



Prayers & Readings for this week

- ▶ We pray for the late Michael Tewkesbury's nephew, Russell, who has cancer. We pray for all fighting this disease - some in our own Brooklands church - especially when hospital resources are so focused on Covid-19
- ▶ Humankind, like our earth, is fragile; we pray for the health and diversity of life all around us – God's creation for our provision and enjoyment
- ▶ We remember Frank Torkington in hospital (Frank & Betty are loved by our church; Frank is now 92). He is renowned for his 'Praise the Lord!'
- ▶ Through this week, as you pray, why not choose a person from church to phone, have a chat with, and so encourage one another

Monday Reading Luke 21:1–24
 Pray for Marion Tewkesbury & family

Tuesday Reading Luke 21:25–22:6
 Pray for John Torkington & family

Wednesday Reading Luke 22:7–34
 Pray for Julie & Hayley

Thursday Reading Luke 22:35–62
 Pray for Jean & Dave Walker & family

Friday Reading Luke 22:63–23:16
 Pray for Carol Wray and family

Saturday Reading: Catch up
 Pray for Norma Whyte & family

Sunday 10th Reading Luke 23:17–43
May Pray for Katie & Scott (getting married in December)

The regular one-week period between writing each of these *Updates* appears to be speeding up! The first couple of weeks of the 'lockdown' seemed to really drag on, and on, didn't they? But for me now the days seem to have speeded up!

Time is a really strange thing! Some people have lots of it on their hands at the moment. Perhaps you are out of work or furloughed and you are trying to fill your day. Maybe you are 'filmed out'; or you have never walked so much in your life.

This time last year you may have been longing for a few days with nothing to do – in order to have a break from work! Isn't it strange that so often when we *get* what we have only hoped for, we then want something *else*....

But these days can also hold a huge *positive* for us. I feel sure you will have watched Captain (now Honorary Colonel) Tom Moore this last week, and the RAF flyover, and the sea of 120,000 birthday cards for his 100th birthday - including one from the Queen! Just think – **a month ago**, coming up to his 100th birthday, he thought - '*I have all this time on my hands, what can I possibly do* that might be significant?' **And now** . . . I am sure the whole country watched this humble man receive amazing accolades for raising £30 million for the NHS!

So, back to our own living rooms; **what can we do to make the best of each God-given hour?** I don't envisage for a moment that we will achieve something so magnificent . . . but to achieve something *worthwhile* is right along the lines of being a good steward of **our time – our most precious possession**; that thing that so many of us have in abundance just now.

Having time to think about life, family, friends, work, rest, good and bad times can be a way of seeing things differently. *We need* to see our world differently. Does litter on the streets bother you? Does it frustrate you when you finally own what you have always wanted and you are disappointed? Then there are our biased opinions about things, and people especially. What if everyone out there secretly does say a prayer to God to make this world a better place? What if more Captain Toms are out there?

What if in our thinking, we filled our minds with 'good things'. '*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) When the Lord is in our minds, he is just 12 inches from our hearts. **May His grace be yours.**



Message: The Real Presence - **Readings:** John 10: 1-10; Acts 2: 42-47

We are approaching that day in the Christian calendar when we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into glory (Thu. 21 May). We make a big thing of Christmas and our celebration of Christ's **physical coming**, but we don't make a big thing about his **physical departure** from earth. His physical presence amongst us ended with his ascension into heaven. When Jesus ascended into glory it was the last time the apostles were to see Jesus in the flesh. The Lord would still be with them all, of course – albeit in different ways. I now want to look at some of those ways.

Where is the presence of Jesus in this Lockdown? Here I am talking about the presence of the Lord whom we cannot see - and for almost two months, we have all been missing our families; longing to give our loved ones, our children, or grandchildren a big hug, or maybe enjoy a wonderful Sunday lunch together around the table! I am starting to feel hungry just thinking about my usual request in more normal days to Dean to pass me another 'Yorkshire pudding' please, or roast potato!

Psalms 23 speaks of the Lord's 'shepherding skills in the valley', and how, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death' – What? **'I will fear no evil, Why? for YOU ARE WITH ME; your rod and your staff they comfort me...'** I had never thought of it before; how abrupt it must have felt - the sudden lack of the physical presence of Jesus. Jesus' physical presence was gone, but there was no grieving! My first observation...

1. The Church Grew

His physical absence was *not* the end of the church – the very opposite, in fact. The body of believers grew in phenomenal ways! It was the teaching ministry of Jesus in those early days that was so important. It is referred to later in the phrase, 'The Apostles Teaching'. The remaining eleven apostles, who had spent the most time with Jesus, were a great source of instruction. The four aspects of, 'teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer' were part of what the Presence of Jesus meant for them! Back then, their homes or wherever they met became their sanctuaries. They were not limited to a physical temple built by hands! In those early days, they also enjoyed the 'favour' of all the people. Their growing community also included their abundant 'Praise to God' for what Jesus had done for them.

So then, this marvellous summary paragraph tells us that, despite Jesus not being *physically* among them, they were growing every single day! It's an important part of our own Brooklands church's Mission Statement: **Loving, Growing & Serving!** It was a valley for them in that they could no longer see, follow or listen to Jesus in a physical sense. But they had discovered a new and higher sense of His Presence among them. Not only did they Grow, but ...

2. The Holy Spirit blessed

We are at around day 41 since lockdown started. It didn't happen for fifty days. In the first forty days, they saw Jesus intermittently – on one occasion by over 500 witnesses! Then, after Jesus physically ascended to glory, there were crucially ten days of prayer.

It was then that the Apostles discovered the *REAL* Presence of Jesus in a new and powerful way!

Here is a great way to describe this growth and blessing by the Holy Spirit – **it was 'Exponential'!** That's a great word! There came times when growth would be steady, but in those early days, and at other later special times since, there was an explosion of rapidly increasing '*exponential*' growth and blessing; it was all down to the Holy Spirit moving amongst them! It was the Holy Spirit upon them that signified "The Real Presence" of Jesus amongst them! Historians have referred to these times as 'Revivals'. The only way to succinctly describe these times is to say people **felt** the Presence of Jesus – through the Power of the Holy Spirit!

Last Monday, two dear friends in our fellowship, Ann & John, sent me a text saying, 'Still together as God's people, even though we are physically apart. Thank God for the Digital Age', they wrote. They referenced an old song; I will read some of the words... **'There's a quiet understanding when we're gathered in the Spirit, It's a promise that he gives us, when we're gathered in His Name. There's a Love we feel in Jesus and a Manna that he feeds us; it's a promise that he gives us, when - we gather in His Name'.**

3. The Good News spreads

Everyone who confessed their belief in 'Jesus of Nazareth' as LORD was spreading this Good News of the Gospel. The amazing thing was that – every believer took up this cause and 'gossiped the Gospel' in an effective kindly way - **everywhere**. Jesus was in their hearts, in their actions and way of life, and in their acts of kindness to needy people. It was quite literally **good news** to everyone.

The Good Shepherd was - **before them** and knew **the Way** ahead. The Good Shepherd walked - **beside them** in the Valley of the shadow of death (death no longer held fear, for its power had been defeated). The Good Shepherd was - **amongst them** by the Holy Spirit both in the miracles that happened and the apparent tragedies that occurred too. An obvious tragedy was the stoning of Stephen as he testified to the Lordship of Jesus. When Stephen **fell**, a giant of an Apostle (Saul, later Paul, who was there) was **raised up** in Stephen's place to proclaim the same Gospel that Stephen had spoken of with his final breath. And what a breath it was! 'Though you do not see Him now, **you believe in Him**' (1 Pet. 1: 8). Jesus is amongst us! **Amen**