



### Prayers & Readings for this week

- Please pray for those thousands in our land who are losing their jobs; while also praying for safety for all, as others return to work following furlough
- We pray for our continued Sunday online services and their good impact in the Manchester area, and beyond.
- Pray for our church board 'Zoom' meeting this Friday, as they seek wisdom in developing plans to see us move forward in these challenging times.
- We pray for those in our church and communities who are struggling.
- Lord, we thank you that you will not let us go through difficult times alone!
- We remember continuing dangers and challenges facing front line workers

Monday	Reading Acts 12:6–25 Pray for Karl & Ingrid Stanfield & family
Tuesday	Reading Acts 13:1–30 Pray for Terry & Sheila Strong & family
Wednesday	Reading Acts 13:31–52 Pray for Gert, Melissa and Jessica Schwartz & family
Thursday	Reading Acts 14 Pray for Marion Tewkesbury & family
Friday	Reading Acts 15:1–35 Pray for John Torkington & family
Saturday	Reading: Catch up Pray for Julie & Hayley (just become a granma!)
Sunday 19 July	Reading Acts 15:36–16:15 Pray for Jean & Dave Walker & family

This past week I attended the Pastors' Summer School. Usually it would be at Nazarene Theological College in Didsbury but this year, of course, it was a Zoom meeting online. Numbers fluctuated between 40 and almost 60 in attendance. It is probably the most we have ever had. The theme was '*Leadership in a time of Crisis*'.

We looked at historical periods of crisis in the Early Church period; selected theological examples (most notably Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane); and more recent examples like Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), Rosa Parks (1913-2005), Martin Luther King (1929-1968), and Desmond Tutu (b. 1931). These are well known stories about Christians living through and negotiating times of crisis and national friction points. Many of us are old enough to remember some of them.

We discovered the place of 'Lament' in the Psalms where writers expressed very openly and honestly the hard questions which they wanted to ask God about from their situations. There is a place for lament today too. Perhaps there is someone reading this *Update* and you have a justifiable 'lament' about some wrong, a personal loss, or an injustice of some kind - and *no one* seems to care. Perhaps even God seems silent to your cries - or maybe you have accused Him of being 'deaf'?

We learned that sometimes God is not able to change the situation and make it better; but many times we discover it is **God who has wept with us!** This world we live in is far from perfect; it is not some idyllic paradise. Before the lockdown we may have rubbed shoulders on the tram or bus with those who silently carried all kinds of heavy burdens of their own. Life on earth is full of all sorts of hard experiences. Over the past few months, countless people have suffered bereavement and thousands have been unable to grieve the loss as they (or we) would normally want to do.

This is where the ministry of caring for others is so vital in our world today. In a world full of all kinds of 'weeds' we need to plant good seed that will grow and bear amazing fruit. As someone said recently, we are about Hope and Holiness. What we do is for the good of all around us.

We pray that this week will see you enjoying good things. We hope you are blessed and are loved by those around you. Our Wednesday prayer times, acted out personally and privately, have become a powerhouse for many great influences which come to bear upon our world. We believe it – 'Jesus has overcome the world'.



## Grace and peace to ALL!

**Readings:** 1 Kings 19: 9-13; Matthew 14:22-33

**Message:** 'Christ in the Middle of our Chaos'

There may be a few people we know who have been to Israel, and particularly to the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. It is a beautiful lake and it must be lovely to live near its shores, especially in the summer months. I recently went online and checked it out. During the past week, the weather was sunny all day and between 23 and 34 Celsius! There is, however, a downside to the geographical location of this rift valley. When an east wind blows cool air over the warm air that covers the sea, the cold air (being heavier) drops as the warm air (being lighter) rises. It is this clash in air pressure that produces furious storms in a short time, with up to 2-metre-high waves. In many respects, the Sea of Galilee (or freshwater lake, if you prefer) is representative of much of 21st century life. One moment things are idyllic and the next, all hell seems to have broken loose! These past four months will record an unforgettable period in the history of the entire world! It has thrown the lives of so many people into chaos, from the loss of business to the loss of life - from infringing our liberties to spoiling our plans. **'Christ in the Middle of our Chaos'**. Turning to the story before us in Matthew Ch.14, after feeding 5000 people with a few loaves and fish, Jesus instructs his disciples to get into a boat and go to the other side of the sea. While Jesus goes up on a mountain by himself to pray, the disciples are confronted with a storm which threatens their lives! A summary of these two events could read something like this: 'Someone is peacefully at prayer, and others are in big, big trouble'. We sometimes feel that we are in the 'deep end', as it were. Have you felt like you've been in the 'deep end' recently? The disciples had each other - **but they were all in the same sinking boat!** It happens a lot. Mark refers to this story in his Gospel, and has an interesting note about Jesus: **'He was about to pass by them'**, which Mark alone makes, in chapter 6:48. It seems that Jesus' original plan was to send them out, pray for them, and then meet them on the other side of the sea. Bear that in mind for a moment. There are **two exclamations** here

### 1. 'Take Heart!'

"Jesus immediately said to them: **"Take heart! It is I. Don't be afraid."** (Matthew 14:27 - ESV) "Take heart" has the idea of 'dare to be bold', and meet the challenges of the day head-on, and realise that what you are and have, is greater than what you merely see with your eyes. One of the 'storms of life' for many people today is how they appear to others. The TV last week featured persons with certain superficial issues that made them feel less than they really are. Let me explain what I mean by that. One man had a huge birth mark on his face. He is in his late 50s and all his life he has had to deal with people staring at him and some making hurtful remarks about how he

looks. He made the comment that for the past four months he hasn't had to put up with this stuff because he was isolating. Another young lady, with a similar facial issue, copes with the comments by smiling back. In fact, the man with the birthmark said it was only recently that he was able to smile in the face of some very hurtful onslaughts! When we read this bible passage, we probably need to see the storm as an inner one!

I sometimes wonder whether the inner dangers seem more real than the physical ones. We fear what we think other people think about us. But when you take heart, you see things differently! You see the possibilities, and you become positive. You have Hope! And remember, prior to this, Jesus had been praying for them. At the end of John 16, where Jesus was trying to explain some of life's difficulties, he concluded by saying, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. **But take heart!** I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Listen to the collective conclusion drawn by that company of disciples in the storm-tossed boat; "Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:33)

The second exclamation is from Peter...

### 2. 'Lord Save Me!'

"But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matthew 14:30) Why does Peter say it this way - 'Lord, save me'? Why didn't he just say, 'help, I am sinking' or 'I am about to drown'; or, 'don't just walk on the water - do something to help me!' In this story, compared to the story of Jesus being awakened in the back of the boat on a similar Galilean storm, Jesus is not there primarily to calm the storm, **but to save Peter**. We are told that 'Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' (v. 31). **It is after Peter is 'saved'** that we are told that 'the storm died down'; then the disciples understood the Revelation in the Storm saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' **They found Christ, God's Son**, in the middle of the Chaos. This was not the first time either. **This is the second time** they think they are about to die in a storm on Galilee. The first time (Matt 8) they ask the question, 'WHO IS THIS that even the wind and the waves obey Him?' I do believe it takes time and several encounters with the Lord before people are able to respond with those saving expressions, 'Truly you are the Son of God!' **Here is the truth - only the Son of God can save us!** We are called to be Christians, which means we are to be like Jesus, and not like Peter. Peter had this idea, for a moment at least, that to follow Jesus also meant to be able to walk on water. An impressive prospect, to say the least! **Well, Jesus did that only once** - and we can't do it at all. But there are other Jesus-like traits that are more helpful for our everyday way of life. Being like Jesus does not mean impressing others; but it certainly does mean we become examples of trusting completely in God - especially when we go through chaos in life. It is then that we can cry out, 'Lord, save me'; and, He does. Perhaps you might like to make that your prayer as we close - **'Lord, save me!'**. Amen.