

# Life begins at 40 ...

Rev Linda Bandelier's sermon notes

I understand Rosyth is celebrating 40 years. 40 years in this building. But actually, I know you are really much older than this.

But 40 is a significant number. And I like that saying: "Life begins at 40". According to this figuring, I'm now 13.

I'd not really stopped to think about what it means for life to begin at 40 ... maybe I assumed the best was already past, that life just wound down after 40.

I now realise God had completely different plans for me, far beyond what I would ever have expected or sought for myself.

- In my 40th year I married Alan
- Because we were told we couldn't have children, we were astonished and heart-broken when I had my first miscarriage at 41
- Nellie was born 4 days after my 42nd birthday
- I began full-time ministry with the Methodist Church with a 3-year old
- Husband's freelance work hiatus for two years from 2003
- Alan diagnosed with cancer in 2007
- Two years later, when I'm 51, I become a widow. And now ...
- Life as a single mum – heading back to full-time freelance storytelling ministry in 9 months.

I would never have dreamed that so much would happen to me. God's plans for me are ambitious, and I'm certain there's more to come; much, much more. The time since has been a blessing: learning to be ever more and more attuned to God's direction in my life; depending on God.



Challenging as it may be at times, it is reassuring that God is active and working through me, and it stretches me to be more willing and responsive to God's intentions for using me.

So, today is an anniversary for Rosyth. There is a 40 in the picture – 40 years in this building.

But your story is much older ... actually since 1916, which

I calculate makes you 94. Many at such an age are tempted to think: "There's nothing left for me but to wait out my days". And maybe you as a church are tempted to think this.

I must have a word with you about your web page on the Circuit site. This is what I read ... Rosyth Methodist Church moved into its present building in 1970 and "expanded to its peak in 1985". You really must take that line out of your description. What are you saying? "We're a declining church, but you're welcome to join us"? This line assumes you believe God has no other plans for you. You just do not want that line on your web page. Take it off! You need to be ready for all that God still plans for you! It is *not* about the past.

God doesn't work like that. God uses the past as a foundation for building in the present in preparation for the amazing future he has planned.

And so, he sends us John the Baptist – at every stage and age of our life – to make us uncomfortable and to remind us "Prepare the way ... the Lord is coming". And the Old Testament lesson also reminds us that out of an old stump, new life grows and flourishes.

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Isaiah and John's words on Rosyth's anniversary will not allow us to rest on our past laurels and achievements, but compel us to prepare ... prepare ... prepare.

**BUT** 40 is a significant number in the Bible. So let's look at examples of life beginning at 40 here. Since we celebrate 40 years in this building, let us see where this number 40 actually connects us into this very theme of reflection, repentance, preparation and change in the Bible.

Here are the main examples that may be familiar:

- Floods in Genesis, when it rained for 40 days and nights
- Moses and the covenant renewed, after which Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai
- 40 years wandering in preparation for the Promised Land
- Elijah's journey when hounded by Jezebel, after which God renewed and restored him
- Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the desert
- And, 40 days after Ascension – Pentecost

40 denotes an extended period of time – What happens during this time? – a time of struggle and testing. 40 denotes a period of preparation for some special action of the Lord; it is a time of grace.

What is the location of the 40? In the wilderness: an arid, dry location where death holds sway; a place to learn and relearn dependence on God's grace.

Anniversaries are always times for looking back, taking stock and moving into the future. So what do we make of our last 40 years at Rosyth? Has it been notable as a time of growing dependence on God and living attuned to God's purposes?

Or would John the Baptist rail at us for our complacency? Or a mixture of both?

What have we learned  
in this time and place?

Earlier this morning Sarah asked the children what they liked about church and what they wanted in the future.

Now it is your turn ... and there will be more time in the weeks and months to come to really delve into these questions as we reflect and prepare for God's future with us.

In the past 40 years, what have been the lessons learned? What do we believe we must carry forward? What must we leave behind? What have been our best experiences, and what needs God's forgiveness and grace?

How can the Israelites sojourn  
in the wilderness help us  
reflect on our past 40 years?

In the wilderness they struggled with temptations:

- 1 The first temptation was to settle down and stop the journey. They'd promised to go with God; grew weary of the constant demand to move on. They'd say: "We're happy with this oasis. We don't need to move on. This will do. We'll just stay here!"  
And for us in Rosyth? Have we become content with where we are and how we are, and resistant to the journey God calls us on?
- 2 Second temptation ... nostalgia – looking back to Egypt, when they were truly oppressed and wanted to escape – it became seen as time of well-being. Looking back to avoid the future.  
Do we look back at 1985 as the halcyon days, and avoid looking at the present and future as the place where God is at work, now?

**OR** do we avoid the temptation of stopping, and the temptation of nostalgia, and look around ... seeing the needs of the world around us ... the people and situations that continue to beckon us out, and to be continually inviting others in? Do we look around for the future that's yet to be discovered?

What else can we learn  
from the Israelites?

While they were in the wilderness, what happened to them? Why didn't God take them straight from Egypt to the promised land?

They had much to learn about their relationship with God.

- Learn to worship God.

They needed to learn again what God wanted from their worship. Break the old habits and learn to focus on God.

And what about us? Have we learned to worship God better in the past 40 years? Do our expressions of worship reflect an ever-growing and maturing relationship with God?

- Learn a new way of living.

God wanted them to learn that what he expected of them was radically different than that to which they'd become accustomed. Often victims become oppressors when they have freedom, and God had other purposes in mind for the Israelites. God wanted them to learn extravagant caring for the oppressed and outsider, and radical hospitality and loving of those on the fringes

What lessons are we learning? Do we need to learn to live in this way that God requires of all of us?

Are we avoiding the temptations and learning the lessons needed to journey into the future with God?

John the Baptist challenges us to prepare. Prepare for the future and all that God has planned.

Isaiah says: "look for the green shoots from the stump". When we are awake God's promises grow in us and through us.

Does life begins at 40? It never stops beginning with God. Life begins at 40 and another 40 and more to grow!