, or even worse, dehumanising them by calling them 'beasts', all of these, help give them a misshapen identity. What we call others helps shape their view of themselves and our view of their potential. By reflecting on who we are in God's sight is a good starting point for thinking about who others are in God's sight, and thus in ours.

So who are we? Here are just a few verses of many which help us think about our identity in Christ:

- Beloved children of God (1 John 3:1)
- God's workmanship, created in Christ to do good works that He has prepared for me to do (Ephesians 2:10).
- A new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- A joint-heir with Christ (Romans 8:17).
- More than a conqueror through Him who loves me (Romans 8:37).
- An ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20); part of a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people (1 Peter 2:9)
- Chosen by God, forgiven and justified through Christ. I have a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, meekness and patience (Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12).

Does seeing who we are in Christ change how we see others? Does it change what we say about them, about who they really are? What aspects of a person do we tend to focus on? What aspect do we tend to ignore?

Next time you see the picture of someone who has been sentenced to time in prison (on the news or in a newspaper), look at the face again and ask God who he says they are.

A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

The passage in Mark 6:1-6 is good for exploring the theme of 'who do you say that I am'. Perhaps Jesus had this incident in mind when he asked the disciples later on in Mark's Gospel (8:29) who they thought he was. Here are a few questions that the passage raises when thinking about what we think and say about people with convictions:

- What impact does the community have on a person's chances and opportunities for making a fresh start? The crowd obviously saw the gifts that Jesus brought and were astonished (6:2) and yet they let their prejudices and misconceptions get in the way. If you are an employer or

work in an organisation find out what the employment policy towards people with convictions is. What does this say about who we are? What would you like to see change?

- How difficult is it for a person to return to their home community even when they have served their sentence and have shown they wish to change their lives? Jesus had not done anything bad and yet even he was treated with scepticism. His actions were limited by the identity the crowd gave him:
 - a carpenter i.e. not educated, lower class
 - son of Mary i.e. a woman, a single mother (why not mention Joseph?)
 - a brother and sister of people they knew i.e. who does he think he is getting above his station?
- How do we limit the potential of people by not believing in them, by not giving them the benefit of the doubt, by not seeing them as God sees them? In what ways can we, as a local congregation, welcome people back into the community by giving them a new identity as a fellow citizen in God's kingdom, a brother or sister on the journey, a precious child of God? Are there Throughcare organisations working in your area that you could support or volunteer with e.g. Connect to Community, Faith in Throughcare, Junction 42?

4. Time with Children (outlines)

Younger ones:

Show a mirror. Who likes looking in the mirror? What do we look at? (Hair, clothes, clean face etc)

(If possible show Youtube clip of dog being startled by reflection)

Sometimes we don't like what we see in the mirror!

Sometimes we only see what we're not happy with.

We wish we could change...hair colour, nose, taller,

Today we are thinking about prisoners.

When they look in the mirror there might be lots of things they'd like to change

(What they did, where they are, saying sorry etc)

God says to everyone, I love you as you are.

Older ones:

How many names have you got? (talk about middle names)

Sometimes people use other names too (talk about nick names and pet names)

Do we like our nickname?

Did you hear that question in the reading we just shared?

"Who do you say that I am?"

That's a question Jesus asked his friends.

How many different names do we have for Jesus?

Today we are thinking about people in prison.

This week churches remember people who are in prison

That question is the theme for the week

People in prison get called names.

Usually not very nice ones. Often they are labels about what they've done.

It can be a challenge to see the person behind the word.

Fortunately, God only sees the person, and says "I love you" no matter what we've done.

That's good news for us all.

5. Worship Resources

A MEDITATIVE READING

The following hymn (132 in Common Ground) can be read as a meditative reading in response to the biblical reflection. The words can also be read **responsively**.

Till all the jails are empty
and all the bellies filled;
**till no one hurts or steals or lies,
and no more blood is spilled;**
till age and race and gender
no longer separate;
**till pulpit, press, and politics
are free of greed and hate:
God has work for us to do.**

In tenement and mansion,
in factory, farm, and mill,
**in boardroom and in billiard-hall,
in wards where time stands still,**
in classroom, church, and office,
in shops or on the street;
**in ev'ry place where people thrive
or starve or hide or meet:
God has work for us to do.**

By sitting at a bedside
to hold pale trembling hands,
**by speaking for the powerless
against unjust demands,**
by praying through our doing
and singing though we fear,
**by trusting that the seed we sow
will bring God's harvest near:
God has work for us to do.**

6. Musical Suggestions

All songs are from Church Hymnary 4th Edition, Canterbury Press Norwich, unless otherwise stated.

727 In the bulb there is a flower – to the tune ‘Hymn of Promise’ this hymn is about realising potential.

279 Make way, make way v2 speaks about healing broken hearts and setting prisoners free.

737 Will your anchor hold. The ‘Boy’s Brigade’ hymn brings to mind the hope that is sure and steadfast, an anchor for the soul (Hebrews 6.9).

237 Look forward in faith – the positive direction is undeniable! There’s a line that says ‘Look forward in hope’.

396 And can it be – v4 is especially relevant for Prisoners Week – ‘Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound...’

250 Sent by the Lord am I – a song that invites each worshipper to play their part in creating a world of love, justice and peace. It’s not long and could be sung twice.

575 Over my head – the refrain hints at hope: “There must be a God somewhere.”

259 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair – this song is wide-ranging in its concerns and represents an appeal for compassion.

694 Brother, sister, let me serve you – people in custody connect with the desire to restore, to do something to help others.

749 Soon and very soon – a lively song of hope, the new creation in the Kingdom complete.

721 We lay our broken world – a song of contrition and hope of healing – ‘find in us love, and hope and trust, and lift us up to you.’

448 Shine, Jesus, Shine – a lively and popular modern hymn which sings of the longing for personal and societal transformation.

77, Songs of God’s People Many are the light beams – a song about gifts and assets!

132, Common Ground Till all the jails are empty – a song about hope for a new society. (Can also be read as a response to the word or as a responsive reading)