



Readings for this week:

Monday	Reading 2 Cor 5 Pray for Mark, Rebecca, Charlie & Laney Rotheram
Tuesday	Reading 2 Cor 6:1–7:1 Pray for Nick, Ada and Joshua Savu & family
Wednesday	Reading 2 Cor 7:2–8:15 Pray for Dean, Simona & Mia Stanfield
Thursday	Reading 2 Cor 8:16–9:15 Pray for Karl & Ingrid Stanfield & family
Friday	Reading 2 Cor 10 Pray for Terry & Sheila Strong & family
Saturday	Reading: Catch up Pray for Gert, Melissa and Jessica Schwartz & family
Sunday 27 th Sept	Reading 2 Cor 11 Pray for Marion Tewkesbury & family

Prayer requests:

- Please pray for Vivienne B as she arranges the funeral for her dad Eric.
- Pray for David R as he starts studies at NTC, and for Katie C, and Huw J as they return. They need our prayers and encouragement.
- We give thanks for the Harvest season - which many nowadays give little or no thought to. It is, however, a vital time for us to offer thanks for God's providence (2 Cor. 9:10), including his provision through 'mother nature'.
- Pray that our contributions this Harvest season to Barnabus Manchester will assist this amazing Christian Charity at the heart of our city.

This Sunday we celebrate our *Harvest*. It is great to welcome Dr Samuel Hildebrandt, a Lecturer in OT Biblical Studies at NTC, as our guest speaker for Harvest 2020. Before he preaches today, Samuel will tell us a little about himself.

Unlike numerous previous harvest celebrations we have no array of goods in the sanctuary to have a *harvest feel*; *neither* are we able to have our annual church photo to follow, nor the usual barbeque and ice-cream stand with a bouncy castle for the children (and older ones too, I should add). Normally we would have invited people from the wider community who are part of, and attend, our midweek ministries. Despite this, we do have **a guest speaker** and we do have **a project** – and we do give thanks to God for **another Harvest** in so many different ways.

This year we are planning to assist **Barnabus Manchester** in a very pragmatic way. This Christian charity has been operating since 1991 when founder Peter Green took to the streets of the city with a bag of sandwiches and a thermos flask. He met the homeless and gave out food to those in need. In 2000 the *Beacon Drop-In Centre* was opened and still operates as a Christian outreach from Bloom Street in the city to this day. It has been difficult, as you can imagine, but they have done everything 'by the book', and we want to support them to help feed and clothe the homeless.

We are asking that any gifts towards this project be given and marked or indicated with the words '*Brooklands Harvest*'. We will wait a few weeks to ensure all gifts are received, before forwarding these monies. We want to thank you for your kindness in this regard. While we may not be there with them in a Street Outreach team or at their Beacon Support Centre, we can encourage them in this practical way.

In our service today, Rev Mickael Kane and his wife Debbie will be telling us a little about themselves. Mick will also be preaching for us in two weeks, on **Sunday 4th October**. It will be a couple of weeks after this that we will be prayerfully holding a members' ballot (by post) in order to follow our constitutional guidelines on deciding whether to call Mick to be our next pastor. **Four people have already recently asked about becoming members. If there are any others, please let Karl know this coming week**, if possible, as it is only one month before our ballot.

Please continue to pray for Michael & Debbie Kane & family. The church board are unanimous in believing the Lord has been leading us - we are now all in his hands!

Grace & Peace!



Message: Psalm 91 and Pandemic Faith **Reading:** Psalm 91

Sermon by Dr Samuel Hildebrandt

***“For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence. . .
no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.”***

Do you agree with these words from Psalm 91? Are they true in the world today? The virus is here and many of us know people, yes, even people of faith, whom the plague has reached, for whom the **deadly pestilence has become their reality**. But Psalm 91, and other such promises in the Bible, are no naive comfort. They are, after all, texts written by and for communities who did not enjoy the security of medical care, who knew first-hand what a disease can do to a people, how it fractures families, how it spreads with invisible force. Like them, we today cannot (or can no longer) read Psalm 91 as an easy promise of perfect health - and we can read this text even less as a magic formula in the way it has survived on many ancient amulets. In this form and worse, as the pious incantation on the lips of Jesus' tempter (Matt 4:5-6), these words will hurt more than heal.

It is important to see where Psalm 91 begins and where it ends. This poem is addressed to ***“the one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,”*** who sits down and rests, who comes to a stop. If this first line runs past me, the rest of the poem will. If I cannot slow down enough to hear its call for calm, my pace will pervert what follows. What is promised in verse 1 is not health and happiness, but **the hope to “lodge in the shadow of the Almighty.”** The movement goes from sitting down to a sleepover, from one action to a state of being, to “abiding” with God. What do such people look like? This is what they sound like:

***“I will say to the LORD:
My refuge and my fortress,
my God, I trust in him.”***

Safety is here portrayed as speech. These words are warmth, well-being, and wonder. And as in verse 1, this line calls to action: “I will say.” Sit and abide – speak and trust. This pairing of terms is not accidental in the poetic density of the Psalms and it is absolutely vital to inhale it deeply before the words about deliverance, disease, and death wash over us. ***“My refuge”*** is not my family, not my workplace, not my medical system, not my fit and functioning body. It **is my God**, who is always personal, always at work, always whole. Psalm 91 starts with the reorientation away from our default mode – running and rambling – towards **a salvation of sitting, speaking, and safety.**

If this is the starting point, if this is our refuge, if safety is introduced as abiding with a God who can be trusted, then neither virus nor void, neither disease nor dread, neither height nor depth can be a true threat. Since we forget these foundations of our faith so quickly, Psalm 91 reminds us halfway through its course that evil shall not befall us “because you made the LORD your dwelling place, the Most High, who is my refuge” (vv. 9-10). Echoing the personal resolution from the start – “I will say” – God as safety is no abstraction but is yours, mine, ours. **To be safe is to be with God.**

Faced with the Corona crisis or, in the Psalmist's world, with arrows, warfare, and serpents, we can lose much and, worse, lose many. **Psalm 91** is not naive; it **is no call for denial, no call to smile when we are struck with tragedy**. But as this text frames such disaster by its opening confession, the poem makes a fierce proclamation of faith: we are already delivered, already saved, already cared for because our heart and health are in the right place. We already sit, rest, and speak from the only place of refuge. As the streets get quieter, we hear God's word. As we are isolated, we are not alone. **As we die, we already live a life on the other side of death.** Israel's faith at times pushes in sincere protest and hope beyond the earthly realm (Ps 48:14; Job 19:26) and the resurrection of Jesus lives out this reality and gives our sitting and speaking certainty. **There, with that man who suffered all the pain** that Psalm 91 describes, is our trust, our health, our protection. There **we must sit and abide.**

What do I say today? What do I have to say to others? Where is the gospel, and where is God? The answer lies not in shallow messages of betterment, not in



impersonal abstraction, not in magic and madness, but in simple words of worship: “I will say to the LORD.” When the facade of our health, permanence, and securities crumbles so very quickly as in these weeks, may it move us to sit and speak what is right and true – that we know, in the person of Jesus, **a health that is deeper than a healed cough** and a comfort that is deeper than cooled fever.

Psalm 91 is true, but only if we start at the right place when we read it and only if we abide in the actual refuge that it promises. To leave us in no doubt about God as the one who can be trusted, as the one who hears and speaks, as the one who provides shelter, let us also not miss on how Psalm 91 ends: with a direct, divine speech that diagnoses a life that knows – and therefore lives and suffers and cares differently:

*“Because you hold fast to me in love,
I will deliver you;
I will protect you,
because you know my name.
When you call to me, I will answer you;
I will be with you in trouble;
I will rescue you and honour you.
With long life I will satisfy you
and show you my salvation.”*