



ON A MISSION

Theme Resource Pack
October 2024
(6 October - 2 November)

Introduction

We are a people on a mission. A mission from God. Join us this month as we reflect on this mission and peat bogs... *Peat bogs? Really?* Read on to find out why!

In the New Testament Jesus and the Holy Spirit urged the apostles to go out and share the Gospel, the life transforming message of hope — God's Kingdom — where everyone can belong and be treated with dignity and respect as beloved children of God. To the ends of the earth!

For two thousand years faithful followers of Christ have carried their witness around the world pointing people to God's grace through openhearted hospitality, tenderness, and acts of compassion. They have expressed this mission through music, story, artistry, and poetry and innovated in a multimedia explosion of creativity! In fact a lot of the technology we use across our lives today were developed and pioneered by Christians looking for new ways of sharing the Gospel.

But those early innovators weren't starting from nothing. Before those first Christian missionaries set out, God was already at work in the world guiding and inspiring humanity. One way God did this was through the Psalms — the stunning collection of songs and poem in the middle of the Old Testament — a tremendous soul-rich resource that has given solace, vision and motive force to humans for thousands of years!

The musicality and rhythm of the Psalms, both in the original Hebrew and in translation, have made them incredibly memorable and 'portable' as we as God's people have carried them with us. For most of human history most people have been unable to read and write but for all of human history people have been able to sing and recite things word perfect from memory.

So what about those peat bogs? Where do they come into this?

Well bogs — those mossy wetlands — are brilliant for ecology, archaeology *and* theology! Firstly, they are a carbon sink which means they helpfully store greenhouse gasses keeping them out of the atmosphere. As we think about our mission, sharing the Gospel today, how we care for the planet has to be a core part of caring for one another. Preserving peat bogs are a brilliant natural example of how we can care for the earth. Secondly, they provide a unique chemical environment that can preserve ancient artefacts remarkably well giving us fascinating insights into the past and into our faith.

The 'Peat Bog Psalter', a book of Psalms, was uncovered in Ireland just 18 years ago after spending over *ONE THOUSAND* years in a bog! The absence of oxygen and the presence of certain acids do a great job of preserving organic matter. The manuscript was preserved by sphagnum moss as it sat upright in under the ground for all that time. In fact, if the farmers who accidentally found it while cutting the turf hadn't wisely covered it back up in moss immediately the exposure to the air and sunlight would have quickly destroyed it. As it is, it's an invaluable

find for archaeology and it is so well conserved that parts of it are even visible to view and read (in Latin!) online. The Peat Bog Psalter has made it from parchment to the touchscreen!

And so what does this Peat Bog Psalter have to do with our mission as God's people today? Well this one object tells a fascinating story. Archaeologists were surprised to discover fragments of papyrus in the binding of the book suggesting a direct link to the Coptic church in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean! In the late eighth century missionaries perched in the boggy North Atlantic carried with them not only the psalms but a direct material link to the origins of their faith and vibrant communities of faith hundreds and hundreds of miles away!

How does papyrus make its way to a boggy field in Ireland in the middle of the Middle Ages? The same way that Hebrew words become Greek and Latin and Gaelic and English. The same way that words spoken in Aramaic centuries before become beautiful images painted on parchment. Through missionaries — through us.

For we are a people on a mission. A mission from God. Christ has already won, having defeated darkness and death for all time, but our mission to share the gospel is still ongoing, still unfolding as we reach out to point more people to God's eternal love. More people need to hear about the Kingdom. More people need to hear the universal wisdom and beauty of the Psalms to discover the solace, inspiration and motivation they offer.

The Peat Bog Psalter tells a story that binds together papyrus and parchment and touchscreens and ploughs. An ongoing multi-lingual, multi-media, multi-cultural, harvest where unexpected discoveries show us the unexpected links that bind God's people together through time and space! Constantly innovating and experimenting. This is our mission! We are called to join in this harvest, setting out with our ploughs, ready to uncover treasure, through testimony, ministry and song — in our lives and in our worship. We are on a mission!

Weekly Overview

- Papyrus — *Moving out, a Gospel always on the move...*
- Parchment — *Moving out, a Gospel we continually illustrate...*
- Touchscreen — *Moving out, a Gospel moving from page to screen...*
- Harvest — *Moving out, a Gospel of scattering wide and gathering close...*

Format

Every month we have a God-given theme delving into different aspects and areas of faith. Over the course of 2024 these themes connect and take us on a faith journey out into the wonders of life with Jesus. Our themes shape our Daily Worship, Sunday Live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! Each week runs Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

Papyrus (Week 1, 6 October)

Introduction: Just like papyrus made its way from the eastern Mediterranean to the middle of Ireland — so did the Gospel! Christianity is a *movement* and it has always moved. And it hasn't stopped moving. That's the nature of the mission! As we set off on our month exploring mission we ask: what is our responsibility to God, to one another, and to the earth itself as missionaries of this movement? To this world we have crisscrossed with story, witness and song. Our faith is a moving, living thing that moves people — our mission is to share that.

Setting the scene: Papyrus being pressed into sheets.

Seeds to sow: Like papyrus in an old psalter, what hidden gems from the past are you finding in your life of faith today that you can share with others?

- 1. Acts 1: 8 To the end of the earth...** So this is the mission! To be witnesses to the ends of the earth of all we have seen, all that we know to be true! This week the psalm we are carrying with us is Psalm 72 as we think about The Good News of this Kingdom.
- 2. Psalm 72: 1-4 Just, fair, flourishing.** The Gospel is *Good News*. In these ancient words we have a vision of a just, fair and flourishing kingdom where the needs of the poor are paramount and oppressors are crushed! We are on a good news mission.
- 3. Psalm 72: 5-7 Ecological and social harmony linked.** Our mission is for all the world — not just the people on it! Millennia before climate science and modern ecology, God was inspiring people to see the link between a flourishing ecosystem and a flourishing society! Not just good news for people — good news for the Planet!
- 4. Psalm 72: 8-14 A different kind of kingdom.** The Kingdom it is our mission to communicate is one where the needs of the poor and the weak, the abandoned, the oppressed and the victim, are prioritised over that of competing warlords and bigwigs (verses 9-11)! In our modern societies — that often reward the rich, the connected and the powerful — our mission can be a subversive, countercultural one.
- 5. Psalm 72: 15-16 People blossoming.** Do people know they are intended to blossom? That they can blossom? That it goes with the grain of the Kingdom, the grain of the universe? How can we help one another to blossom?
- 6. Psalm 72: 17 Legacy.** A blessing for all nations! God's Kingdom is bigger than anyone culture. Like papyrus in the Peat Bog Psalter — our movement is a cross-cultural, multi-lingual, transnational one!
- 7. Psalm 72: 18-20 Filling the whole earth.** God's glory fills the whole earth, because God's glory is not static. Like the beautiful words and images that travelled from papyrus, to parchment, to iPads, our mission won't stay still either. Let's get moving...

Parchment (Week 2, 13 October)

Introduction: In the middle ages artists rendered beautiful texts painstakingly on expensive vellum parchment (stretched and dried animal hides) to help not just to repeat the Gospel but to convey it in accessible ways, to express it in a way that was beautiful and relatable. How are we doing that now in our age? The peat bog persevered that vellum psalter, what are we preserving and conserving? And where are we innovating and experimenting to make the Gospel accessible for all? We tend to think about 'illuminated manuscripts' as something from the past but we continue to illuminate the Gospel as the Holy Spirit inspires us — illustrating it through our artistry and through our everyday lives.

Setting the scene: An artist illuminating a parchment manuscript adding elaborate flourishes to the lettering and details in the margins.

Seeds to sow: What do we want to preserve from our time for future generations?

- 1. Matthew 28: 16-20 To the end of the age...** Jesus is with us throughout time. If last week we were thinking about how we describe the Good News this week we want to think also about how we picture it. How do you picture this incredible scene? How is imagery and visual art important for expressing our mission? This week the psalm we are carrying with us is the vibrant, sparkling Psalm 67 — itself packed with imagery.
- 2. Psalm 67: 1-2 That your way may be known upon earth.** What is our mission? Well Psalm 67: 2 pretty much sums it up! How can we *illustrate* the beautiful picture of God's face shining on us in our mission this week?
- 3. Psalm 67: 3 Mission as praise, praise as mission!** Sharing our openhearted worship and making it accessible for others can be a crucial way of carrying out our mission. Do we want people to know God's way upon the earth? Well let's sing about it!
- 4. Psalm 67: 4 Nations singing.** *Nations*, plural! God's Kingdom transcends all our borders and divisions — it's a multi-cultural, multi-lingual picture.
- 5. Psalm 67: 5 All people praise!** How are we inviting one another to praise? How can we illustrate this praise in our lives?
- 6. Psalm 67: 6 The blessings of God.** Again, like last week, we have an ecological link between a thriving people and a thriving land. We are not to live at the expense of the land, but *with* it. This is part of our mission too.
- 7. Psalm 67: 7 Revered to the ends of the earth.** Mission achieved? If not, why not?

Touchscreen (Week 3, 20 October)

Introduction: We have a Gospel that just won't sit still, the digital age shows us what has in fact always been true — that we are always linked and connected across time and space! As the Gospel has sprung from page to screen we have been given new insights into our faith. The Holy Spirit has always connected us wirelessly! We are all linked in the cloud! Our faith, like our tech, is a seamless part of our everyday lives — not something separate and distinct. How is mission in the midst of our lives linking all aspects together? In the same way that digital technology links up different parts of our lives (family, shopping, hobbies, work, weather, music... there's an app for everything) our mission from God is woven in to every aspect of our life. Are we releasing the full potential of that?

Setting the scene: Reading the Bible on a phone in a busy train station.

Seeds to sow: Where is God calling you to mission in your life?

- 1. Colossians 4: 16 Once you have read it — pass it on!** This wee verse offers us a fascinating insight into the early mission of the church. Read it and pass it on! Swap! Share! Innovate! Collaborate! Don't just be silos doing your own thing and not communicating...Mission achieved?
- 2. Psalm 96: 1-2 All the earth is singing!** Our mission is meant to be infectious, is it? Is it catchy? Do we have the tune right in our heads?
- 3. Psalm 96: 3-4 Declaring the marvel!** Are we articulating the greatness of the Lord in our actions? Do we live in such a way that the greatness of God shines through? Through our successes and our failures, our striving and our vulnerability?
- 4. Psalm 96: 5-6 A mission to overcome idols.** What is our mission in a world populated with competing idols?
- 5. Psalm 96: 7-9 An invitation to the earth to Worship.** Have we lost the art of trembling? Can part of our mission to an often cynical, jaded society be one of rediscovering the tremble — the awe of being alive!
- 6. Psalm 96: 10 The Lord is King!** In a world full of examples of flawed leadership how can we portray that goodness and fairness of God's Kingdom?
- 7. Psalm 96: 11-13 Let the earth rejoice!** Does our mission make the trees sing?

Harvest (Week 4, 27 October)

Introduction: There will be tears of sorrow and tears of laughter as we go out into the world, bearing the seed for sowing, looking to harvest, to share what we ourselves have tasted, sharing the mission. Our Gospel has always been one of scattering wide and gathering close... This final week we carry two psalms with us, Psalm 34 and 126.

Setting the scene: Resting on a fence looking at what has been harvested and what is still to be harvested.

Seeds to sow: What are we harvesting this year?

- 1. Luke 10: 1-2 The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few..** The mission is ongoing! Christ may already have defeated death and darkness but our mission is still unfolding. Sometimes it can really feel like the labourers are too few. But pray — earnestly pray!
- 2. Psalm 34: 1-3 Magnifying the Lord together!** Through all times. Harvests are cyclical and seasonal there are times of scattering wide and times of gathering close.
- 3. Psalm 34: 4-7 Speaking from experience!** Our Lord listens to poor souls! We are never too small or insignificant for God. Mission Control always has our back!
- 4. Psalm 34: 8-10 Taste and see!** Are we sharing the taste?
- 5. Psalm 34: 11-14 Pursuing peace!** Our mission is not only to tell people about the Gospel, but to live it out! To do good and actively pursue peace! How are we exemplars of peace today?
- 6. Psalm 126: 1-3 Laughter and joy!** The infectious rejoicing of gratitude..
- 7. Psalm 126: 4-6 Scattered far, brought close.** Even when everything has been scattered far and wide, our God who loves us remembers us, his missionaries on this earth, and he brings us in, holding us close. An in our arms we shall reap the harvest in those we love.