



We're all in this Boat together!!!

'So, they took Jesus in the boat and started out... But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"... (Mark 4:37-38

Bad News everywhere! Corona Virus is contagious, the rate of people dying daily is rising in great numbers...Stay at Home! Lockdown in almost every Country around the world. Supermarkets are empty and it seems like chaos is reigning everywhere. Fear, worry and anxiety increases as we move into greater uncertainty about our today's and indeed our tomorrow's. What does the future hold for the UK and the World at the end of 12 weeks – will things ever return to normal ever again?

A fierce storm hit as Jesus and his Disciples/Followers set off in the boat. Jesus had been sharing the message of a New Kingdom with them in crowds in differing towns and cities as well demonstrating miracles of healing. They were crossing this expanse of water with someone whom was much like them but able to do extraordinary things in the lives of those who were in need. This storm was threatening to overwhelm them, waves had entered the boat and their lives were in danger...and this extraordinary man was fast asleep in the boat. Where is He? Why not put His power to use and save us – stop this storm? The Disciples response are much like any of us when experiencing great difficulty..." if there is a God...if God was here this would not be happening to us..." But we could look at the situation in two ways. Firstly, He doesn't care or secondly that His presence with us tells us that despite the threats and the impending danger He is with us and everything will work out. Which one will you choose? However, there is hope this journey in the boat doesn't end at this point... The disciples wake Jesus concerned with His seeming lack of alarm or urgency and He challenges their fear and lack of confidence in Him. Jesus commands the wind to cease and He speaks to the stormy sea and says Peace be still and the storm ended. The Disciples now question 'Who is this man that even the wind and sea obey Him? This story offers us another way to look at our situation ... Yes, we are all in this boat together ... we are all in the same boat and Jesus; God's Messenger – God's Son is with us in the Boat too!! The one who has power over nature and potentially disastrous events. Where is our focus? Is it on the wind and waves that threaten or on Jesus the one who can stop the Storm? – It is both a matter of perspective and a matter of belief...the choice is ours.

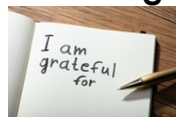
A fierce storm has hit our world like never before. We can no longer point to another nation and draw comfort from the problem being 'out there' - somewhere happening to them ... it is now happening to us. The World has become much smaller as we now are forced by a common problem to unite and say WE have a problem. And now, in the midst of our storm we begin to recognise as a Nation that there exists a wonderful opportunity to work together as a Global Community seeking and offering support, the exchange of guidance and wisdom to manage this global problem. This same opportunity has presented itself for people of the UK to unite again after a very fractured 3 years post Brexit...

Despite the 12-week Lockdown and the threats that loom we can begin to question, 'How can we positively reframe our current experiences? Will we seek the opportunity to receive the Peace that Jesus offers? A depth of peace that brings calm out of chaos, freeing us to find that creative ability within each of us; A peace that will enable us to exit this storm not in complete deficit but having gained something despite the turbulence

Jesus, keep us through this storm until it passes...We seek your Peace. Give us your peace that which quiets the internal storms of anxiety, worry and fear within us...replacing with Hope and confidence we need...as we ride out this storm together.

Practicing Gratitude in difficult times

(27th March 2020)



"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:**

It is always easy to be thankful in times of great joy, happiness and success but how is it naturally possible to be thankful when things are difficult, during times of sadness and grief. Especially now when all seems chaotic and a virus plagues our World and people are dying in great numbers on a daily basis. Gratitude and thankfulness do not come naturally – it is an act of choice; it is voluntary and when practiced as daily habit it is found to have the ability to change our lives. There are benefits to Gratitude and Thankfulness.

It has long since been a spiritual practice for Christians and other faiths and it is now scientifically recognised for the benefits. In the Old Testament it is recorded as a religious practice known as the 'Sacrifice of Thanksgiving' which is in fact a peace offering motivated by thanksgiving. The offering included animal sacrifice and presentation of types of bread and it was a voluntary offering offered by the giver as an expression of thanks to God. This particular offering was presented to God by the Priest in the presence of the giver who following the offering was given the remaining portion of meat and bread. He was then able to share his portion in a feast with friends and family on the same day. This offering of thanksgiving was a moment celebration which connected the giver in relationship to God and in the final instance he too became a beneficiary of the sacrifice presented. This voluntary offering pleased God and that which was freely given as a gift became a blessing to not only the giver but also to his wider network of family and friends. This religious rite is no longer a requirement or practice for Christians today because Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross however, there are principles here that can be carried forward into current everyday practices. That of sacrifice; the act of giving or doing something that is of personal cost for someone who is considered worthy of such a gift. That is done or given voluntarily which communicates a willing desire to express our thanks to God. These principles can be seen to honour God and benefit us at the same time.

Science recognises the benefits that Gratitude has upon our well-being, our state of mind and our general state of happiness. By expressing gratitude people acknowledge what is good and positive in their lives, not only in the good times but especially in the more difficult times of lives. Gratitude recognises the source of goodness beyond the self and connects humanity to something good and greater beyond humanity. Whether you consider yourself religious or non-religious the benefits of being thankful has been found to have a good and lasting effect upon our physical, emotional and mental state.

Today, as we continue to live with the effects of lockdown carrying concerns about the present and the future of our health; the health of the nation and the health of the World. We can stop for a moment and turn outward away from ourselves and begin to identify those good and positive things around us and be thankful. Today I would like to put at the top of thinking the ...

- NHS; Consultants, Doctors, nursing staff, hospital workers of every grade and volunteers who are keeping our health facilities open.
- Keyworkers; Transport Workers, Delivery drivers, Street Cleaners and rubbish collectors, Supermarket Workers all those who are keeping the UK clean, moving and fed
- Police and Army personnel maintaining law and order
- Government; MP's, Local Councillors

Thank you to all. Thank you for all that you are doing and will continue to do. Thank you for all that you do at risk to yourselves and families on our behalf. May you all know God's divine health, His good guidance, protection and wisdom during this time.

How about we make the act of Gratitude a daily practice? Let's make it a challenge? Whether religious or non-religious...We can introduce the idea to our children and make it a family practice. (See Link below – a Children's story about Gratitude)* We can challenge each other online or on the telephone to come up with 3 things to be thankful for...I leave you with this! What three things can you be thankful for today? * <https://karenharveycox.wordpress.com/2008/04/04/the-thankful-coat/>

Dear Lord, help us in these difficult times to always remember to find something to be thankful for. Help us to remember that a grateful heart is not only of personal benefit to us but that it also has the power to benefit those around us

Time for Re-imagining & Reconnection (29th March 2020)



For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you...to be strengthened...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being **rooted and grounded in love** may be able to comprehend...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge... Ephesians 3:14-20

Everything around is changing, is shaky and uncertain...we crave for things to return to normal as we attempt to come to terms with the fact that our current situation is the new normal at least we believe for the next few months until the worst of this viral contagion ceases. We have little or no control over the external things around us, but we do have control over how we respond and where we focus our attention. As The 'wheels of industry' have slowed down, even stopped temporarily in many cases, we have move into an enforced 'lockdown' and our routines have changed drastically - work, social and educational activities now curtailed. We have the opportunity to reconnect with each other like never before. Many households are managing an intensity of intimacy that seems at best unusual or even unfamiliar – How do we manage our new normal?

Today the theme taken from the above text is one of being 'rooted and grounded in love'. Looking from the root upward we attempt to understand growth and changes that are experienced but goes on unseen. When it seems to us that we no longer have control over external matters we can shift our attention elsewhere, turn inwards and focus on the things that we can change – we can manage our need for change and control from a different perspective – the change that goes on unseen yet just as important.

The story of The Chinese Bamboo Tree has much to teach us...A poor farmer purchased some seeds which he was told, once harvested would make him a wealthy man. He planted the seeds and followed the regular process of farming and waited for the return of his labour. One year passed, there was nothing; no visible sign of growth...the farmer persisted watering his ground each year looking for a return...four years passed and still there was nothing...the Farmer had come this far so he continued. And year five...there it was, as if by miracle a shoot budded and within 6 weeks the tree grew 80 feet.

In the busyness of life and work it is often so easy to miss what is really important to us but now that we have turned inward we can take a look at our relationships and consider - How important is your family, your partner, children, friends to you? Where does our true wealth really lie? Our relationships have been put back on the top of priority list. What have we found? What needs tweaking? What needs to be cut away? What needs to change to give it the place it deserves in our lives? Those people who are important to us are just like seeds that can be planted to take root and be secured in the soil of love; God's love. A love that is unconditional and founded upon tenderness, gentleness and the sacrificial act of forgiveness.

Given the opportunity presented to us...

- How can we reimagine or recreate our families, relationships, friendships? Like the Farmer, 5 years from now how do you imagine this/these relationships to have changed as a result of what you will begin during this period?
- What weeds would you need to identify and uproot in order to arrive at the picture you now have for this relationship?
- What ideas (at least 3) do you have that will get you one step closer to your picture
- What will you do from now to fulfil the dream of your reimagined future? What routines will you put in place? How will you overcome those things that obstruct or hinder your vision? What will I do when there is little or no evidence of change?

Jesus may our families, our relationships be rooted and secured in your love. Give us the ability to both reimagine a future for our loved ones and the strength to make our vision a reality in our lives

A moment of worship with Hillsongs United, Oceans (where feet may fail) <https://youtu.be/6GGFb6LcX3U>

There is something more...there is Someone else... (31st March 2020)



I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 12:1-2

The Bible reveals to us that something more exists! The Bible reveals this Something more as a person. Someone else. God. In personal form as God the Father; God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. A personal God who seeks to relate personally with humanity whom He created; He seeks to relate by means of Love; a divine love which is rich, abundant and far reaching. The Bible also reveals to us that we are more than we think we are...that our humanity extends into the realm of something more by our spirit within each of us. And by our spirit we can enter into relationship with God ... the Someone Else beyond our usual sphere of relationships – that Someone Else who is Greater, Wiser more loving than we can ever imagine...God the Invisible, who is not seen but can be experienced by us all

Today the Psalmist in Psalm 121 looks beyond his questions, his concerns and speaks out into nature, he speaks out into the hills possibly, a mountain range...into a space in which we too may be familiar – that of silence where we meet and arrive at a sense of wonder at the vastness and beauty of all that exist around us. The Psalmist speaks into that moment of something more, he recognises God and understands that what he needs is a greater help – a greater resource than that which is available to him. There are times in our lives when those around us cannot provide what we need...be it love, reasonable answers to our questions, encouragement when afraid and the list goes on... you know you need something yet wherever you look no one seems to be able to understand, answer our questions or even comfort us; we turn to our government, spouses, our partners, our friends and relatives and they do not have the answers we need nor that 'something' that we are looking for.

Where does my help come from? The question posed by the Psalmist ... as he looks into the vastness and the beauty of Creation, it reflects back to him the answer he seeks. His Help comes from God; the maker of heaven and earth ... The Creator of all he sees around him... this to him is no act or accident of evolution but an act of a great and wise Creator. Are you seeking answers to those Big Questions of life that draw us into the realm of the unknown - into that something more, especially now in these uncertain times? God waits to hear from you, He waits to hear from us all, He waits to answer our questions, He waits to connect with us to fill the void, our emptiness with His love... ***'This, you see, is how much God loved the world: enough to give his only, special son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost but should share in the life of God's new age.'* John 3:16 (NTE).** When in our questioning, we call out to Him, we are rewarded with what we need which gives us that inner sense of security, stability, assurance and peace we so crave, enabling us to manage the outer uncertainty, instability and confusion around us ...

Have you noticed the quiet? Have you noticed the birds singing? Have you noticed the bluer skies, the trees in blossoms and the signs of spring that we so easily miss as we rush by in times of busyness? Being mindful of these things - have you been caught up in a sense of wonder? Lockdown has both separated us from and at the same time caused us to crave for those aspects of life that we are no longer able to engage with – may you now pause with wonder and ask out loud into the beauty of nature; the beauty of creation ... Where does my help come from? **May God answer you, your questions and meet you where you need Him most.**

'My Help' Sung by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir <https://youtu.be/k47xB8eoT5g>

Another Kingdom – Another way of thinking?

(5th April 2020)



The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!" ...the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has

Recently while watching ITV London News I was inspired by a poem written and shared by a young poet; Aimee Corry... **"Twelve weeks, 2016 hours to stay inside and ask ourselves the question of where we lost our way, to question what we did for this lesson, to try and make this chapter a Blessing ... life has never been so precious, we've never felt less clever...."** Where indeed have we lost our way as humanity? The spread of this virus repeats its message over and over again this is not about one nation – it is about us all. It is about the world. We have seen terrorism escalate, wars, movement of refugees around the world and mass deaths as they search for freedom, murder on our streets, corruption of governments, lies, divisions, injustice and the list goes on... How do we find our way? What alternates do we have? How will we re-emerge from this crisis? What lessons have we learnt? What will we try to change? Or will we return to business as usual?

Our Bible Reading today describes a Royal Procession unlike any other. Jesus enters Jerusalem not by Air Force One nor by Royal Carriage as do dignitaries of our day. He enters Jerusalem upon a donkey, the most modest form of transport; upon a 'beast of burden' nothing befitting of a King. Why not a well-bred Stallion? An animal more befitting of the Messiah who is understood to be the most powerful man in the world. The modesty of transport and the simplicity of the event is symbolic of the type of Government – this King Jesus announces...A picture of an administration so simply and subtly presented yet a powerful challenge to Royalty and Government of his time.

The streets are lined by the crowds who shout 'Hosanna' and whilst this term is largely noted as a means of praise, it is also a SOS cry – **"Save us"**. Jesus rides into Jerusalem not seeking status but to satisfy prophecies that were spoken of him about 500 years before the event – He is King, and He is the people's source of liberation and rescue. Jesus' government is one of peace, justice and the highest virtue and goodness. Jesus presents the Kingdom of God, a distinctively different Kingdom which is not established by geographical location but by the conversion of the hearts and minds of the people. A Kingdom that presents an alternative world view of life and living, another way of thinking about and shaping our world and our relationship with others, another way based upon the purity of Love and its power to transform our world.

The freedom and rescue of the people offered by Jesus which they later come to understand, is not achieved by wars and violence but by the liberation of their minds from ideologies and philosophies of the world; assumed beliefs, values and systems of the world. The peoples' Hosanna's are recognised by the Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees, as mounting failure in their attempts to sabotage and discredit his teachings and compete for the minds of the people. The Pharisees acceptance of failure is noted by their statement that 'the whole world has gone after Him.' As the World, we now, particularly in this state of crisis have the same opportunity to go after Jesus and cry out Hosanna! The change we seek is not another external change of national government/s but an internal change of our minds. A mental shift – a change in our thinking, a significant change of mind that has the power to influence our thoughts, actions, behaviour, one that directs and guide our humanity to find our way to a path of integrity and honour we crave. This is the Kingdom of God which King Jesus draws us to...There is another way! We are all welcome – the call is 'Hosanna' and the King will answer.

Two songs to choose from for Palm Sunday Celebration

Love's response to Hosanna's SOS! Jesus the Passover Lamb to the Rescue... (8th April 2020)



"...Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"
John 1:29
"...For indeed Christ as Passover was sacrificed for us..." 1 Cor 5:7

In the book of Exodus, the Old Testament we read of God's rescue plan for His chosen people, leading them out of Egypt to freedom after 430 years of slavery under Pharaoh. They leave Egypt during a plague under the safeguard of ritual ordained by God, ceremonially known as Passover. They were instructed by God to use the blood of a sacrificed male lamb or goat that was without blemish, the blood was to be smeared above the door and upon the doorposts. The Blood upon the doors would be a sign and a cover which would cause the spread of the plague to 'passover' the houses of God's people so that they would be saved from death. The Passover Meal was to be celebrated yearly in remembrance of this great event of liberation from slavery.

Some 1500 years later Jesus, on the night of his betrayal shared The Passover Meal with disciples. During which Jesus presented to them a reinterpretation of the Meal, the bread and wine that they shared was now symbolic of His body and blood. He is the sacrificial lamb on His way to His Crucifixion which he had predicted and shared with the disciples a number of times. He would die on a Cross, the place of sacrifice which would be for the rescue of all humanity from the 'mental' slavery of a sinful and immoral nature. Jesus would bring a new reality to the idea of a perfect sacrifice; one without spot or blemish to this Passover Event. To be understood further by His Crucifixion, as God's final and unending response to humanity's SOS call. By Jesus' death, His blood would provide the 'passover' cover and protection from God's judgment upon sin and provide for ALL the opportunity and freedom to choose God's ways and His Kingdom.

Who needs to be rescued? Who needs Jesus? Our World! We do! How are we evaluating the events, disasters and catastrophes of recent years? Could we possibly accept that our ways and our choices have caused our environment to turn against us...Australia fires, UK floods, locust in East Africa & Iran, Hurricanes, the steady onslaught of natural disasters, wars, diseases and off course global Corona Pandemic - who will forget 2020? What of Greta Thunberg and other young activists around the world sounding the alarm on the effects of climate change upon our environment? What of Extinction Rebellion? Can humanity turn back the tide unsupported and really change the effects of years faulty actions, decisions and choices? What is needed is a global, corporate change of heart and mind, a recognition of God the Creator, a greater appreciation of His gift of life, a greater appreciation of the World and all its resources that we have been given. A godly notion... Humanity in need of divine support:-

The Passover Lamb's one-time sacrifice remains effective forever; year in and year out ever since Jesus' crucifixion 2000+ years ago. Today, this means that our cry 'Hosanna' – 'save us'; our call for rescue has a ready response. What must we do? We can acknowledge that we have fallen so short of humanity's best, corporately admit that our choices and ways have not served each other and the world, we can accept that we want a change in recognition of the fact that we are in need of a power beyond our human resources. We are facing a human crisis, a human emergency ... we need a Saviour, we need Jesus...!

This Easter Week we can all pray – Father forgive us for all that we have done to contribute to where we now find ourselves as a nation, as a world. Release us to do and to choose the right thing, the right way so that we go forward seeking to serve the best interest of each other and the world...our

corporate welfare at the heart of all that we do. Passover Lamb, please protect and cover ALL NHS Staff, ALL frontline Keyworkers, those who have contracted the virus, those who have lost loved ones. We ask for healing and recovery for all who are sick, we ask for the healing of our nation, our world and our land. AMEN

A Hymn - a moment to pause... Amazing Grace

<https://youtu.be/CDdvReNKKuk>

Love's Response – It is Finished (...It is sorted!)

(10th April 2020)



Yet he was the one who carried our sicknesses and endured the torment of our sufferings. We viewed him as one who was being punished for something he himself had done...But it was because of our rebellious deeds that he was pierced and because of our sins that he was crushed. He endured the punishment that made us completely whole, and in his wounding we found our healing. **Isaiah 53: 4-5**

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said... "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. **John 20:30**

Imagine with me for one moment that every human failure, every human mistake, every violent, abusive act against one another, children, spouses, every violent angry thought, every motivation and participation in war and murder, every evil angry act imaginable, every crime, all suffering, grief and sorrow, every disease and illness, every innocent death, every act of vengeance and unforgiveness.....We pause for breath! Imagine further that all the grief, sorrow and suffering that results from all these acts and heinous crimes committed by humans upon each other past, present and future are **ALL** carried to the throne room of God for judgment...What is your plea? Guilty or Not Guilty? What is humanity's corporate plea? Guilty or not Guilty? BUT your advocate Jesus CHRIST stands before the judgment throne of God and says on your behalf "I will carry the penalty; I will take the guilty plea! It will cost His life for you, for me, for humanity to go free, yet He was prepared and ready to exchange his life for all that is before God for judgement. **WHY?**

*"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it..." **John 3:16-18***

It is by choice, Jesus gave His life for all the sin and pain of the world. It has all been paid for and everyone who names and claims Jesus as the Lord stands to gain all that Christ received in exchange for our sins...He carried it all away, removed the charges and debts and we are set free to live a life of love, godly thinking and abundant living

Again, imagine a world in which admittance of wrong, true sorrow for harmful and hurtful acts and decisions, a change of hearts and minds and willingness to live and serve each other, each state, each country from the spirit of love, forgiveness, mercy and compassion. Such is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. This is what Jesus preached and shared as Good News. A different way based on love; His Love is the kind of love that cost Him everything by standing in our place. A love borne out of sacrifice...His Crucifixion. The Good Friday Cross stand for us at all times a symbol of God's LOVE, through His Son, Jesus' loving sacrifice for ALL of humanity. Having exchanged His life for ours...His final words were '**It is finished**'. The debt is paid, penalty removed, and we walk into freedom just by believing in Him. A Freedom that requires us to carry the responsibility of living differently – Loving God and loving our neighbour as we love ourselves - We are better – can be better because He came, because He died in our place...yet the story does not end here...! We look beyond the Cross to Easter Sunday...

Jesus, help us to understand more fully how much it cost you and how much we stand to receive and to gain both individually and corporately because of what you endured and what you accomplished through your death on the Cross.

The Shack_Judgment Scene

<https://youtu.be/hUiW7bOqGPA>

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

<https://youtu.be/dPdmnzRHIMA>

Love's Response HOPE for all time...He is Risen!!!

(12th April 2020)



"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" **John 11: 25-26**

"...very early in the morning, they and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared...they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened...two men stood by them in shining garments ...they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!" **Luke 24:1-6**

Happy Easter!!! Easter Sunday is a cause for remembrance and celebration. Today Celebration carries within it powerful messages of HOPE for us all. It is a message once received becomes a means of assurance which holds compelling meaning that can be used to interpret and understand our experiences of crisis, change and death. Today we remember Jesus' victorious Resurrection from the dead.

This all sounds so overly religious and seems to make no logical sense...you may say! But have you considered the clues around us to be found in nature? Have you considered the caterpillar and its transformation into a butterfly? What is seen as a crisis of catastrophic proportions for the caterpillar is an unrecognised moment of transition leading to a greater transformation. The seeming disintegration of the caterpillar into a gooey puddle of some sort holds within it the DNA coded message that will rewrite the next chapter of growth and physical appearance in this bug's life. We can learn something from the caterpillar's experience as we consider how do we cope with life changes that signal the end for us; How do we cope with the disintegration of the things that are so familiar to us? Likened to the gooey puddle of the caterpillar – how do we cope with the mess? How do we manage the confusion that change, uncertainty, unfamiliarity brings? We often use so much effort and energy trying to fix it all, trying to restore things to normal but fail to notice that the situation is telling us, most glaringly that things have changed – the end has come concerning this particular matter. The choice that confronts us in times of crisis one of struggle and resistance or face the inevitable that things are changing or trust that DNA coding in our situation has the potential to take us into the new no matter how daunting that may be.

In our readings today we are told that Mary Magdalene and other women; followers of Jesus went to the Tomb. The women like many others had witnessed to Jesus' tortuous death on the Cross and early Sunday morning they attended the grave in great sadness and mourning following the customary ritual of anointing the body for burial. Jesus was not in the Tomb and upon entering the empty tomb they were asked by the Angel **"why are you looking for the living amongst the dead?"** they were also told that Jesus had miraculously Risen from the dead and had gone on ahead of them to Galilee. The message here, simply questions... why and how often will nations, you or I return to an event that is past, dead, void of life mourning, grieving our losses, angry and resentful, questioning why even seeking to blame others? Yes! grief is the natural response to death, a process, for up to 3 years which could ultimately take us to a place of acceptance. We cannot avoid the pain and suffering that death and loss brings but we can question, how far in the past was the event that we keep returning to? Our prolonged suffering is determined by how we interrupt or seek to understand those difficult experiences which confront us. However, Jesus' Resurrection tells us that there comes a time when we come to learn that there is no life to be found in returning to the grave looking for answers, there can be no life in the rubble of death. We can continue to return and stay stuck in yesterday, missing opportunities and the buds of

new life or we can choose to follow Jesus, like Mary Magdalene and His disciples, into life, into the Resurrection beyond the grave. The only condition is that of belief; believing in His promise that He waits for us up ahead – in the new where we are more than equipped to live and thrive well.

There is a message for us today and a message for tomorrow. The Message for today tells us that there is always HOPE of new life when events good and not so good bring crisis and change to our circumstances. If we let go of our fear, stop trying to 'fix it', stop trying to restore things back to the familiar we can take a different posture, we can rest in the hope of Resurrection, trusting and waiting, gathering clues, gathering new evidence around us that tell us that the DNA coding for our situation is doing its work processing our very transformation. The Message for tomorrow tells us that Jesus' resurrection is victorious over death though we die and lose our bodies of this world we continue to live on beyond this plane in another body that we will only now following our death ... and just like the caterpillar we transition from an earthly grublike body to a body capable of soaring above all that we have ever known – something ever more beautiful than we can ever imagine now.

Jesus help us in times of difficulty or crisis to recall to mind the miracle of Easter, help us to trust that we need not fear uncertainty, show us that instead, we can trust that your Resurrection holds the foundation of truth-that all change has the potential to take us beyond death, darkness and uncertainty to a new and transformed state, a new place that you have planned for us. Amen

Waterbugs & Dragonflies <https://youtu.be/2yGU8xJ7Cqk>

(A short story that helps explain to children thoughts about Resurrection)

In Christ Alone <https://youtu.be/JWiFYJMGas0> Low in the Grave He Lay <https://youtu.be/0arouoCJ8es>
(Two Easter Hymns)



"So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into "the Holy Place." Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. The "curtain" into God's presence is his body..." **Hebrews 10:19-21 The Message**

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: "'Father... **Luke 11: 1 (NKJV)**

Last weekend we celebrated Easter; the horror and sadness of Jesus' crucifixion and the culminating joy of His Resurrection. Jesus willingly answered the call to demonstrate God's great love for all humanity in this one act of sacrifice that we celebrate during Easter. One of the many things achieved by this huge sacrifice was one of access. Access to what and to whom? A pathway has been opened up, a channel of communication created by God; The Father. It is a reciprocal conversation between and humanity. Access Granted can be understood as Prayer!

Prayer in its simplest form is It is simply a conversation with God, a way of developing a relationship with God. It is a divinely created space where God's presence is affirmed, God listens, speaks and gives of Himself. It is a way through which God gives Love unconditionally and is fully attentive to us. For us, it is where we enter by prayer into a space where we are welcomed and accepted. Where we are free to speak, to seek such closeness of God. It is where we can approach God and speak honestly to Him from our heart without fear of judgment or criticism, we can speak unfiltered from the depth of who we are. It is a communication from the heart. How can describe our heart language? I believe this to be - our greetings, thanksgiving, concerns, calls for help, songs, praise, celebrations, our cries, our groans, our whispers, our shouts, our silences...the list is endless. There are numerous places in the Bible which speaks of God's response to prayer in a way that builds confidence and assurance in our pursuit and practice of prayer.

"...Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.¹ "I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!²

We are assured that through Prayer that God hears, He knows and understands our individual, language unique to us. Prayer is deeply personal and confidential. How do we pray?

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: "'Father..."³

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come! Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation. But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.⁴

We can pray for personal matters, on behalf of others; family, friends and neighbours; praying for them as if praying for ourselves. We can pray for our nation, other nations and governments around the world. Let us pray today to One whom Jesus revealed to us as 'Our Father', Please accept our words of concerns for...

NHS staff; Consultants, Doctors, Nursing Staff and all hospital staff as they operate the frontline – often putting their own lives at risk. For All Staff Caring for senior citizens and those who are sick & vulnerable and in need of residential care, those who have contracted the Covid-19 Virus and are fighting the disease, for those who have lost loved ones. For all Keyworkers; transport workers, supermarket workers, delivery drivers, post men & women, takeaway

¹ Jeremiah 29:12 (NIV)

² Isaiah 64: 24 (New Living Translation)

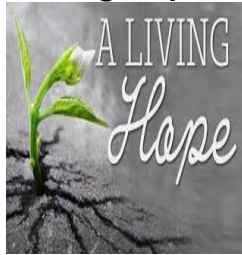
³ Luke 11: 1 (NKJV)

⁴ Matthew 6:9-13 (NKJV)

restaurant worker, mill workers and bakers. For all those who are ensuring the production of food and essential provisions for the nation. The neighbourly way in which communities are coming together across the nation and across the world. For an increase in wisdom for Government, politicians and Scientist in their pursuit of a cure. We pray also for an arrest of Covid-19 and end to this pandemic ... AMEN For an increase in wisdom for Government, politicians and Scientist in their pursuit of a cure. We pray also for an arrest of Covid-19 and end to this pandemic ... AMEN

Finding Hope in tough times

(21th April 2020)



"What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all—life healed and whole. " **1 Peter 1:3-5 The Message**

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into **a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" **1Pet 1:3 NIV**

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

I first came across this excerpt of Theodore Roosevelt's 1910 speech when quoted in a book 'Daring Greatly'⁵. What caught my attention was the fact that it is the person who engages fully in life when under immense pressure who understands that it is neither success nor failure that counts, but the effort spent. To manage any difficulty in life without the threat of being judged as either successful or as a failure is a liberating idea. To know that your effort, your willingness to contribute is what really matters most keeps us from being paralysed and gripped by fear, achieving nothing or doing nothing and remaining stuck. Why would someone enter the Arena? I imagine they enter with hope, they enter with a vision or a view of the future that is so starkly different from where they currently find themselves and they fight to bring the reality seen through the eyes of hope into being. It is that willingness to engage, the willingness to be seen, the willingness to be vulnerable – despite the possibility of weaknesses exposed. This willingness is rewarded by courage and resilience, the twin sisters of hope when facing life and its challenges.

The Disciples were facing a very difficult situation, under immense pressure, experiencing what could be considered a type of lockdown which followed the Crucifixion of Jesus.⁶ They were found huddled together in fear and as followers of Jesus it would be likely that if caught they would suffer the same fate. In a moment, life had dramatically changed, their hopes, dreams, expectations and plans about the future appeared completely lost to them. How do they face this moment? How will they face the future without Jesus? Jesus appeared to them in the midst of lockdown and first announced a blessing of peace to them. How important was this announcement? We can imagine that the disciples were frantic with fear of being caught, fear of death, worry, despairing of life, wondering about the future and what's next. Jesus' blessing of peace comes not as an empty sentiment but comes full of life...words of life that penetrates disturbed narratives of their minds bringing a state of stillness, peace and balance to the souls of the disciples. Peace gets rid of 'white noise'; the noise of disturbance and restores clarity, focus, the ability to see and hear more clearly – even giving the ability to grasp the possibility of hope. Jesus' appearance had surpassed all scientific norms, it was an 'impossible possibility', it was an extraordinary occurrence that required the Disciples full attention. It is a landmark in human history! Death becoming 'Living Hope' in the form of a Person. This was not the end but the beginning of something new, a new thought, a new reality known as the Kingdom of God. The effect of Jesus' declaration of peace was one of realignment to purpose, productivity and motivation. Jesus is alive and so too is their hope. The Disciples can now move forward envisioned with a new perspective.

A month of 'Locked in or locked down' however, we consider our current 'normal', life is distinctly different, and the uncertainties still remain so with less clarity and we continue in this

⁵ Brown Brene Daring Greatly, p1

⁶ John 20: 19-21

state. We need something to hold on to, something that will keep us steady during this time... Jesus comes to us from the records of history and calls us to believe the 'impossible possibility' of His Resurrection. He appears to let us know that death, evil, or disease do not have the final say. We need not accept the finality of any situation as being the end. In His Resurrection we have the choice of life, new beginnings, different alternatives, light in darkness and has the power to realign us to a living hope.

The Arena of Life calls us to fight for a tomorrow that is worthy of all of us. At this time in history we are faced with the challenge for all to enter the Arena of life; clearly frontline and Keyworkers face a different or greater type of challenge. However, the challenge for most of us is that of facing uncertainty with courage and hope, that of not knowing the terrain before us, 'we have never been this way before'. We are forced to face our mortality, high death rates on a daily basis, loss, economic shifts; uncertainty about jobs, salary cuts, low social contact and isolation for some, children at home many of whom are stuck at home with limited space and there are so much more new aspects that we manage on a daily basis. The call to the Arena of life can be summed up in the lyrics 'When the going gets tough the tough get going'. As we answer, the resources within us come to the surface and those aspects of ourselves in need of development are stretched and we grow – enabling us to develop further the new life skills we need to cope, perhaps a different way of thinking. Growth can be difficult, but with Hope we believe - **We can do this!** We need not be paralysed with fear or spend time criticising complaining because with Hope we believe that - **We can do this!** We are made to be resilient; We are made with the ability to bounce back. The Arena of life calls us into today to expend our efforts for tomorrow, for a future that is different from that which we are currently experiencing. It is Hope that calls us, it is a Hope that is alive with possibilities worth our fight today. History has taught us that humanity can and has come through the 'darkest of moments'. History also records Jesus' Resurrection, an event that keeps on giving and has been doing so, for over 2000 years. His Resurrection opened a pathway that permits a transfer of divine blessings, qualities and virtues – such as God's love, peace and hope those divine attributes that cannot be fully appreciated by our human definitions but can be fully experienced by those who believe, as qualities and virtues that empower, inspire and transform us, our communities and our world.

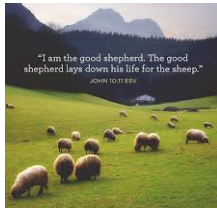
Jesus come to us and penetrate our 'lockdown'... flood our homes with your peace, flood our minds with your light and give us the ability to see through the eyes of hope a tomorrow that will motivate us to expend our efforts today for the greater good of all. Amen

In Christ Alone

<https://youtu.be/JWiFYJMGas0>

Finding Inner Peace_Psalm 23

(22st April 2020)



The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

Psalm 23:1-3

I am the good shepherd...I know my sheep and my sheep know me — ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay

Psalm 23 invites us to step away from it all... to stop for a moment and make an inner journey by way of our imagination. The Psalm is rich with beautiful imagery that has the power to draw us away from the noise and chatter of our outer world to a divinely created inner space where we can find peace. Let's follow the Psalmist and journey inwards with him by our imagination and may God lead us uniquely to a restful place divinely created by Him...

Psalm 23 was written by David, Israel's greatest King, chosen by God he rose to throne from the humble beginnings of a shepherd boy. The idea of a shepherd is more than a metaphor or picture of God, it is one born out of experience, out of his relationship with God and out of his own understanding of that of being a shepherd. David identifies God as a Shepherd and he as a shepherd finds himself in a work environment situated in the vast open, expanse of land where in the unknown lurks threats and dangers of various kinds. David found God; he found the One whom he attributes the name Shepherd, a revelatory aspect of God's character which relates uniquely to David's experience. Out of the depth of his heart, David writes this Psalm which has become, for so many, a means of comfort and guidance when found in those spaces we call the 'unknown'.

The Lord is my Shepherd ... this statement is deeply personal. David owns and honours the relationship he has found with God; he owns this relationship with a sense of belonging and ownership. There is no sense of the general about this, it is found in terms of exclusivity; the face to face; up close and personal type relationship. David accepts that in such an exposed environment that this relationship offers him such a source of comfort, his Shepherd will provide for him the protection, security and guidance he needs. David expresses a sense of belonging and understands himself to be under God's good pastoral care. In the New Testament, Jesus announced Himself as 'The Good Shepherd', the One who lays down His life for the sheep; again, this idea is restated by the Messiah, in the form of caring devoted relationship. From David's words we hear that there is to be found in the vastness of 'the Unknown' – God described in personal form as Someone who cares for humanity, someone who is to be found by humanity should they seek Him. God did not reveal Himself as One so superior, inaccessible or distant but as One to whom relationship is absolutely important...

I shall not be in want ... David identifies that there is nothing lacking, nothing wanting – there is no scarcity to be found in this relationship. He has a view of abundance as there seems to be no unmet needs here, in this desert space. His Shepherd is both willing and capable of supplying all his needs.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the quiet waters – Imagine a visit to the countryside where your eyes feast upon enormity of greenspace around you and the way in which what your eyes see feeds your soul in an unspoken way. I spoke to a friend this afternoon about this very Psalm and she told me a story about one of her children...when asked what is your favourite colour? Her daughter answered – Green! Why? Because it is everywhere...the beauty of the words of children, their sense of knowing the unspoken. In a sense, Green is everywhere to be found in flowers, plants, trees, grass of the fields and so we find nature speaks continually of creation and of God her Creator. The green pastures feed our souls and so too, the still waters – brings quiet to it. The shepherd leads us out to a space that rewards us with rest, a place to lie down for a moment away from the chaos in a picturesque expanse of open pasture, to a feast of green that feeds our souls and the stillness of water which brings balance, peace and quiet. We are led to these inner spaces within which we have clearly been unable to find for ourselves...

AND He restores my soul...here in these inner spaces whispers the promise that the Shepherd will restore our souls. Those dark places within us that house any brokenness that we carry, any pain, worry, anxiety and fear. The Restorer goes to work in the area of most need, He repairs, renews and revives in unseen operative procedures that result in our recovery. We are given the ability to return from our inner journey with renewed strength and security to face the challenges that previously threaten to overwhelm us...

Jesus, Good Shepherd may I see more clearly your great provision, protection and guidance that you offer and lead me on an inner journey to green pastures where I can rest and beside the still waters where my heart may be stilled. Above all restore my soul that I may stand renewed in the face of all that threatens to overwhelm. Amen

There is a promise of Rest ...

(26th April 2020)



Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, your God. Don't do any work—not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, nor your maid, nor your animals, not even the foreign guest visiting in your town. For in six days God made Heaven, Earth, and sea, and everything in them; he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, God blessed the Sabbath day; he set it apart as a holy day. **Exodus 20:1-7**

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also

An ITV London News report this week showed images of London on Lockdown in what would normally be 'Rush Hour' – places like Victoria Station had fallen silent, empty and devoid of its normal 'hustle and bustle' of human traffic. All falling silent to Covid-19. Looking back as a child I recall memories of similar silences; the silences of Sunday when all shops were closed with the exception the local newsagent that remained open until midday and the silences of Thursday afternoons when most shops and businesses closed at midday. The idea of rest – time away from busyness and work...the practice of society operating within a rest cycle... memories of the past.

The idea of 'rest'; time set aside from work is not a human idea, but a practice ordained by God for His chosen people Israel. A Chosen People who would reflect the truth of His existence and demonstrate godly principles, values and proposed lifestyle for all of humanity to the World. The Rest for this Hebrew people is termed as the 'Sabbath' and is used as a phrase for the observance of many of their Religious feasts and festivals. However, Sabbath in its Christian form is carried out and continued as day of Worship on Sunday and for some Saturday. What is the practice of Sabbath and what could the idea of Rest contained within it mean for believers and indeed the world?

What did God mean by a Sabbath for humanity? A which originated out of a need to provide for a group He had just rescued from 400 years slavery. God made provision out of a 7-day cycle to be set aside for a previously oppressed people to experience freedom from work and rest – a day in which they could rest and do absolutely nothing. The provision of Sabbath It comes in the form of a command but rather than protest at the sense of enforcement they understood this as God's provision of care for the for them and by extension we can see this as God's programme of welfare of all human beings He created. For a more modern day understanding of God's purpose for Sabbath we can think, for example of terms like self-care, well-being and mindfulness all of which are now being commonly used to express the need for rest and care in our fast-paced world. A world which has unconsciously relegated the God-given practice of 'Rest' from its lifestyle and by so doing are now attempting to find a remedy for needs unmet. God the Creator's knowledge of humanity, in His wisdom and understanding of our needs, sets aside a day for renewal, restoration and balance – A day willingly set aside by its observers, away from all labour in recognition of God's existence. A day in which God blesses its observers with His rich promises to be found in 'Rest'.

There is also a Land Sabbath (Lev 25:1-7) which was to be practised every 7th year, a time of 'rest and release'. The land was to be left fallow for a year, no crops were to be sown or harvested in that year. Whatever grew during this 7th year was free to all, especially set aside for the poor. The Land was to be allowed to rest, so too its workers and animals used in service of farming. This fallow year for gave the land an opportunity to rest and restore of its fertility and productivity. Farmers on the basis of faith could honour this 7th year because of God's promise of abundance in the 6th year, a promise to provide extra that would suffice until the new crop. This 7th year was also a year for 'release'; debts were to be cancelled and mortgaged land belonging to the poor was returned to them. The whole expression of this 7th year can be understood as one of **reset giving an opportunity to start over – to start again**. It was an expression of Faith and belief in God's care, His promises and His provision. God cares and He will provide!

Sabbath reveals God as a Liberator from 'slavery to our jobs, our work, as a provider of our needs and moral framework for lifestyle and survival. The essence of the day is one of an intended blessing so for those who observe and recognise the tenets of the day, they who become recipients of renewal, rejuvenation and refreshment that it offers. However, it is more than a just a day, year, or a set period of time away from labour. It is a time of meeting, a time devoted to relationship. It is time in the presence of God – a period to live in the presence of God to feed on him just as seeds sown in the earth feed upon the nutrients and minerals of the earth we feed just as miraculously upon God restored to greater level of vibrancy and productivity.

Will we look back and remember this time as the time our Cities, our Nations fell silent...? Will we remember God's provision of Sabbath? Will we seek to understand its truer meaning for us? Particularly, as to what this may mean for us in this time of enforced time away from work and external activities. A time to seek God perhaps? A time to seek answers beyond what is known – understanding that seeking to know more - is a normal pursuit in times of uncertainty. It is a spiritual activity and God awaits us in our search, He awaits with love, with care, with compassion and understanding of human fragility and need. Today, this Sunday – or Sabbath as you know it – or as a new practice entirely...May we remember God. Give honour to God as our Creator. May we honour His presence and visitation with us much like that of a Royal visit with all the fanfare He deserves as an expression of Worship. And in our time of enforced lockdown and silence may we transfer what we now understand by willingly putting aside all busyness, without resistance and surrender to the practice of 'rest' so that we can find all that we need bodily, emotionally and spiritually in His Presence – trusting that He will provide and take care of all our needs as we surrender in faith to the practice of Sabbath.

Jesus, as we seek you please fulfil in us God's promise of rest ... Amen

How Great Thou Art <https://youtu.be/V91sJMu-W6g>
(A Hymn of Worship)

Patience and Perseverance-Making it through hardship (29th April 2020)



So, let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us... **Galatians 6:9-10**

"...But we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance comma and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit **Rom 5:3-5**

The Prime Minister returned to work on Monday under pressure to lift Lockdown... He urged the Nation to **"contain your impatience because I believe we are coming to the end of the first phase of this conflict, and in spite of all this suffering we have so nearly succeeded."** This statement comes amidst reports that 'Lockdown' is breaking down. In the haze of Sunshine, some Brits have headed to parks and beaches sunbathing, gathering in groups, on picnic blankets queueing for ice-creams etc... despite being told actions such as these are putting lives at risks and undue stress on the NHS and its staff. Lockdown is indeed proving to be challenging for many and the Prime Minister acknowledges..."**I know it is tough and I want this economy to get moving as fast as I can but I refuse to throw away all the effort and the sacrifice of the British people and to risk a second major outbreak, and huge loss of life and the overwhelming of the NHS...**". The call to manage our impatience is a call to the nation to master the two qualities of patience and perseverance. We are being asked firstly to continue to endure whatever the difficulties we are experiencing in Lockdown and secondly to be determined to persist and to keep on going to achieve the purpose of managing the risk of spread of the Virus, death of those who are vulnerable and ease the pressure on the NHS. We have managed 6 weeks of 'Lockdown' and the Nation is weary and whilst the Government repeats the 'Stay Home' rule of law – Community togetherness and the purpose of arresting the spread of the Virus is being weakened by the growing general weariness of the nation.

Our Bible verse today tells us that there is good to be found in the exercise of patience and perseverance in difficult times. We are encouraged to keep doing good, and not to look for reward in the present but know and have surety that benefits of endurance - patience are character building and the fertile ground for the birth of hope. Hope that sees the purpose up ahead. These two partners; patience and perseverance in both texts are so connected to God that we understand that they are the fruit of spiritual discipline requiring spiritual input. We then consider that acquiring these virtues and benefits cannot be easily accomplished in by our human strength alone, in our humanity we naturally want to give up when life gets tough especially when our considered needs and wants are being stifled or curtailed in some way.

How patient are we? How much longer can we endure? Years ago, when I started my Jogging experience, I learnt two very valuable lessons that I imagine to be routine and familiar stages for seasoned joggers and long-distance runners. At my initial phase of tiredness when jogging, I would stop, my Trainer informed me that I was hindering progress by my continual stop-start approach. He encouraged me to push on past this tiredness the next time I jogged, I did exactly that and found my body discover what seemed like another reserve tank – another reservoir of energy that fuelled me to keep on going. The other, was an over concentration upon the distance to be covered, ahead of me this would cause me to tire and want to give up – Again my Trainer advised me to concentrate on my current steps, looking at where I was placing my feet and to concentrate on what I was able to do, what I was doing in the moment. I found this to be good advice which allowed me to rein in my thoughts and accomplish the goal of completing the distance – I had learnt two secrets of the long-distance runner.

Like a new jogger, it seems that we as a Nation have come to that place, we are tired and want to stop. We have in a sense have 'come to the end of ourselves' which is often a sign that we are in need of 'that something more'. However, should we stop we risk hindering our progress, the effort made so far and more than that we cut ourselves off from learning the content of that the 'something more' lies beyond our urge to stop. And only when we push

on past our weariness will find the this hidden 'reserve tank – reservoir' that will energise us to complete the long haul.

We, the Nation are being asked to 'serve the best interest of each other'; to be unselfish, endure difficulty and suffering so that we can all win. To demonstrate 'Patience and its partner Perseverance' is a call to love our neighbour as we love ourselves – which is completely a Religious principle. A Christian value that has its root in loving God, believing in God and having faith that whatever we do in an act of love for our neighbour can never be lost – it the choice and the decision of an individual or group to love and to act lovingly whatever the cost. At the end of this is our reward for the cost made now, we will learn something new about ourselves. Our Senior Citizens are great examples of people of character, they have endured Wars and hardships that we have yet to experience and have emerged as people of great character, strength, self-discipline and resilience.

It now seems to be the time for later generations to develop such strength and fortitude in face of adversity. This Crisis has enforced upon us lessons to be learnt, lessons which we would not have chosen for ourselves but nevertheless, here we are. The Prime Minister is not the teacher nor instructor of our lessons – these lessons seem to be ones of a higher purpose, those that will produce sustainable character-building fruit out of our International and National crisis.

Today! We pray - Jesus, please impart to our Nation, the encouragement we need to continue on and the strength we need to push through our weariness. Help us to develop further the qualities of patience and perseverance which are needed in these times seeking only the greater purpose for us all - that as many lives as possible are spared, our Health Service and key workers remain protected as far as is possible by our costly actions today. Amen

Too good to be true – The eyes of Faith

(3rd May 2020)



"Unless I see in His hands the prints of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hands into His side, I will not believe...Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" **John 20:29**

'And having not seen/knowing you love so now you do not see him yet believing you

"A little girl was on a cruise ship and she and her father was standing on the deck. It was a beautiful clear day, and the air was crisp and fresh. The little girl, standing on tiptoe said to her father, I can't see anything the father picked her up and put her on his shoulders, so that she was higher than everyone else on the deck and was able to see everything around her. "Daddy!" she exclaimed. I can see further than my eyes can look"

Easter Sunday was almost a month ago and today we have another reading about his Resurrection ... it is perfectly in order to do so as Jesus remained on the earth 40 days after He rose miraculously from the dead. In our reading today we meet the Disciple Thomas who was not present with the other Disciples when they met Jesus after his Resurrection. Though Thomas knew his fellow disciples very well he refused wholeheartedly to believe in their reports that Jesus was now alive. "Unless I see...I will not believe". How easy is it for us to look back into this story and criticise? Placing ourselves in Thomas' shoes faced with the same situation - how would we react? Seeing someone who we know to have been tortured to death standing before us, physically, as if his death had not taken place? Or even hearing second hand that this was the case? Very difficult! We can assume that Thomas' thoughts could have been something like, 'they have lost their minds – it was after all a traumatic experience, or they could be intoxicated or on drugs. His friends were describing to him something impossible, out of the ordinary. They were describing something they had seen further than their eyes could look - This is the power and miracle of Jesus' Resurrection. The source of the Christian 'Faith'.

Days later Jesus appears to the Disciples again and Thomas is with them. We like the disciples are party to the conversation between Jesus and Thomas. There is no sign of offence or conflict as Jesus appeared declaring peace to all. He knew Thomas' thoughts. Thoughts that were rejecting and impenetrable yet rather than confront him or pose arguments Jesus communicated with him with sensitivity and compassion. Jesus makes no demands, though he expresses his desire for Thomas, a desire that he would have a change of mind. A change from that of unbelief and complete dismissal to one of belief. Jesus speaks directly to Thomas..."don't give in to your doubts any longer, just believe!", "Do not be unbelieving but believing." Jesus presents himself to be touched and seen by Thomas, to present to him personally the new physical reality that the other disciples now hold. A new perspective that would open his eyes of faith to witness and to know that 'Death' is no longer the end.

Arguments and discussion did not change Thomas' mind it was the revelation of Jesus Christ. A new reality had been uncovered and Thomas was standing in this Truth with new eyes and the gift of faith to believe. Thomas' beliefs about the world, its possibilities and its norms were completely shaken. And his unbelief immediately dissolved in recognition that he is in fact is standing in the presence of God, he said, "My Lord and my God!". Thomas' experience demonstrates to us that a personal encounter with Jesus removes questions and doubts and give birth to belief that God is real! There is a God who came into the world as Jesus Christ to demonstrate his love for humanity, His existence, His saving purposes and to transition all who believe beyond the limitation of death into life eternal. Change of mind happened for Thomas because he was presented with Jesus – the initiator and living source of such powerful change.

The gift to all followers of Christ is the gift of revelation; seeing in the moment what Doubting Thomas saw in reality. Christ announced that those who believe without having the physical evidence would be blessed and the blessing they receive is the gift of faith, spiritual evidence – the ability to see further than the physical eyes can look and believing in what we see there ... ***Dear Jesus, meet us in our questions and meet with all those who question the reality of your Resurrection, give to us the gift of eyes that can see further than our eyes can look. Amen***

My Jesus my Saviour

<https://youtu.be/R752dEbs1ac>

VE Day 75th Anniversary Prayer

(8th May 2020)

VE Day 75 Prayer May 8

by Rev Dr Helen Paynter Bristol Baptist College



A Biblical Vision of Eternal Peace and Safety

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it...He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. Micah 4:1,3-4

God of justice and self-sacrifice, healing and reconciliation, Prince of peace and victorious risen Saviour.

Today we remember the events of VE day, and all that that day signified:

- the culmination of enormous sacrifices made by individuals, communities and nations,
- the formal conclusion of unspeakable sufferings inflicted by humanity upon humanity.
- gain and loss; victory and defeat; joy and sorrow.

God of righteous outrage and justice, we thank you for the end to the Third Reich and all the hatred and evil that it unleashed upon the world.

God who gave himself in sacrifice, we thank you for the sacrifice of those who gave their lives, their loved ones, their health or their freedom to strive for the cause of justice and to resist great evil.

God of grace and restoration, we thank you for those who gave their energy to peace and reconciliation after the war: who worked with bricks and mortar, finance and healthcare, hearts and minds to bring aid, restore communities, and to rebuild bridges of trust between nations.

God of healing and new beginnings, we confess that we have not wholly lived in the new possibility that peace and victory opened up. We have continued to wage war, we have turned once again to suspicion and antagonism against other peoples and nations. We have permitted the rise of hate-based ideologies across Europe. And we have allowed the seeds of murder and war to continue to live in our own hearts.

God of victory and peace, we look forward to the end of all evil – including our own; the end of all violence – including our own; and to the coming of your glorious kingdom of love and justice. And we commit ourselves once again to working with you towards that beautiful goal. Amen.

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/575823/VE_Day_75th.aspx

Reconciliation_Returning Home

(10th May 2020)



'We have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens...therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away all things have become new. Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given us a ministry of reconciliation... 2 Corinthians 5:1, 17-18

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself. 'C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (Geoffrey Bles, 1952)

The longer I serve as a pastor the more certain I am in the truth of the recurring message of God's loves all of his creation; All of humanity are his children whether they know it or not – some acknowledge and recognise His love, and many do not. Whether we acknowledge or believe in His Love or not, His love exists all around us to be received or awaiting discovery. His love, an unconditional love is unlike our human definition of love. It is a love that waits patiently with the greatest desire to be shared, to be given and to be recognised – recognised as coming from God, Father of all humanity.

There is a biblical story in the Gospel of Luke known as the 'prodigal son' or the 'lost son', it tells the story of a Father and his two sons. The younger son demands his inheritance and upon receiving his lump sum, he leaves home and squanders what he has living a life so unlike that of his upbringing. When he hits upon hard times having lost all his money, friends and home he is forced to reconsider his lifestyle and decision. He 'came to himself' a strange phrase but the sense we can get from this, is one of 'a light bulb moment'. The moment when he realises that there is more to who he is than where he now finds himself. 'He has come to the end of himself'; by his response we see that he does not accept this will it be the end for him. He seems to have had a good talk to himself, decides to retrace his steps and return home. He is returning home with an apology willing to be a servant rather than a son and with humility he is prepared to accept any reprimand his father decides he deserves. His expectations were low concerning the kind of reception he would receive, yet he decides to make the journey. He had not made it to the door yet he finds his Father running towards him with a welcoming greeting and a kiss, his apology and request to be a servant is ignored as his father calls to his servants to prepare a feast and dress his son in the finest. Jesus told this story of reconciliation between father and son to demonstrate God, the Father's love for humanity, his longing and patient wait for each person's recognition that there is a place of return – their uniquely experienced 'light bulb moment'.

Jesus through his voluntary death on the Cross and powerful victory over death proven by His resurrection, removed every obstacle, every mistake, every evil and hurtful act that we may have committed or those which may have been committed against us, thereby clearing the way for us to be reconciled to God like the younger son in today's story. And for those who seek the return, they will find that 'Reconciliation' is the beginning of their journey of transformation. There is first a change in relationship; from that of separation and hostility to that of reconnection which forms the base upon which the work of restoration and renovation can now be established. The story reminds us that the challenges of living, our life choices and decisions can often cause us to lose our way at times and to see ourselves in ways that are so much less than who we are, this is why reconciliation holds within it the work of renewal and restoration to God's original and highest vision that He holds for each of us.

Do you desire change in your life? Change in an area of your life? Whatever adjustments are needed, it is the desire and willingness for change, the moment of realisation when we understand that we are more and worth more than where you find ourselves – it is in that moment the catalyst for our transformation is sparked. It is a matter of exchange; (it is also an inner reconciliation with our true selves) change from one position or idea of ourselves to a better and greater version of ourselves. This is possible in the Father's hands as He reshapes

and remodels us to resemble his original plan for us. Yes! There is an original plan for each of us – we don't have to live to a lesser model of ourselves.

The idea of home can be both an inner place of security where we hold a sense of our value and self-worth as well as an external place of familiarity, comfort and security where loved ones are to be found. The sense of home, the sense of security is what humanity search for and needs - God presents himself as a secure place to be found outwardly once found, He seeks to connect more intimately with us internally so as to provide within us a depth of inner security and peace.

Jesus you are the change we seek as through you we are reconnected to the One who can truly make a difference in our lives. Receive us today... those who recognise that they have come to the end of themselves and want to renewed in the image of our True Father and for those who recognise that they would want to progress further in this journey of renewal...welcome us and make us into worthy buildings...beautiful secure dwellings for you and others. Amen

I would like to share with you one of my favourite hymns written by Dottie Rambo
He looked beyond my faults and saw my needs <https://youtu.be/BgO0hFDL6zA>

JOY_Our Strength and Defence

(22nd May 2020)



Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our LORD. Do not grieve, for **the joy of the LORD is your strength**. Nehemiah 8:10

The well-known phrase, 'the Joy of the LORD is your Strength' was spoken by Nehemiah following the reading of the Law by the Prophet Ezra, the people having heard the Law were broken and sorrowful the recognition that they had fallen so far short of God's expectations. They had just returned from a long exile – so much had been lost to them as a people they had been displaced without their land and their identity; sense of self had suffered. Now how are they to relate to God whom they had rejected? How would God relate to them whom they now understood to be so disappointed in their rebellious ways? Though they could now see their failure and how bad things were, they are reminded by Nehemiah's words that they were still God's chosen people and He was still their God. Nehemiah tells them to no longer be sorrowful but should now move on from grief to a time for celebration.

Firstly, we see from this phrase that Joy belongs to the LORD, it is a characteristic of His, this is further supported in the New Testament where we understand that Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy is a spiritual quality belonging to God ... If Joy belongs to God how are we to receive it? Let us now take the two words Joy and Strength and separate them to make a more detailed view of their meanings before coming to a view on what Nehemiah may have meant by this directive. Joy in this biblical context means to rejoice, celebrate or to make glad, happy, cheerful. We can then take it that Joy is celebratory and makes for intentional happiness. Strength speaks of a 'place of safety, protection, refuge and stronghold – a place of defence. Joy is a spiritual gift given by God to his people and the expression of His Joy by its celebratory nature, oddly enough, becomes not only a symbol of strength but also a means of defence and protection.

Nehemiah was speaking to a repentant people who were expressing such sorrow at the recognition of their failure and how much they had grieved God by their actions and rejection of His Law and His Ways. He was now directing them to move away from the burden sorrow and grief into the freedom of Celebration. To declare a Holy Day; a day set apart in recognition, remembrance and appreciation of God. A Day to celebrate God and to celebrate their pardon, God's desire to forgive and to be reunited with them again. It seems then that such a shift/move away from sorrow by God's directive would provide the opening for them to become recipients of God's gift of Joy – a Joy that would strengthen them; bringing this people back the confident state of mind and being. The Joy of the LORD would indeed become their strength.

To celebrate takes intention, an intentional act by a person or group of people in remembrance of a special person, event or something important and the cause for celebration here for Nehemiah and the people is the restored relationship they now have with God...they have been forgiven and have in effect a clean sheet – a new start! Reaffirmation and renewal of their covenant with God. This is joy; celebration, restoration, forgiveness and reconciliation and this joy is the gift that provide refuge, safety and protection of God as the strengthening that builds the confidence of the people. It was said of the Israelites... "From the days of Joshua...until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated like this. And their Joy was very great."

Joy expresses itself out of an appreciation of a restored relationship with God, a willing commitment to all that is required of this relationship. To live in right relationship with God, to be aligned with His ways and His purposes. Joy is an expression of gratitude, it also seeks to find reason to be happy, to be glad out of a knowledge and experience of complete forgiveness. Joy sees good in all things because of its source, because of who Joy is associated with – Joy is expressed as confidence because of the union between God and its recipient and the protection that comes from this union... And finally, Joy in its fullness tells its recipient that there is little or nothing to worry about because there is One greater Who loves, values accepts and walks with them personally or corporately as a people. Is the JOY of the LORD your strength today? May it be that we come into the deeper knowledge of His JOY and be open to experiencing more of the JOY of the LORD!

Jesus today we are reminded that the Joy of the LORD is our strength, help us to review our lives with you, seeking like the Israelites to be rightfully aligned with God in our relationship with Him and our actions with others... so that from that place the gift of joy will move within us to live a celebratory life before God and in relationship with others. Amen.



We can use many scriptures to build a picture of Christ's ascension from both the Old and New Testament and today's post will tell the story through the Scriptures, beginning first with the words of Jesus. During His farewell speech to Disciples Jesus tells them though there will be much reason to fear they are to hold on to their belief in God... His death and departure from this earth is not without purpose. *'I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.'*

A series of events have unfolded as Jesus foretold. Jesus is crucified. Jesus is risen and the Disciples are witnesses of His Resurrection, they have spent 40 days with Him being taught of the Kingdom of God. And now finally they have come to the time of His physical departure from the Earth and are witness to another spectacular event. *"...While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."*

Jesus rises from Earth into the Heavens, the Heavens open ... and the words of Psalm 24:9-10 seem an fitting chorus for His welcome. *"Lift up your heads, O gates! Be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle, the Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory!"*

From this Psalm It can be said that it is only Jesus who could rightly ascend to heaven with pure hands and a perfectly clean heart. Jesus' Ascension, though without the visible pomp and ceremony of a coronation procession, it is none the less an event that marks his crowning and his rise to the Throne of the Kingdom of God. Both Old and New Testament speak prophetically and interpretatively of Jesus' kingly authority and reign. The Book of Daniel and the Letter to the Philippians provide for us further support and commentary...

"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." **Daniel 7:13-14**

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' **Phil 2:11**

There is more to Jesus' Ascension than His Enthronement and Jesus foretold of the importance of His departure, *"It is to your advantage that I go away for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you"* **John 16:7**

The Helper who Jesus says will come is the promised Holy Spirit for whom He tells the Disciples they must wait. But for now, Jesus must depart, His Disciples stand and become witness to this historic event; a divinely orchestrated shift taking place right before their eyes. Heaven and Earth meet in Christ's Ascension as Angels verify that the way in which the disciples see Jesus leave the earth will indeed be the way he returns. Jesus' Ascension carved a legitimate, cleared pathway for the rule of the Kingdom of God on earth, made possible by His death and Resurrection. A Pathway has been forged and within the next 10 days the Disciples will experience the coming of the promised Holy Spirit who will be Jesus' presence on the Earth. The Holy Spirit is assigned to be the Disciples, to empower, to accompany and be with them forever, though Jesus has departed they have not been abandoned or left alone. And this will be the same for all who will believe in their Testimony of Jesus Christ and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Since then it remains possible for all that the Disciples received and experienced through the presence of the Holy Spirit, to be available by the same promise for all believers to experience. Believers can experience spiritual realities of the Kingdom of God especially, as we partner with Christ and pray 'let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'. We do so, in the full knowledge that the Kingdom that we speak of, has a legitimate King Who is enthroned with dominion, power and authority over all things in Heaven and Earth.

Torch Carriers_Carrying the Torch of Love

(31st May 2020)



When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability..."*They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongue?" "...They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"*. Acts 2: 1-4, 6

Since the beginning of Lent, we have been making our way towards Pentecost, the finale of what is also known by Israel as the Feast of Weeks. A revered/sacred period which typifies the presence of God in so many different ways. 50 days ago, we celebrated Easter; the Passion of Christ and His Resurrection, 10 days ago we remembered Jesus's Ascension and today we celebrate Pentecost; The fulfilment of God's Promise in/by the coming of the Promised Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. All Nations were included in this move of God on this notable Day of Pentecost. The 'tongues of fire' are sent for Everyone, for all nations. God makes no apology for creating the human race with many different nations despite the man-made structures of the world that support a view that some nations are more superior than another - all are made of equal worth before God. Pentecost is seen as a Divine demonstration of the heart of God; that of love, equity and justice for all.

In our reading today we see God move in power as a uniting force for the good of all humanity, for all nations. We witness, in effect, fire as a unifying influence creating the union between God and humanity. We see a unity of heaven and earth; we witness extraordinary coming together with the ordinary. We witness a union of love made possible by the work of Christ's Passion displayed on the Cross and His Resurrection. Peter states in his sermon, 'Jesus whom "...you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death...This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Every Holy Festival ordained by God in the Old Testament was given as a point of meeting between God and to His people Israel. So, from Passover to Pentecost we understand that the presence of God loomed over all festivities and events that took place as God met with His people, particularly, over the tortuous and traumatic death of Jesus. There was pain, tension, sadness and in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 24;18-21). We notice that Pentecost follows the horror of Good Friday, the joy of Resurrection, the celebration of Jesus' Enthronement and becomes God's 'finale' of this period. God moves into Pentecost making His presence felt and known by 'mighty rushing wind', I imagine sounding much like 'Concorde' flying low, overhead so loudly that the sound was heard by many far and wide. And as lights appearing like 'tongues of fire' alighting upon the Disciples for all to see. God is present, revealing Himself to all, in the Person of the Holy Spirit and one aspect of the pictorial images provided by Luke to describe the event is that of 'tongues of fire'; a metaphor of fire that can also speak of divine love and passion. Biblical poetry of Song of Songs (8:6) can give support to the use of 'fire' as 'love'. **"...For love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."** The Holy Spirit was poured out like 'tongues/flames of fire'... a Holy Fire of Love. Jesus' passion on the cross borne out of passionate love for humanity, of which He foretold, "I have come to set the earth on fire and how I wish it were already blazing ..." How are we now to be set ablaze? (cf.12:49) And His victorious Ascension preceded the pouring out of this same passionate love for all of humanity, it is an unquenchable, intense and passionate love that burns like fire yet in its burning, it neither consumes nor destroys. It is an eternal burning love that enters the hearts of believers, a love that transforms, empowers, strengthens and refines, He pours out a love that has the power to change its recipients and the world ...

The Disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and from that moment they became, in a sense, 'carriers of the torch' of God's passion for the world. The Phrase **'carry the torch'** is taken to mean those 'of a particular belief or movement who work hard to ensure that it is not forgotten and continues to grow stronger'; an understanding that can be used to describe the new responsibility Disciples were appointed to carry – there is no secret to the love they carry but an inner charge and that is revealed and experienced upon contact and encounter. Not only does this fire torch speak of love and passion, it speaks of power, the power of God's love, the transformative power of His love to effect change in our lives and the lives of others. And we know that **for any Union to be sustained and grow, Love must remain at the centre and this is what God has provided a tangible love in the form of fire to alight upon the world in a way that ordinary men and women could receive it. (cf. John 3:16)**

How are we to understand all of this and consider its relevance to our lives today? The Nativity story of Mary's conception helps us to personalise what can seem so distant and abstract, this experience was the first of her two recorded experiential meetings with the Holy Spirit, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:35) 'Come upon you' and 'overshadow you'* are two phrases that impress upon us the reader the arrival and creative impact of the Holy Spirit who comes to make good the plans and will of God. Mary is to be transformed by her experience with the Holy Spirit. She becomes what we can simply, even clumsily call a 'God carrier'. **The second of Mary's experience is that of her being of present with the disciples in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14)**

The similarities between Mary's experience and Pentecost is that both events were subject to God's timing, having everything to do with God and nothing at all to do with man, encountered by ordinary men and women bringing significant change to their lives that would impact the World individually and collectively. Yet distinctively, Mary would become pregnant miraculously by the Holy Spirit and carry the Son of God whilst those at Pentecost would and for those who would later believe in their testimony would **Carry the Torch - Carry the Holy Spirit of God** and bring life changing impact to the lives of others and to the world.

Pentecost 2020 meets us in the World today in the throes of Covid 19, a plague that is responsible for huge numbers of deaths around the world; nations across the world saturated with sorrow brought on by loss and grief. A World on 'Lockdown' living with restrictions upon all freedoms in ways that have never been experienced before in peace time. A sustained period of restrictions with many faces, feelings and experiences that have affected us all in different ways. And sadly, this past week Pentecost meets us as witnesses to gruesome images and recordings of firstly, an exchange in Central Park, New York between a Black man and White woman where she openly states on camera that she will call the Police and tell them that he is threatening her, a lie that she did not believe would be broadcast internationally. Secondly, an additional report of Police brutality in the US with the death of another Black man; George Floyd at the hands of Police. This is not a new or an unfamiliar event but just one more to add to a catalogue of names of those who have died in similar ways. For many Black people across the diaspora, these new events have become the catalyst for the venting of an array of feelings and emotion, built up and layered over many years. Particularly, for Black men whose calls for justice have gone unheard, who have witnessed time and time again acts of injustice against their counterparts being permitted on a huge scale across the World; Especially, here in the West, the US and UK where microaggressions of bullying and the unwarranted murder of many continue at the hands of those in authority who often, though convicted, walk free without penalty, as if the lives of those murdered do not matter. **However, there is hope in the midst of all this pain, grief and sorrow; trauma, tension and horror we as humanity are not left to ourselves. The fire of God's love is poured out to alight upon every open and receptive heart who want to become 'carriers of the Torch', carriers of the fire of God love. Every Carrier is empowered to work towards and bring transformation to the hearts and lives of those who are broken hearted, those who are sorrowful and to those who grieve. Additionally, may every Carrier willing take up the responsibility to work towards justice in every situation bringing the fire of God's love to meet with and transform the many faces of injustice.**

Jesus as we remember Pentecost, this year in our troubled times – we praise and thank you for the Love you have sent to dwell in the earth through the Holy Spirit. May the hearts of those who know you, who having heard want to know you be experience again and for the first time the Fire of God's love in their heart and lives. Also, may we who having received this love be Carriers of this Love prayerfully and actively cause it to be poured out into every dark and desperate situation we encounter bringing life, bringing hope, bringing renewal and transformation. Amen

Two Hymns ...

Holy Spirit you are welcome here (Contemporary)

<https://youtu.be/2q7hMfmVL3I>

Through the changing scenes of life (Traditional/Organ)

<https://youtu.be/OVJxha>

George Floyd: our responses



Our General Secretary, Lynn Green, has released this statement in response to the situation in the United States:

The inhumane and merciless brutality demonstrated towards George Floyd last week was an appalling act of injustice and reveals yet again the ugly reality of deeply ingrained institutional racism in the USA. The authentic response of a people who follow a God who delights in justice and righteousness is to stand together in solidarity and protest in the face of such insidious evil. The death of George Floyd must also drive us to some serious heart-searching of our own. The spotlight is not simply shining on 'them over there' but also on us here in our own context. Baptists Together hold a common value; that we are a Movement which shares a hunger for God's coming Kingdom and seeks to confront evil, injustice and hypocrisy and challenges worldly attitudes to power, wealth, status and security both within and beyond our Union. Right now God is presenting us with the opportunity to grow more deeply into this value and, in doing so, to unleash a prophetic call and presence in our communities and nations.

(2nd June 2020)

Sunday's Post_Looking Through the Cross_ Standing for Justice 2020)

(7th June



For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Ephesians 2:14-16

This Sunday follows a week of high emotion, I say this loosely as this may not be the depth of felt experience of all but that which is mostly shared by those who continue to suffer from a legacy of daily injustices. George Floyd's public murder at the hands of Police in the US has set off a deep cry of a broken hearted and emotionally crushed people across the world, causing many Black people to question as always, Why? Yet another? When will it end? Furthermore, there is also cause for surprise, disbelief and astonishment at the question raised repeatedly by many onlookers - **Why is there upset in the UK when this event happened in the US?** Really? Is the answer of questioning disbelief. Jane Elliott, an Anti-Racist Campaigner of 1960's may help to give an answer to this question. She developed an experiment with her primary school students which was later carried out with adults. In a room full of people, she asked the same question twice, **"...If you as a white person would be happy to receive the same treatment that our black citizens do in this society - please stand! ... Nobody is standing here. That says very plainly that you know what's happening. You know you don't want it for you. I want to know why you are so willing to accept it or to allow it to happen for others".** (link of short video of Jane Elliott) <https://youtu.be/wZSCgNjPMq4>. Jane Elliott's question to the group's response is a view that may help interpret the root of the presented lack of understanding by those who continue to pose the question of why, here in the UK. A denied sense of knowing what Black people face by an unwillingness to honestly acknowledge that they would not wish to share the experience. Have all the complaints and challenges against racist actions been misunderstood and unheard? What happened in US was a Racist act that had every appearance of one that would escape the call for justice like many Black deaths at the hand of the Police both in the US and the UK.

A further answer as to why demonstrations in the UK? Is one attempt at an answer, **not the answer nor the only** answer but just one perspective. Many 1st generation Black Britons born in the UK of Caribbean parents, and those who came to the UK as children from late 1950's through to the 1970's share the fact that many of their great grandparents were slaves and grandparents who were born into slavery as it was declared illegal. This fact demonstrates that the atrocity of African Slavery in the Caribbean is one, not buried in the annals of time, but that slavery is a more recent history than many would want to recall. This speaks to the Caribbean experience of a nation of freed people attempting to recover from 400 years of slavery with little or no financial support to rebuild. Further Colonial activities in Africa and the Commonwealth mean that many more are included in the framework of institutional racist worldview. Though, physical shackles have been removed they were sadly replaced by shackles of racist ideologies and philosophies of many Institutions in the UK and the West that label and define Black people in many derogatory ways and dehumanising ways.

The notion of a hostile environment in the UK has been and continues to be a long term lived experience beginning with the lack of welcome for many families who upon their arrival to the UK were being met with signs stating 'No blacks, no dogs, no Irish' as they made attempts to settle her in their search for accommodation and even membership in local Church. It may also surprise many that Black people live in fear daily, fear of unsolicited aggression against them; the microaggressions in the workplace and wider concerns for Police aggression against Black men; sons, brothers, fathers. Every act of Police Brutality or racist murder works as a latent emotional trigger of the tortuous brutality meted out during Slavery against men, women and children without regard for their humanity. Heinous acts against humanity, though historically challenged have not been held to account by any system of Justice to this day nor has there been any reparation as victims of these crimes. Why are people marching and demonstrating in the UK? The motivation for action at this time is to call for justice, equality and equity, the call for systems of injustice to be reversed and overturned. Though oddly enough, as deep as the pain is felt and experienced, the motivation for demonstration is not, in the main, one motivated by vengeance.

A number of questions have been applied as I search the scriptures for Biblical understanding and clarity for Christians response for all nations. What is Justice? What is Biblical Justice? What did Jesus do or leave us as a means to fight for Justice? What does it mean to stand for Justice? Is there a role for Churches to play in the stand for justice? "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he." (Deut 32:4). "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you." (Ps 89:14). Justice begins with God; justice is at the

heart of who He is and an attribute of His character. It follows that His people would do as the words of Micah so eloquently tell us to '...do Justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God'. There is an expectation and a responsibility of Believers' to act justly as part of their lived experience, a calling to take action, to challenge and confront acts of evil, to care for those in need and work to right wrongs in our society... **What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14,17)**

Jesus has already laid the ground for the work of godly Justice. Our Reading today from Paul's letter to the Ephesians points us clearly to the Cross – as both the symbol and the place of Justice. We begin by affirming that Jesus Himself, is our Peace before it goes on to tell us how Jesus accomplishes this aspect of peace for us. This peace that Paul speaks of is the power that destroys dividing walls of hostility between two groups ahead of creating a sacred ground out of which God's peace can flow unhindered, can bring healing and growth; where peace can finally be founded. This text can easily be applied to any given situation of conflict and hostility between individuals and groups and can be more than appropriately applied to the events of the past week. We can attempt to name the dividing wall before us today as Racism. Bob Marley's song 'War', gives social commentary to unease and tension that will perpetually exist without change if nothing is done to discredit racist and classist structures; *"Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned...until there is no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation...Until the colour of a man's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes..."* The basis of the War, unease or tension can be understood as a 'Dividing Wall of hostility'

Years ago, as a theological student I was approached by a Australian White male student who wanted a moment of my time, he went on to explain to me that every time he saw a group of Black male students he was fearful and believed they were up to no good... he said he felt the need to confess this as sin to another, hence the reason for our conversation. I responded by saying to him that this was a racist assumption with no foundation and that he would need to prayerfully confess this as sin and give up this type of thinking about black men, he replied if I give this up what do I have in its place? I replied, Jesus. This is what I believe is meant by the theme of this article 'Looking through the Cross', **Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". Matt 16:24.** The cross becomes the symbolic ground of prayer for sacrifice, for letting go, for giving up the acts, thoughts and attitudes that breed hostilities of hatred, bitterness, resentment and biases of any kind that makes for building and creation of dividing walls. Jesus by the giving of His life in exchange for the sins of humanity, created in that moment the power to destroy enmity and hostility by producing peace in its place. The Greek word, in our text, translated in English as 'destroy' also means to release and 'unbind' from bondage. Not only does Jesus destroy the enmity, He also sets people free from bondage, the limitation of their thinking, slavery to a default set of behaviours by providing an exchange – a change of condition. This freedom comes only at an individual or group's willingness to confess that their actions are sinful and in contradiction to God's ways and their willingness to begin the process of transformation, a willingness to be open to having a change of heart, change of thinking – new learning, new behaviour trusting themselves to God that in this new position, in the knowledge that living in this new way the Kingdom of God will be born.

Standing for justice is not one of comfort or ease, it requires moral courage, it requires a level of honesty and humility and a sense of duty to work for justice on a daily basis. The stand for justice and brings with it discomfort and unease for both the one who challenges who faces the temptation to witness and do nothing or to walk by. And for the one who is challenged who faces the temptation to retaliate and or defend rather than listen humbly. The goal of the peace that Christ affords as both the challenged and the one challenged is the understanding that moment as an opportunity that opens a pathway for change, for a solution that works to the benefits all parties – the search for a win/win. We come to the cross as two parties; Black and White with our false beliefs, ideologies and philosophies about Black people, with our silences about racist actions, with our regrets about failure to act we come with our pain, fear emotional triggers, we come asking for forgiveness, healing for our pain and healing of our distorted sight and distorted images of each other borne out of fear and pain. We come asking for forgiveness for the ways in which we, by thought, act or behaviour have added to the building of the dividing wall of hostility. We ask for the destruction of the 'Dividing wall' that has is being erected between us so that Christ may enter and bring His reconciling power to heal relationships and aid in recognition that we are all of one humanity before a Just God.

Dear Jesus, as we stand for justice, we ask that every prayer before you be received as a union of voices. We invite your divine presence to move in a way unlike ever before to break down the internal 'walls of division' within our hearts so that we may be equipped to break down the 'walls of division' before us. By so doing may we make room for the Justice and Peace of the Kingdom of God. Amen

<https://youtu.be/3Mb0XA2BDx0> Leaning on the Everlasting Arms
I Can't Breathe – Words of Lamentation

<https://youtu.be/FhvXOIvRv4> When I survey
(10th June 2020)

Prayers written by Pamela Searle, Minister of Sutton Baptist Church and Mary Taylor, Regional Minister in Yorkshire Baptist Association - both members of our Racial Justice Hub

The God of Love open our eyes to see the suffering of all our brothers and sisters.
Help me to see and hear.

Silence is not an option!

A time to be silent and a time to speak
As Brothers and Sisters in Christ when we see an injustice we must pray,
lose our shame and speak up and be proactive.
Father equip me to have the words to pray out loud when I see my fellow brother or sister beaten
mercilessly. Father equip me to speak against the murder.

Kneeling to you

Father I thank you that you are a Just God.
I praise you Lord for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; as my soul
knows it very well. Lord I thank you that you knitted me together you grew the beginning of my spin
within my mother's womb. and that I am made in your own image. Father I cannot begin to know the
pain and the suffering that my Brother endured as his neck was being knelt on, as he called Momma
and breathed his last breath after nine minutes!
I can cry out to you Lord, help me speak against injustice, that we should never see this evil act occur
again. I thank you lord that Justice is foundational to your throne.
Amen

Lord Have mercy!
Prayers as a Black woman

Help me Lord to celebrate my difference in the country I live in.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to speak up when I feel the silence is against me.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to grow past the privileges I have been denied.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to feel accepted in a country a world that is not my own.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to show the richness of my culture and not to feel defensive when asked.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to not feel ashamed when I am under pressure from my employers when I see my
brothers and sisters speaking out against injustice.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord For the times when I have been too consumed by my own pain or distracted by the
tasks of life to see and respond to the deaths of those You hold dear.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord never to tire to be hard working and persistent in my commitment to justice.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to see past the indifference of others who do not share Yours and my commitment for
justice.
Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to open my ears and eyes to hear and see those who cry out!

Hear my prayer

Help me Lord to seek you and to get rid of all resentment, bitterness, rage and anger, that I hold towards people who have hurt me and to continue to step forward with compassion and forgiveness in my protest for an invisible unity.

Amen

Lament is not despair. **It is not whining.** It is not a cry into a void. **Lament is a cry directed to God.** It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world's deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. **It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are...**

Lord have mercy! The prayer of a white woman

Help me to open my heart when I would rather stay un-moved. **Lord have mercy.**

Help me to be silent and listen when I feel defensive. **Lord have mercy.**

Help me to examine myself for sin when I start to be the judge of others. **Lord have mercy.**

Help me to admit that I benefit from privilege even when I have not actively sought it. **Lord have mercy.**

Help me look hard and see with fresh eyes the different lives of others, when I would rather stay immersed in my own. **Lord have mercy.**

Lord help me to speak out and act when I would rather stay comfortably on the fence. **Lord have mercy**

Help me to be hard-working and persistent in my commitment to justice, especially when I become weary. **Lord have mercy.**

Lord, help me to anoint your body with the costly ointment of love and protest, even when others are criticising my foolishness. **Amen**

Isaiah 1: 16-17

Wash yourselves; **make yourselves clean;**
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

Father we ask that your justice flow in this world, as your creation weeps.

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/579793/Lamentation_words_for.aspx



God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah... The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah... Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Psalm 46:1-2, 7, 10-11

A few years ago, I had the great pleasure of looking after my granddaughter for the day, we had a lovely time but we had cause to have a moment of silence. That afternoon she was a hive of activity moving from one game or toy to another, it was so tiring just watching her and then - she started talking and it seemed she wouldn't stop, my head was spinning. I called her to my side and whispered to her that we need to have 5 minutes of complete silence, she agreed I believe because she assessed that she could handle 5 minutes. I seated her on the sofa – and repeated “no talking”. She made a few attempts during the silence to talk but as I sat with her I shook my head and reminded her that her timeout was not up, we have...x mins left, she finally gave up trying to monitor the time and to my surprise, guess what? – she fell asleep.

How many of us are like little children busying ourselves with so much activity? To stop, to be seated – to find a place to be still in silence throws up for us so much resistance. But there is a lesson to be found here. There is a rest in stillness and silence – just as my granddaughter and I had found.

Psalm 46 begins with the affirmation, “God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in time of trouble. These words declare in a pictorial sense a picture of God being a shelter, a protector, a defence even a defender from the storms and battles that may be raging externally around us. He becomes a fortified place of existence, a place of protection from attack, a bunker, a place of safety and security. Despite the figurative descriptions of shakings of mountains, earthquakes, tremors and the problems caused by flooding and disaster, which represents troubles in our lives, those who make God their refuge, strength and shelter shall not be moved, they will remain steadfast. Why? Because God makes his residence in the centre, in the very centre of their hearts and in the midst of their situation. A troubled heart and mind is replaced with an inner, spiritual strength, beyond that of physical might and problem solving, which allows believers to be resolute and hopeful through trying times. What confidence such images offer to those who are needful of such dynamic strength and protection.

In times of trouble; crisis, despair, distress, enmity, adversity, sickness, and experiences of injustice, God is found to offer His presence. His very being, to be the very help needed, a means of boundless, infinite support and assistance full of power and potency. It is from this image and into this spiritual reality that God calls us to a place of stillness. **‘Be still and know that I am God’.** He calls us to a place in Him, a place of refuge in Him, to stillness - a call to do nothing, to stop, to be silent and quiet for a few minutes. To a moment in time when we are no longer responding to external moving and shaking around us to a place where we focus on Him, his strength, his power and his protection. He is in the centre; He does not call us to place of emptiness or intimidation. He calls us to himself. Just as my granddaughter found rest in stillness and in my presence. He calls us similarly to relationship, into His divine Presence and despite our attempts to resist the quiet and refrain from activity He sits with us until we settle and resist urges to do something –so that the Rest can come, and renewal is found.

We are called to a place of vulnerability. Could this be why we as adults resist such a state of being? We resist this space where we come face to face with ourselves; our weakness, powerlessness and uncertainty. We somehow believe this to be an unnatural and unproductive place. Yet, God calls us to vulnerability and a dependency upon Him that opens for us, the opportunity to be given something in exchange – rest, renewal and courage found in Him

“Vulnerability isn't good or bad. It's not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living...Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.” Brene Brown; Daring Greatly

And being found in His presence we can be comforted, receive succour and experience God. It is implied that we can become acquainted with Him more personally, learn more about him and receive His wisdom. We can gain deeper insight and understanding of Him, ourselves, others and our situations.

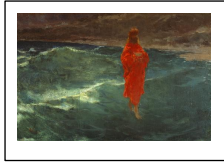
In His Presence we can refrain from needless activities and unhelpful responses and here in relationship our worship of Him can flow more authentically from a state of knowing him. God declares to His hearers, "I will be exalted". God will be set on high, He is elevated in our eyes, thoughts, attitudes and in our lives by the truth we now see of Him in this space. God is exalted and elevated over the external troubles that drew us into this space with Him in the first place. He declares that in our knowing and in our praise He will be elevated and exalted by us above our problems – as we see Him differently for who He is, not for what we have been told nor for who we think He is – we see Him for who He is. God is exalted above all nations and throughout the whole earth. Isn't it wonderful what authentic praise and worship can achieve! And finally, we can recite in chorus ...**Here he stands! The Commander! The mighty Lord of Angel Armies is on our side! The God of Jacob fights for us! Pause in his presence (selah;praise)**

When we seek Him in the stillness, in times of vulnerability, God will empower us to stand courageously whilst He fights on our behalf. I'm off to find Him in the stillness, I pray that you may be blessed in your timeout as I know I will be in mine.

Dear Jesus, Help us to stop, to refrain from high emotional responsiveness, busyness and much activity help us to find you in the stillness and the quiet ... open our eyes and our hearts in this place to know you better to receive the wisdom for our lives so that we can offer up authentic praise that elevates you in our eyes above the distresses around us. Amen

**Jesus be the Centre
(An inspirational song for worship)**

<https://youtu.be/EG-l1kK-BpU>



Faith that Walks on Water Matthew 14: 24-33

(5th July 2020)

The story of Peter walking on water comes after a very sombre time for Jesus. At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus is informed that his cousin and fellow kingdom missionary John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod. Jesus sought to be alone and set off to a deserted place, but He was followed and found by the crowds who had great need of Him. Having compassion for them, rather than send them away, he healed many and ministered to their needs. He also blessed two fish and 5 loaves and miraculously fed more than 5000 people with surplus besides. When they had eaten, Jesus finally, dismissed the crowds and sent the disciples ahead of him and went to the mountain alone to pray. A change had been signalled by John's death, things were shifting – the timing, the tragic close of John's mission as the forerunner to Christ was the endorsement of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus needed to commune with the Father in prayer – What is He to make of John the Baptist's death? Is the timing of His death significant? What meaning had it for Him? Jesus sets the example of what is needed in troubled times, He dismisses the crowds and seeks quiet time alone to hear from God, to seek guidance and wisdom. Like Jesus, we too can seek to discern events that mark our time - What is happening around us? What events are signalling to us that time alone with God is needed? What time is it? What season are we in? Are we seeing our events through God's eyes?

The disciples having been sent ahead were well into their journey, in the midst of the sea in stormy waters. Jesus having no boat walked on water to meet them! The sight of such impossibility caused the disciples to imagine that they had seen a ghost, they were terrified at this awesome sight, - Jesus walking on water!!! Imagine their possible thoughts; What on earth is this? Are we seeing correctly? This must be a dream??...Jesus speaks into their fears "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Before we go on, Let's stop for a moment and meditate a little further on what can be made of this event using what we know of Christ in light of His Word and this miraculous event. Sharing my thoughts here is merely a perspective, they may also be reflections and repetitions of what you have heard before but this is done for the purpose that we will, like the Disciples worship and affirm, "Truly, You are the Son of God."

Jesus is the Creator of ALL things; all creation, He is One with creation, He is LORD over creation, He is united with creation. ***For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col 1:16.*** The waters can bear Him, yet it remains fluid. How is this possible? It is His bond with that which He has created; it is His unity with creation that permits such possibility. The One who creates knows the design, the pattern, the materials and elements used. Additionally, 'ALL' of creation is part of who that He is. An example that comes to mind is that of the body; just like our limbs, parts of our bodies that move automatically when required, it seems creation being united with Jesus moves in automation by His will and His thoughts. ***"...For You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created." Rev 5:11*** The Sea and the waves move as part of Jesus can therefore support Him and be controlled by Him. ***"... in him all things hold together. Col 1:15-17; "...sustaining all things by his powerful word." Heb1: 2-3***

All were terrified but only Peter saw a possibility, an opportunity through which he desired to exercise his faith and meet Jesus on the 'waters of impossibility'. ***"...If it is you command me to come to you on the water."*** Upon Jesus' invitation, Peter stepped out of the boat and as he had hoped – Peter found himself walking on water. Peter's desire was powered into faith by Jesus' invitation and here his faith became the unifying principle. Peter's faith connected him to an extraordinary space where the Creator and creation were unified – A space in time that Jesus was holding on the earth for Peter to exercise his faith. Peter by faith, for a moment became a participator of what I choose to call the 'miraculous impossibility'. Faith connected Peter to Jesus in an unusual way and his faith became the firm foundation upon

which he walked to Jesus – faith saw a possibility beyond the natural realm and made it a living reality.

Faith sees extraordinary possibilities beyond the natural and asks for such possibilities to become a reality in the business of everyday life. Such empowerment and strength to exercise this kind of faith is found in faith's connectivity to Christ, faith's unity with Christ and Jesus' transference of divine abilities to the Believer which permits them to participate in His power over all earthly realities. It can be said of, " ...I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Phil 4:13

Peter initially steps out of the boat onto the water completely aware of the storm, faith is his motivator. However, as he stepped toward Jesus, he is confronted by the wind in such a way that caused him to be fearful, fear was now causing him to sink. Peter was faced with a snapshot decision, to remain focussed upon Christ ahead of him or be overcome with fear at the wind about him... "Lord, save me!" *Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and lifted him up and said, "What little faith you have! Why would you let doubt win?" (TPT) "...Why did you doubt and dance back and forth between following Me and heeding fear?" (The Voice).* Faith in life, here on the ground is beset with choices and we like Peter are caught at the crossroad of decision where we either choose to sustain faith in face of adversity or adverse circumstances, despite our fear or choose to let imposing circumstances win over believing in a reality that is often unique to us and has no supporting evidence outside of that which is seen by faith, in Christ.

2020 has offered up a number of life events and challenges that have hit like waves across the Globe. Due to the current Pandemic, we have been engaged in worship outside of our church buildings and like the rest of the world we have been living in lockdown; many living alone, or as couples or as family with reduced social activities and social engagements. We the Church have been challenged to find new ways to engage with worship and 'being' outside of the Church building. Lockdown is easing and Churches are making renewed attempts to resume Worship though, for some the solid walls of the Church Building may remain temporarily unavailable due to shielding. We have been reminded during this time to live as we have been called – understanding the reality that the Church is more than the building, we as individuals form the church, each a 'living stone' finding our security in Christ. During this time, we have been continually challenged to find our true focus in Christ, going to deeper levels of faith in Him and rediscovering the true source of our motivation.

There have been so many unknowns; much uncertainty and indecision. Every concern, every doubt and every moment of uncertainty is a moment upon which we are called to rely on the very gift that makes us Christian Believers'; that of Faith. We follow Jesus as disciples, not into the known and the familiar but into the unknown completely dependent upon him for every step, it is and will be our faith that we keep us afloat. It will also be the depth of our personal relationship with Him and our ability to trust Him in the unknown, in the times of limitations that we will find our freedom in Him despite times of confinement.

Oceans (Where Feet May Fail) Lyrics (Hillsongs)

https://youtu.be/dy9nwe9_xzw

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep
My faith will stand

And I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand
Will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed and You won't start now

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger in the presence of my Saviour

Beauty for Ashes

(12th July 2020)



"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the LORD has anointed Me to preach tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of prison to those bound...to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes." Isa 61:1-3

In our Passage today we meet the nation of Israel who have returned to Jerusalem from a time of captivity and exile. They find their much love homeland in ruins; covered in debris and ashes. It was for them a time of deep national loss, grief and great mourning. God does not pass over, nor does He ignore their pain and hurt – He speaks into this situation through His Prophet Isaiah words of promise, comfort and forthcoming transformation.

Today's focus is on God's promise to give 'Beauty for Ashes' as part of His Universal plan for the whole World. A plan that would be accomplished by His unnamed special agent/servant, He would be sent to deliver Good News firstly to Israel, news of sweeping and exciting transformation, news full of possibilities for a hopeless people. News of release, liberation, healing, justice, reparation and restoration. And the recipients of these changes are identified as the poor, those in mourning, those who grieve, the oppressed, the broken hearted. It is difficult to see who could be left out these groupings. Some 700 years later, God's Word, His long-awaited Promise becomes a reality in time, it takes on form and springs into life. Jesus reads the first two verses of this passage in the Synagogue and declares to His hearers "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus is God's servant, not only does He deliver God message of the Kingdom of God verbally, He also seals this message with a physical act love. The giving of His life as an exchange for sin; in exchange for all that is evil. We have as our backdrop the image of 'Empty Cross', the finished work of Jesus Christ, the completed work of all that Isaiah foretold and all that Jesus claimed. The Cross becomes for us a place of 'Divine Exchange' and Transformation. Exchange is at the heart of this message of Good News and this 'Divine Exchange' is not one of equality, it is not kind for kind, nor is it an exchange of similar value – it is an Exchange that allows the One who is greater to enter into the lives of humanity and bring transformation to the damage caused by evil in the World. An Exchange that gives us the opportunity to bring our brokenness, ~~our hurts, our pains~~ in whatever form to God knowing that what we give up places us in a new position to receive something far greater and more beautiful.

Isaiah begins with the Spirit who is described throughout the Bible as; breath, life giver, creator, counsellor, comforter, the author of new life. it is the Spirit who has Anointed God's servant with status and authority to carry out this Divine work. A role that He, the Promise, the Holy Spirit will take over and continue once Jesus has ascends and returns to Kingly reign. Isaiah tells us that the anointed one will do the work of comforting; he will soothe and heal the pain of grief; He will dispense justice and divine compensation. Beyond the inner work of healing and repair of wounded and broken hearts is God's promise to create outward changes for His people. These are not empty promises, as both internal and physical changes are to be made as a means of God's rebuilding plan from the scenes of ruin and ashes.

'To console those who mourn in Zion to give them beauty for ashes'. In the time of Isaiah people would put ash on their heads as a symbol of personal or national grief and loss, sorrow and repentance. Ashes is therefore, associated with pain, loss and suffering. When

we think of ashes, we understand it to be residue from fire, the result of complete ruin with nothing left of its original form. Ashes replace what once was, bearing no resemblance at all to what was lost, only ashes. It symbolises with such power the depth of despair of the mourner, the complete and utter end of life, or lifestyle of a community – an end resulting in deep sorrow at the sense of powerlessness to reverse this fate. It is impossible to cause ashes to return to what they once were BUT HERE IS GOD!!! There is no beauty to be found in ashes and we can imagine those covered in ashes, neither looking particularly comforted nor attractive – not a condition that anyone of us would choose or envy. However, God moves in to beautify with more than superficial makeup, the word used for beauty in this text speaks of a 'Crown of beauty', a garland of flowers, a headdress worn by priest, men of positions and bridegrooms. The crown speaks of a person in high office. It is a beautification of elevation – a beauty that takes a person from the lowest depths of despair and ruin to the greatest heights of splendour and majesty.

Just as the ashes are a complete transformation of what was lost in the fire, so too is God's act to restore the life of the mourner. He desires to give a transformation of a beautiful kind, a transformation of a divine kind that which could only come from Him and by His power. Yet, we cannot obtain this beauty if we choose not to give up the ashes; if we choose not to openly share our wounds, pains, hurt and doubt with God. As we do, God moves over us and within us by His Spirit, to release us from the reign of sorrow, grief, despair and doubt to bring the beauty of transformation. To crown us with a beauty that would reign instead of sorrow. A reign of goodness, grace and full of thoughts of hope, optimism and positivity about the future. This new reign of beauty that produces shifts in our thinking and a new vision of the future to work towards.

In closing, will you take a moment with me and think of all that is happening around you... Where are the ashes and ruins that you notice in your life, family, job, community, Church, Country etc...? Now take some quiet time and consider the following question prayerfully..."***For a moment, imagine that tonight, while you slept, a miracle occurred. The ashes that you had named had been transformed into a crown of beauty... When you awake tomorrow, what would be some of the things you would notice that would tell you that life things had changed. What would be the first thing that you noticed? what signs of new life can you see...?***

Dear Jesus, open wide our eyes and our hearts, please flood them with Your light, purify our thoughts, our imaginations so that we are able to receive Your desires and hopes for our concerns. Give to us Your highest vision of beauty that You have for each of us, for each situation we have presented before You. Amen

**Beauty for Ashes – Crystal Lewis
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
So In Love feat Chandler Moore**

<https://youtu.be/DDhITzbyFRo>
<https://youtu.be/FhvXOIVsRv4>
<https://youtu.be/RCfjEOfKco>



Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world...after you have suffered a while, [\[b\]](#)perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 1 Pet 5: 5-11

Peter's letter is written to the Churches across Asia Minor. His letter is one of encouragement urging its mixed membership to maintain their trust in God especially in times of struggle, conflict and particularly through any suffering experienced as they travel through this Christian journey. Peter points out clearly that suffering is part of the Christian life and living and therefore not to be thought of as peculiar to any individual or group. Peter reassures and encourages his readers; he gives direction as to the type of attitude necessary and warns of the need for vigilance. He is also especially concerned that members develop the ability to read and discern carefully the circumstances them – all for the purpose that the right stance can be taken prayerfully before God.

The text chosen today is divided into two parts; verses 5-7 and 8-11. The context for our passage today is that of submission and humility in relationships within the Church; in particular with those in authority, with each other and ultimately to God. In the sense that all members practise an attitude of humility ensuring that any egotistic or prideful posture is absent from their relationships and any act of submission is understood not as one subject to oppressive rule of others but as that which 'puts others first, which thinks of the desires, needs, ideas more worthy of attention than one's own.' Grudem:194. Peter's letter goes on further urging is readers to submit themselves in humility under the rule of God, practically Peter is directing Believers to position themselves with humility; a lowly posture communicating with God prayer, it is a posture of dependence in recognition of His the authority, wisdom and power of God. Such humility means that all self-directed or wilful actions and plans cease and are given up, and control is given over to God. – 'in effect putting God is in the Driver's Seat'. It is God's fight and the Believer acknowledges that He takes up the fight on our behalf.

We can confidently do so because we are encouraged to cast all our anxieties and worries upon him, everything that causes us to be distracted and preoccupied. The image we gain from idea of 'casting all our cares' is that of someone throwing away from self onto someone else – someone far greater and far more powerful, continuing on we get the sense of the one throwing 'all' is left free with nothing further to carry. All that is now required of them is a lowly posture, complete dependence giving God His rightful place/position which allows Him to manage external circumstances whilst also enabling Him to give to the Believer the full measure of His peace. No matter how lowly and bereft we may be left feeling by having to give up control we can do so in the knowledge that God not only manages the situation He also cares for us and that we imagine ourselves surrounded, even wrapped in His care - God is concerned for us and He has an interest in our receiving the best possible outcome to our cause and for our greatest relief.

The second part verses 5-11 seem to be a repeat the themes of the earlier verses. Though, the perspective changes to one of spiritual conflict which comes from an unseen source, sadly to be experienced by all believers. We are cautioned to be watchful, take time to read our experiences, discerning who our real enemy is – 'the devil', taking the right response, that of prayer and a posture of faith rather than that of fear. It is implied that our own efforts against our spiritual opponent are fruitless.

Peter's directly names the enemy whose name provides clues as to how to discern the source of conflict and attack; *the adversary* who distracts and tempts into sin, the one behind the intensity and destructive nature of false accusations, slander, criticisms and violence, the source responsible for events of evil or malicious intent. We understand during times such as these rather than being purely a relational issue we are being faced with

something much more forceful and sinister. The adversary whose strategy Peter likens and to that of a lion on the prowl waiting to pick off the vulnerable to harm or to use in his attacks on others. How is the Believer to respond? Just as earlier verses outline, Believers are called to position themselves before God throwing everything upon Him, our humility is our position of faith filled resistance as advised by Peter. God never loses a Battle therefore, our faith in Him holds to the 'truth' which believes that just as God is victorious so will we. There is an indication that our difficulties, from whatever source will bring suffering, but we are reminded and encouraged to believe with certainty that no matter the duration God will restore us..."... *will personally and powerfully restore you and make you stronger than ever. Yes, he will set you firmly in place and build you up. And he has all the power needed to do this forever! Amen. [TPT]*

What concerns have this week brought your way? In the news, personally, within the community or around the World?

What concerns or anxieties are you carrying? Today we are urged to Cast all – throw all of them not just some upon the living God – He can take it! He can carry them! Be relieved of worry and take your position of dependence, let Him take the fight on and wait for an outcome that will take into account your best interests – because after all He cares about you and how your managing this thing called life...



**Let's join together in a prayerful Sunday
To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

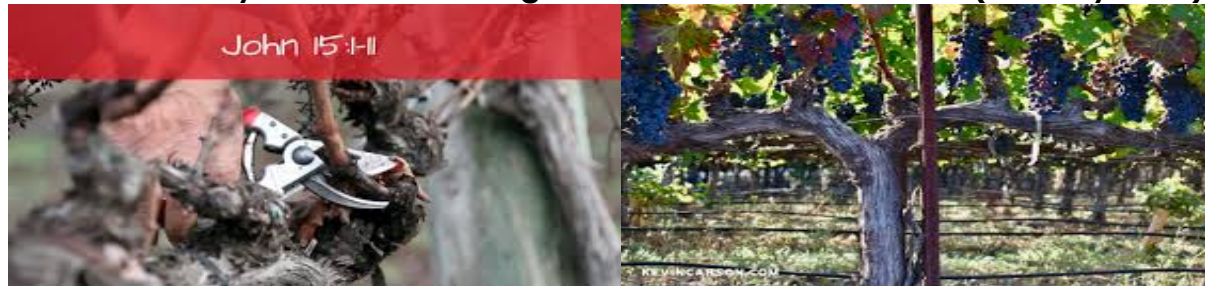
Thinking of Tessa, Frances and many others who are facing challenges this week ...

Leaning on His Everlasting Arms

What a friend we have in Jesus

<https://youtu.be/DObSJ1PSdnQ>

<https://youtu.be/cscMcqHquuY>



Jesus uses the very powerful image of a Vineyard and Vinedresser (keeper of the Vineyard) to convey a message of spiritual relationships and of growth and development that comes from them. He begins with the relationship between Father before following with that of the Father and the Son's individual relationship with the disciples. All relationships are interconnected though with marked differences in reliance, support and influence. The image of the Vineyard relies upon our use of imagination and our ability to develop the imagery further; we can begin to see a Vineyard that is being kept by a Vinedresser focussed upon obtaining the best yield of His crops. I would go on further in this vein and imagine this Vineyard to be a prized Estate that has a mission to produce the best grapes and ultimately the best wine. Yes, we see a Vineyard with a Vinedresser who is working to produce a crop of excellence, who both knows how to get the best out of the Vine and its branches. We can draw further from the Gospel writings of the 'Wedding of Cana' that Jesus the true Vine produces wine of the best quality.

The image is expressed like a mini drama with the roles of all the players in the Vineyard. Jesus speaks of Himself as the 'True Vine, a term that suggests that are other vines 'out there' which by comparison are counterfeit...poor imitations. The Vinedresser, He speaks of using familial and personal terms; 'My Father', who is no ordinary keeper but God Himself. We can glean from this that the Keeper of the Vineyard exercises His role with divine expertise and precision. Lastly, 'you are the branches' defines disciples or believers as the branches of the Vine.

Now to the Vine dressing activity, "*...He cuts off/takes away every branch in Me that does not bear fruit.*" it is difficult to ponder the thought that The Father will cut away branches that are unproductive, so too is the thought that fruitfulness does not stop a branch from getting the cut either 'cut off if you do and cut off if you don't'. This is personal as the branches are us; either you or me! What does this mean? Will a moment of unproductivity can get us the chop? A footnote (a) added to The Passion Translation⁷ reminds the reader that the original Greek Phrase used in the text has variation of meanings some translations use; 'take away', 'cut off' or 'remove'⁸ however, there are other meaning such as; to raise, take up or lift up that can provide another perspective which is less fatal and can be considered to be more in keeping with a loving, nurturing and forgiving God. We are asked to consider that the Vinedresser "...takes up (to Himself) every fruitless branch. He doesn't remove these branches, but He takes them to Himself. As a wise loving farmer, he lifts them up off the ground to enhance their growth." This perspective demonstrates that the Vinedresser maybe open to considering other options less final in outcome.

The idea of 'abiding' helps us to consider the above aspect further. As the term 'abiding' causes us to further consider relationship in light of the responsibility of the disciple. What does this term really mean? Again, this term has variation of meanings 'continue, endure, wait, remain, persevere, hold fast.' However, the overall sense I take from its meaning is one of relationship, that is staying in relationship no matter what – so that we the Disciple may endure and persevere. What does it mean to abide, to stay in relationship with the Vine?

⁷ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+15%3A1-17&version=TPT>

⁸ <https://biblehub.com/greek/142.htm>

We need only consider how any of our relationships have grown and developed. Relationships require investment of time, our spending time with the person/s, getting to know them; asking questions, finding out about them, discovering what we like and love about them, equally what we find difficult – discovering how we come through difficulties together. Abiding in the Vine is developed through our times of prayer, study of the scripture and meditation. We will find as the text suggests; the branch will greatly benefit from acts of abiding, the Vine has so much to give. The only condition being that the Disciple stay connected, stay in relationship, seeking to know, discovering. Like many of our relationships this one requires our time and our commitment yet goes much further by demanding our dependence – demanding it for no other purpose or agenda than that of our growth and development.

The one in whom 'you', the branch is called to abide is stronger, more powerful and He is the source of the Disciple's ability to endure. Relationship in Christ, in connection with Christ, is source of our ability to endure, it is our ability to withstand the pruning and shaping of the Vinedresser whose purpose is to fashion us in the likeness of His Son. Jesus advises us to abide which though not mentioned, suggests that there is choice to abide or not. And life has shown us that there occasions when we may not want to abide – we do not wish to stay. These times, I believe are distinctive moments when we for example, do not understand the actions of the Vinedresser, when we perceive His actions intention to cause us harm and when we blame the Vinedresser wrongly, for the pain we are suffering we are experiencing. The call to 'abide' seems to be most relevant during the tests of 'Pruning'; pain and suffering. More to follow on 'Pruning' in part 2 of this series.

For now, we hold on to the fact that the one who abides is empowered, nourished and strengthened to persevere, even healed. For the one who separates and moves out of the relationship is in danger of losing out on receiving vital nutrients that sustains and maintains us through the hard times. Separation and isolation from the 'Source'; the 'True Vine' will eventually lead to fruitlessness, lack of productivity, discouragement and hopelessness as Christ states, within this powerful imagery of the Vineyard, with knowledge and authority – "... Without me you can do nothing."! We may ask the question, could it be during times despair, separation and isolation that we find that the Vinedresser will, rather than cut us off, is will raise us up and bind us to Himself? If this be the case – then it's all good, whatever befalls it will always be good in the Vineyard.

Father we thank you that your ultimate purpose for us in your Vineyard is one of spiritual growth and development. Your pruning activities in this garden is one of shaping and formation as your 'workmanship' being created into the likeness of your Son – so that we eventually become the best possible version of ourselves. Help us we pray, do continue to raise us up on those occasions when we fail to understand your purpose ... we thank you for your forgiveness, your loving kindness and mercy towards us. Amen.

**Jesus be the Centre
You are the Vine we are the Branches**

<https://youtu.be/EG-l1kK-BpU>
<https://youtu.be/Hw5En1VoYYw>

“...Without Me you can do nothing” Part 2 2020)

(2nd August



Jesus' image of the Vineyard prompts the reader to call to mind a flourishing plantation. And as Jesus expands this image further, we see within this blossoming garden the inclusion of the process of cultivation responsible for its growth and productivity. The Vineyard becomes in essence a metaphor for the process of growth and development of to be experienced by the Christian Believer. This great expanse of Vineyard is managed within the loving, nurturing relationship of Father, Son and the Believer recorded in the text we now know beyond the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ that His cultivating work is supported by the Holy Spirit. The means of cultivation focused upon within our text today is it that of 'pruning and cleaning' and these two aspects are given some consideration and enquiry. What is the connection between the two, if any? and how are they applied to the life of the believer?

What did Jesus mean when he told the disciples that they were "...already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." The original Greek word used in this text here is translated as clean and it is the same word used in the text to mean pruning; an interesting thought that the Word of God is a means of cultivation, we are 'pruned and cleansed' by the Word. Jesus' words cleanse us, an inward deep cleansing removing impurities; "our thoughts and motives as we absorb and obey its truths." (Charles R. Swindoll) The idea that Jesus' Word to us cleanses and removes from us that which would hinder our productivity so that we can receive without hindrance the necessary nutrients from the vine. Here in the garden we are under the cultivation of the Vinedresser whose work is transforming us to ensure our productivity and encourage new life of the Kingdom being formed in us.

What is it, that is said about how we are cleaned by God's Word? God's word through Christ has within the miraculous power to cleanse its hearers and readers in such a way that is far reaching, deeper and superior to the cleansing by water. We are reminded in Genesis 1 that God's spoken word has the power to create and in John 1, Jesus described as the Word who created all things. We read further in Ephesians and Hebrews the power of God's word to clean and to prune by removing unseen debris.

"...We know He gave Himself up completely to make her His own, washing her clean of all her impurity with water and the powerful presence of His word." Ephesians 5:26-27

For we have the living Word of God, which is full of energy, and it pierces more sharply than a two-edged sword. It will even penetrate to the very core of our being where soul and spirit, bone and marrow meet! It interprets and reveals the true thoughts and secret motives of our hearts. There is not one person who can hide their thoughts from God, for nothing that we do remains a secret, and nothing created is concealed, but everything is exposed and defenceless before his eyes, to whom we must render an account. Hebrews 4:12-13

God's word, works upon both the internal unseen aspects of our humanity; our personality, character, thoughts, attitudes and intentions as well as the physical aspects of what we do as a result; our actions and our behaviour. His Word has the ability to reveal the hidden, the unknown aspects within us and make them known to us through our meditation and self-examination. It can be understood that we have a part to play here in our cleansing, much like our daily routine of showering and bathing in morning and evening. We regularly read and listen to the scriptures and respond positively to the challenges Jesus' word presents to our thoughts, attitudes, character, personality and actions. By doing so, we position ourselves

to receive God's perfecting views and thoughts on our lives and as we accept his revealed observations as truth we can begin to ask to be changed in light of this new truth. We can then be set free from those things in our life; the debris that stifle our growth and hinder our being transformed 'into his likeness'. Our response determines the stages of our growth and development. So, in some way our being clean or tending to our spiritual hygiene becomes part of our Christian responsibility and as such distinctively different from the pruning and cleaning activity of the Vinedresser.

One of the roles of the Vinedressers or Gardeners is that of pruning, cutting and trimming branches, removing debris for the main purpose of influencing the way the tree or plant grows; the act of forming and shaping the tree or plant for maximum productivity and a pleasing appearance. In TD Jakes Book 'The Crushing' he applies a very helpful perspective to the idea of pruning. He brings to our understanding of human suffering the notion of 'pruning'. The view, that life crises often causes us to question and seek to understand the WHY of what has happened or is happening. Jakes suggest that attempts to answer the question of why is better managed by us when we can see things from the perspective of the intention and purpose of the vinedresser. The awful events that befall us are not seen as sent by God but rather that as a means He uses to form and shape us. Understood in this way he states that "Pruning is not punishment...and the difference between pruning and punishment is intention...We think of the vinedresser with a sharp instrument and any cutting would induce pain if we as individuals are considered branches. Pain and suffering go hand in hand and the pruning purpose is to bring growth."¹⁰ We can conclude that, pruning is 'pain producing purpose', we are not being punished by our circumstances or for any wrongdoing but purely being pruned so that we 'mature and reach our full potential'.

There is so much more to be said about the processes within the Vineyard – for instance, the crushing of grapes to wine... the story continues!!!

But for now, one final thought on 'abiding'; last week the focus was on the Believer's ability to abide, to stay connected and in relationship with Christ come what may. Basically, whatever our circumstances however, Christ is very clear in His imagery that the act of abiding is mutual – it is shared. If we abide in Christ, we have His promise that He will abide with us too! He will never leave us in a crisis. He will not only sustain us through it all, He will also help us bear the weight of our experiences and empower us to persevere through to the end. Oh, what a wonderful saviour!

Dear Jesus, we thank you for your imagery of the Vineyard and for the way in which we are held and supported by your love as we are being transformed into your likeness by our Father. Help us during times of difficulty and suffering to always be reminded of your abiding presence with us and intentions of our Father who is working for our ultimate good. Amen

Shout to the Lord My Jesus My Saviour
Darlene Zschech, Hillsong

<https://youtu.be/y78aKBa917I>

Man of Sorrows What a Saviour
Amy Peck

<https://youtu.be/U9i-PWLRMGY>

Abide with me
Emeli Sande

<https://youtu.be/MmtRIEIIznQ>

¹⁰ TD Jakes, The Crushing P55-74

No Place like Home

(5th August 2020)



"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." John 14: 1-4

Last weekend a beloved church member was finally granted her wish to 'go home', not to her earthly home but to her heavenly home which we have fondly joked about as her new address. Though she is dearly missed and though many grieve her passing - many will celebrate with her, her desire to depart and be at home with the LORD. It is the great hope of Christian believers' who are assured that death is not the end or the final destination but the joyful beginning of a new chapter – a new chapter of humanity's story. It is a belief that is confidently founded upon Jesus' promise to go ahead of Believers' to prepare a place for us and to create a route and destination that will be familiar to us.

Our text today is another of Christ's images used to ignite readers and hearers imaginations and to produce a sense of familiarity to the concept that He is introducing. The concept of familial relationship, a home that would be big enough to accommodate many; in some sense, a picture of a new home elsewhere – with Him. Jesus shared this picture with His disciples following the predictions He gave of His death and this promise is part of His farewell address to them. A picture that would be realised through the tragedy His of death and the victory of His Resurrection both of which provided the route, the model and the destination for all who believe...all made possible because of what He had achieved through His crucifixion on the Cross.

Below I have shared the 'Waterbugs and Dragonflies' story by Doris Stickney, it is a story that was introduced to me some years ago by Vera, a Senior Citizen whom I visited regularly as a Chaplain. It is a story written for children, yet in its simplicity it is relatable to all ages offering a powerful concept of death and the hope of new life beyond. I share it with you today in the hope that you too will be inspired by its message and its warm-hearted approach to a Christian concept of life beyond death and new beginnings...

Waterbugs and Dragonflies

Down below the surface of a quiet pond lived a little colony of water bugs. They were a happy colony, living far away from the sun. For many months they were very busy, scurrying over the soft mud on the bottom of the pond. They did notice that every once in a while, one of their colony seemed to lose interest in going about. Clinging to the stem of a pond lily it gradually moved out of sight and was seen no more.

"Look!" said one of the water bugs to another. "One of our colony is climbing up the lily stalk. Where do you think she is going?" Up, up, up it slowly went.... Even as they watched, the water bug disappeared from sight. Its friends waited and waited but it didn't return..."That's funny!" said one water bug to another. "Wasn't she happy here?" asked a second... "Where do you suppose she went?" wondered a third.

We will meet Again!

(9th August 2020)



"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body." 1 Corinthians 15:35-38

When can we talk about death? It's never an easy topic to have a conversation about, the subject can often appear to be so taboo, yet it is an event we must all face. It is not something we have a choice about or an event in our life that we can fail to show up for...yet we do not speak about it as part of the cycle of life. We live with our many questions and for some they remain answered and death is approached with such terror and fear. Many silently question, Is there life after death? Is death really the end? If there is life after death what will it be like? What will we be like? What is there to be made about the Resurrection? The Apostle Paul's presentation in today's text assists its readers to begin to understand the concept of Jesus' Resurrection and its importance in response to those who challenge the truth of a bodily resurrection and its reality.

Paul presents the Christian response to these questions as part of his letter to the Corinthian Church, he is addressing the idea presented by some in the church that there is no Resurrection. The text focusses upon answering the following two questions, how are the dead raised? And what kind of body will they have? It was important for Paul to answer these questions about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the whole event forms the very foundation of the Christian faith. He argues that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then we as Christians witness to a lie and our testimony about God is false. Paul remarks that without the Resurrection, our Faith becomes futile and we are 'to be pitied'.

The Resurrection in our terms simply means that someone who has died will be raised from the dead and restored to life as the person s/he was before. It is the step that follows death. What do we think of death? Fear it? Fear of death is a legitimate response as it is quite normal to fear the unknown and many Christians whom I have had the opportunity to have such a conversation we share a similar response, our answer to the question is both yes and no. Yes, because fear how we will die and no, because we do not fear what lies beyond death. The answer 'No' to fear is answered by the Believers' confidence in Jesus' death and resurrection. We can approach death with a sense of life as a continuation and the opportunity to boast the newest outfit on any catwalk ... a new and transformed body.

Paul explains the process with such simplicity by using images found in nature; the planting and sowing of seeds. He explains the seed and its process of transformation from seed to plant, tree or fruit. The journey of the seed begins in one form though, it can only become what it shall be by first by being planted to die in the ground as part of its maturing; as part of its growth so that it can become something else. Yet, the seed and what it produces remain related though they are distinctly different. Believers' life and death can be compared to the seed, we begin this journey of maturation in the human body, the body we have grown to know and at our death we are, metaphorically speaking, sown in the earth to rise to our new spiritual body. Wow! How amazing we rise to a newer version – a newer model of ourselves! A body that will last forever.

We can look back at Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection and recall that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, the Disciples, those on the road to Damascus and many others. The reports do not record that He was visually recognised but that He was recognised by the things He said, by the things He did and by His scars of His Crucifixion that He shared. Yet they knew He was Jesus. It is further recorded that Jesus appeared and disappeared, He passed through walls. It was also proven that He was not a ghost, Jesus had risen bodily; He

shared His scars to Thomas who doubted, and He ate and drank with the Disciples. We can question was He recognisable by revelation or by behaviour and actions? Whatever our answers, Jesus was raised bodily and He is the perfect example and demonstration of what will follow for all who believe in Him and His message of God's love, forgiveness and grace offered to all as preached through the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. **"...we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2**

Will we be like the seed, first recognised by who we were yet physically different? It is a bit of a riddle or and possibly, too difficult a concept to grasp – but we need only to look, as Paul's presentation suggest within nature and meditate on this great miracle of death to life transformation. We have the Caterpillar transformed to a Butterfly or the story of 'Waterbug and dragonfly' posted earlier this week. With all that we have understood we can celebrate that Resurrection is a transformation that takes us from one state to another, where we are essentially the same but distinctly different. We carry the seed of who we were into the body of who we become. In the life beyond this life we will be able to recognise each other in our new bodies, so at our death we can say to those who journey with us to that final moment... this is not goodbye but 'au revoir' – until we meet again!

Dear Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ for your love, grace and forgiveness that has been offered to us through Him and His coming to be with us in this world. We thank you that by His death we have a new life beyond this life we now know – a life with you forever in our glorious new bodies. Today we remember all those who grieve and ask that you would send in abundance, your peace and comfort to touch the hearts of all who mourn. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

For Tessa and family, For Frances and family...

Here is love vast as the oceans
God be with you till we meet again

<https://youtu.be/v8YOPj5TnUM>
<https://youtu.be/1hvaysA1MYQ>

Praying for Peace_ peace that surpasses understanding (16th August 2020)



The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:7

Over the past two weeks we have lived in the backdrop the white noise of Covid 19 and its fluctuating numbers of death and contagion alongside the complex ease of lockdown, we hear of Lockdown's

effect with talks of quarantine for visits abroad, economic downturn, vast numbers of unemployment and then comes the devastating explosion in the Lebanon, Refugees seeking refuge, train derailment in Scotland and national outcry of our youth concerning dashed hopes at examination results. It is sometimes hard to find good news in 2020.

Today I call to mind the a few words of one of my all-time favourite R & B classic, 'Joy and pain are like sunshine and rain' sung by Frankie Beverley & Maze. Though it is a song about the ups and downs of relationships, it greatly captures the essence of truth about life and living; the coexistence of both the good and the bad, the happy and sad. Life never gives us one thing or another – we will find that the many facets of our experiences exist together. And again, today we are encouraged by both our Bible reading and the few words of my chosen song, to look for the good that is happening around us despite the influx of bad news. For instance, it is uplifting to hear of the Lebanese nurse who rescued the 3 premature babies from the incubators and carried them to safety from the midst of danger; rising from the rubble of a scenes of a destroyed city and the many dead bodies, this nurse found the courage and strength to transport the babies to a hospital where they received the care needed. The babies have survived and restored to their grateful. Not forgetting the Scottish derailment; the high-speed train which would normally be full of passengers was only carrying 12 passengers and yes, though we mourn with the families at the great loss of those 3 men named we are thankful that there was not a greater loss of life.

Paul, the writer of the Letter to the Church in Ephesians instructs his readers to turn to prayer in face of all adversities of life. They are encouraged to speak to God in the form of prayer, to share their worries and anxieties, to ask for help, plead their causes appreciating the good and God's willingness to be of help. Yet whilst, we acknowledge the opposing scenes of life, we are called by Paul to relinquish anxiety and worry for prayer, as prayer and worry are totally opposed. It seems to be that we either choose to worry or pray and whatever we choose has the power to displace the other. Prayer calls us to completely give in trust, to God's care all our needs, our concerns, our requests and petitions. Including our offer of thanks to Him for the good that we find in the midst of our struggles. Following Paul's advice, we are of promised a deposit of divine 'Peace'. A 'Peace' that Jesus gives which He describes to be unlike that found in the world; **"...My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do, I give to you."** It is a 'Peace' that comes directly from Him - His own peace, that delivers an influential internal unflustered and composed state which is unmoved by circumstances.

We seek this promise of inner peace that is beyond human understanding, a peace though experienced, is not easily articulated. A peace that stabilises, calms and soothes people in moments of great distress so that they are able to experience the truth of the realities they face; the trauma and the emotions though strengthened to remain buoyant, not sinking or been carried away involuntarily. And yet, there is more! God's peace works to protect and to guard; and in a more pictorial sense 'keep watch over' our hearts, the very place where we earnestly seek to defend its fragility, weakness and vulnerability. However, we are assured by Paul's word's here that a person in prayer, need not exercise any manner of hypervigilance in self-protection because this call to prayer and thanksgiving gives 'Peace' the task of all round vigil and surveillance over our hearts and the matters presented to God.

With peace depositing a sense of calm and taking up the role of guardianship and protection, those in prayer are directed to turn their focus away from worry and anxiety (that are now in God's hands) and put into practise a more positive state of mind to think on good things ... **Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Phil 4: 8**

Yes, Finally, as a result of our prayers and our receipt of His comforting, healing and sustaining 'Peace' we are freed to move into a more hopeful and optimistic outlook about our present and our future having placed our trust and dependency in the One True Living God.

Today let us turn as advised, our minds to prayer requesting the peace of God for

- all who mourn the loss of loved one to Covid 19
- Lebanon; those who mourn loss of loved ones, those who are displaced, loss of homes and businesses, issues concerning the Government
- The desperate plight of Refugees seeking refuge in Europe, for a godly solution to be found by countries in Europe where they seek refuge
- The families of the 3 men who lost their lives in the rail crash and those who were injured
- Young people across the UK who are facing exam results that have greatly impacted their future hopes. For the English Government's change of heart – a change that will give the youth a fairer, a more just way of grading examinations
- ALSO, let all think of at least 5 things that we are thankful for ...

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the promised Peace of Jesus Christ that can be ours when we turn to you in prayer. This day we ask you to hear our prayers for the concerns of those who suffer around the world, for the concerns we have for those who are close to us, for the news that disturbs us, for the issues we raise here and in it all we thank you Father for being such a great listener, for having the ongoing concern of humanity, for the good that we find in times of struggle, for the Church who in Christ calls us to this place of prayer. May your presence move upon us by your Holy Spirit as we come to you in prayer, in Jesus' name. Amen

Be still my soul (Kari Jobe)

<https://youtu.be/mq59iE3MhXM>

Heal our nation

<https://youtu.be/yeoiOKOxc4o>

(Remembering Lebanon, Scotland and the pandemic its casualties across the World)

Great if thy faithfulness

<https://youtu.be/0k1WhFtVp0o>