



### Prayers & Readings for this week

- ▶ We pray again for one another, and the many challenges so many have daily, being confined to their homes and anxious of going further afield
- ▶ We pray for John B with his continued infusions, and Jon F with his weekly cancer treatment procedures
- ▶ Sadly, Nat H lost his cousin to Covid-19, and dear Frank Torkington also passed away last week; we also want to acknowledge Jean Cunningham, who faithfully attended our church for a number of years, and has passed away in a nursing home. We pray for all of their families & friends
- ▶ We pray for wise & hopeful news this week on lockdown arrangements
- ▶ We give thanks for the ongoing courage of frontline staff, we applaud them all, especially those facing the severe challenges now in Care Homes

Monday      Reading Luke 23:44–24:12  
Pray for Efrain, Nertilla & Samuel

Tuesday      Reading Luke 24:13–53  
Pray for Nikki & Mathew Armett, Antony Jessica  
& family

Wednesday      Reading John 1:1–18  
Pray for Maud Batchelor

Thursday      Reading John 1:19–42  
Pray for Arthur Basnett & family

Friday      Reading John 1:43–2:12  
Pray for Wendy Bailey & family

Saturday      Reading: Catch up  
Pray for Theresa Baker & family, and Oliver

Sunday      Reading John 2:13–3:15  
Pray for Val Batty & family

**This Sunday evening** we hope to hear *good news* about the present strict seven-week lockdown being tentatively relaxed a little. We have almost forgotten what ‘normal’ was like! Numerous people’s holiday plans have been scuppered, and despite there being a lot of time on the hands of many, it’s hardly a holiday!

The theme for this week in our virtual digital service is **God’s goodness**. It comes from a line in Peter’s first letter:

*“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that **you have tasted that the Lord is good.**”* (1 Peter 2:2–3)

It is great to be comforted and strengthened by words in the Bible. It is also good, as true students and disciples of Jesus to ask the difficult questions that come to our minds – questions that many people must be thinking; questions that others ask, while we only quietly store them away in our minds. If these testing things are happening to us, as in this pandemic, where then, is the goodness of the Lord?

If I were an atheist it would be easy to point fingers at God when things go wrong. Or would it? An atheist can’t point any fingers at God because they don’t believe he exists. I am mentioning the viewpoints of atheists in my message this morning online, although I didn’t have room for details in this printed *Update*. There are many self-claimed atheists today, but if they are ever tempted to offer a prayer, then I want to challenge their stand.

If I were a journalist, I would have a field-day! I know it’s a part of their job to ask really difficult questions and leave no stone unturned, but they do tend to major on the *problems* and not the *good* news. My plea to journalists: *Please* write more about **the magnificent ‘good’ things in our world** - in people, in nature, in our environment, in the awe-inspiring beauty of the simple things of life. Jesus spoke of sparrows, the lilies of the field, taking each day as it comes and the beauty of trust in One we cannot see but know is there – because God’s creation (‘the work of His hands’, Psalm 19: 1) is freely lavished upon every one of us all over the world, ‘as the waters cover the sea’.

Each day that we rise is reason enough to use that first breath of each day and give thanks for God’s goodness, and especially those of us who have ‘tasted that the Lord is good’!

Have a *good* day; a great day, not taking the simple pleasures of life for granted. May his grace be upon you to help you see the **good**, the **free**, and the **priceless**.



**Message:** “The Lord is Good” **Readings:** Psalm 31:1-5, & 15-16; John 14: 1-14

I have taken a verse from one of today’s lectionary readings. It’s from 1 Peter 2: 3 “**now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (1 Peter 2: 3)** It’s a really easy reference to remember – **it’s as easy as - 123!** Peter is talking about ‘goodness’ that is holy. He says, ‘**The Lord is Good!**’ Just to put that into perspective from a social point of view for a moment... Often when we buy something online or a product from a company - they usually ask us for a *review*.

They are asking us to endorse how ‘good’ their product it is. When I’m about to buy something and I want to be certain I’m not going to waste my money, I usually check out the ‘reviews’. I guess you may do the same thing. We probably ignore both extremes in the reviews because you are always going to get those who exaggerate saying: ‘**This is absolute rubbish!**’ or ‘**This is the best thing since sliced bread!**’ But I feel it is the *honest appraisals* that we find most helpful. It is the *well-balanced* reviews that we truly appreciate. And this, I believe, is exactly what Peter is giving us here.

Peter is **not** telling us that everything was absolutely wonderful all the time! If you follow Peter’s life in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, you will discover that Peter lived through many challenges, and offered his fair share of ill-judged opinions. He wants us to be **mature in our thinking**. I feel Peter is writing from his personal experience. Like a child, he easily became over excited, was impetuous, and said silly things. But now from the perspective of hindsight (*which is a wonderful thing!*) he was finally able to pass *balanced* judgement – and he writes, ‘**O taste and see that the Lord is Good!**’ Here are a couple of ways of seeing the impact of ‘Goodness’.

### 1. Your Servant – Stephen!

I mentioned Stephen, and the testimony of his faith in Jesus Christ, last Sunday. Looking at what was going on in Acts chapters 6 & 7, the religious leaders were trying to say that Jesus was *bad*; bad for religion, bad for the people, *bad, period!* They also concluded that Jesus’ followers were also ‘bad’ for society.

Stephen though, as Luke writes, was ‘**a man full of God’s grace and power**’ (Acts 6: 8) Verse 10 says, ‘**they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke...**’ They secretly plotted against him and fabricated their lies to lynch him... One of his responsibilities was to make sure widows were **not neglected in the daily distribution of food**. Why would anyone want such a person killed?

As Stephen boldly answered his accusers, their rage boiled over, and finally they stoned him to death. I don’t know how many of you have enrolled in *the new Church History Course* offered by NTC, and taken by Rev Dr Joseph Wood. The session we

watched this past week mentioned two Christian women from the third century, **Felicity and Perpetua**.

They were put to death (about AD 203) for standing up for their faith. All they had to do was make an offering to the Roman gods and they would be free (I suspect they would have to do it frequently). Each simply replied, ‘**I am a Christian! I can’t serve other gods.**’

The martyrs, Stephen, Felicity & Perpetua, by helping the needy were ‘good’ upstanding citizens of this world, and good *Servants of the Lord*. What happened to them **was not ‘good’**, but **they were good!** I just wanted to point out that they were the Lord’s servants – and they did what was ‘good’. **Here’s another verse** from today’s readings...

### 2. ‘Your hands’ – says the Psalmist

The Psalmist writes, ‘**My times are in your hands!**’ The whole verse reads like this: “**My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.**” (Psalm 31:15) This is a reminder that bad things can happen to good people. You have Stephen, Felicity & Perpetua as examples of this - and of course here is the Psalmist. I hasten to add that the Psalmist was indeed ‘*delivered*’ from his enemies because obviously he survived to write down his experience.

The Psalmist’s realization is well worth our attention. ‘**My times are in your hands!**’ What ‘times’ are these for you? Are they difficult times; times with dark clouds; probably no one is going to say – ‘these are great times!’ But I believe ‘**these times are in His hands too**’. I just love the conclusion – this *honest appraisal* and *balanced advice*, this *measured and wise judgement...* “**Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.**” (Psalm 31:24). What a timely exhortation for these days! One final reference from today’s assigned lectionary passages...

### 3. Your Hearts – Troubled?

Jesus understood that when people have troubles they turn them over and over in their hearts (and minds). Right now there are people, perhaps listening to these words, and their hearts are troubled with lots of things! It’s true, isn’t it?

‘**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.**’ (John 14:1) Indeed many people are troubled when, in spite of trusting God, bad days come along. Can I just say that the goodness of God is everlasting and all-knowing on how one or two days seem to pan out in our lives? God’s goodness to us is not governed by our circumstances right now. We should never be so immature in our thinking!

I wanted to tell you this morning that when you are **His Servant**, and you know you are in **His Hands** and if **Your Heart** ‘trusts in God and in His Son Jesus Christ’, then this assurance is *yours* – you will ‘**taste and see that the Lord is Good**’. Amen.

May the Lord of all ‘Goodness’ and grace be **your ever present companion**.