The Bible references and key thoughts/questions have been taken from the sermon video by Major Janet Robson. If you choose to develop your own sermon outline but want to use the Candidates Sunday theme we hope that this provides a useful starting point. In the video Major Janet includes a personal story of someone she knew who accepted an invitation, please feel free to include your own examples and stories to help demonstrate the power of reaching out with an invitation.

**KEY VERSE**

‘I am confident that the Creator, who has begun such a great work among you, will not stop in mid-design but will keep perfecting you until the day Jesus the Anointed, our Liberating King, returns to redeem the world.’ Philippians 1:6 – *The Voice*

**INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS AND THOUGHTS**

I wonder how the story of God is unfolding in your life?

The key verse for Candidates Sunday is an encouragement to each one of us to understand that there is a great story of God unfolding in our lives.

A story that began long before we were born and a story that will continue into eternity.

It’s a story of our great Creator God at work in the world and at work in our lives.

It’s a story of Jesus our Redeemer, our death-defying Saviour, the one who died for us, the one who lives for us.

It’s a story of God living within us, his Holy Spirit alive and at work in the world.

It’s a story with an invitation to anyone and everyone to step into.

So as we step into these moments of thinking together, I want to invite you to step into this story of becoming that we see in Scripture, God’s great love story of being with us, of being for us and his heart of longing for us to be and become all that he has created us to be.

**STORIES OF PEOPLE IN SCRIPTURE**

We’re going to briefly jump into four stories we find in Scripture – stories that capture something of the reality of Philippians 1 verse 6 – stories that capture something of this ongoing momentum of God’s great work – that he doesn’t stop mid-design – that his love and his work for his people began a long time ago – that we can see his work unfolding through generations - and that we can be confident that his work will continue a long time into the future, into eternity.

**STORY NUMBER ONE**

We’re going to start with Moses and zoom in on a moment towards the end of his life.

He’s lived an amazing life, he has stepped up to the call of God on his life and he has led the people of God in their journey from slavery towards freedom. Moses is nearing the end of his life and we’re joining the story in Deuteronomy, chapter 31.

**Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: “I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you.**

**The Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan.’ The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the Lord said. And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land.**

**The Lord will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you.**

**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”**

**Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”**

This story of God unfolding in the life of Moses and in the lives of the people of God. There’s a confidence in Moses’ words, he’s handing the baton over to Joshua and he encourages and challenges Joshua to live confidently in God.

**STORY NUMBER TWO**

Still in the Old Testament, but we’re in the first chapter of the first book of Samuel and we meet Hannah.

The early verses of this chapter tell us the story of Hannah and of her longing to have a child. It’s gut-wrenching to read of her pain:

**‘In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life.’**

Fast forward into the story and Hannah gives birth to a baby boy and she calls him Samuel.

We’re jumping into this story at the point where Hannah takes Samuel to the house of the Lord.

**‘After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull,an ephahof flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, “Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.”’**

But we see the story of God unfolding in the life of Hannah and into the life of her beloved son Samuel.

**STORY NUMBER THREE**

We’re in the New Testament and we’re with an old man called Simeon in the temple courts in Jerusalem. Simeon just so happens to be in the temple courts when Mary and Joseph turn up with their son, Jesus. They’ve gone to Jerusalem as part of their commitment to the law of Moses – so they’re bringing Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

We’re joining the story in Luke chapter 2:

**There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:**

**‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismissyour servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.’**

**The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’**

Imagine being able to meet Simeon and have a conversation with him. To ask him about how he was so confident in what God had said to him. How did God convince him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah? How long did Simeon have to wait? How did he find the confidence to say what he said to God and then what he said to Mary?

**STORY NUMBER FOUR**

We’re jumping into John chapter 4 and the amazing story of Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman at a well. What would normally be a very ordinary thing – a woman going to a well to get some water – becomes a life-changing moment, not only in the life of the woman in the story but in the lives of many other people who were impacted by her testimony.

She has this conversation with Jesus, forgets about the water she wanted to get, goes back to the town she lives in and says to everyone ‘you need to come and meet this man, will you come and meet him’

John 4 verse 39 says this:

**Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.**

The power of the unfolding story of God moving from one person to another. The power of one person sharing their story!

God’s great love story of being with us, of Jesus coming alongside us and inviting us to know his heart of longing and love for us.

**STORIES OF PLACES IN OUR LIVES**

***Reference where you are preaching from and ask the congregation what stories they think the Mercy Seat could tell us.***

Stories of men, women, boys and girls coming to kneel here.

Stories of people encountering the love of Jesus in their lives.

Stories of people discovering God’s purpose for their lives.

Stories of men and women making covenant with God here.

Stories of the unfolding of God’s love in the lives of the people he loves.

Stories of becoming…stories of men, women, boys and girls coming to God.

**AN INVITATION**

I do want to extend an invitation to you…

The same invitation that a Samaritan woman gave to her neighbours and friends.

Will you come?

Will you come and meet Jesus?

Will you come and meet Jesus as your Saviour – as the one who loves you and longs for you?

Will you come and meet Jesus as your Lord – as the one who rules and reigns over your life?

Will you come and meet Jesus as your guide – as the one who calls you to walk in his ways?

On this Candidates Sunday you might need to come and meet Jesus as the one who is calling you out from where you are now to something new, to serve him in a new way, as an officer, as a territorial envoy, as a pioneer, in a new job, in a different sphere of work and service.

Will you come?

Will you come to the Creator, who has begun such a great work among you, and will not stop in mid-design but will keep perfecting you until the day Jesus the Anointed, our Liberating King, returns to redeem the world.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

***Father God, our simple, sincere prayer today is that you would help us come confidently to you. That you would help us trust that you have begun and will continue to do a great work in and among us. That we will know that you are not about to stop in mid-design but that your relentless work of love will continue and “keep perfecting us until the day Jesus the Anointed, our Liberating King, returns to redeem the world.”***

***We pray in his name for his glory, amen!***