



Readings for this week:

Monday	Reading Gal 5:16–6:18 Pray for Nikki & Mathew Armett, Antony Jessica & family
Tuesday	Reading Eph 1 Pray for Maud Batchelor (Nursing home)
Wednesday	Reading Eph 2 Pray for Arthur Basnett & family
Thursday	Reading Eph 3 Pray for Wendy Bailey & family
Friday	Reading Eph 4 Pray for Theresa Baker & family, and Oliver
Saturday	Reading: Catch up Pray for Val Batty & family
Sunday 11th October	Reading Eph 5 Pray for John & Ann Beattie & family

Prayer requests:

- Pray for David Richmond, having finished his first week at NTC
- Pray for Karl and Huw Jones, as Huw's College Placement is set up this week
- We pray for the Rev Michael Kane as he preaches this morning; as we prayerfully consider his ministry, and prepare to ballot later this month.
- We thank the Lord for last week's successful **live stream** from the sanctuary
- We continue in our prayers for Nat & Chris H, John & Ann B, Jon F, Viv B, and others who currently face health or other challenges
- We give thanks for a good response to our Harvest for *Barnabus Manchester*
- The live link details for Eric Best's funeral Monday 5th October at Altrincham,

3.15pm is <https://www.weslevmedia.co.uk/webcast-view>

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- Did you know that Sheila & Jessica raised over £150 for **Macmillan Cancer Support** in their cake sale? Well done!

This Sunday is a very special day, one we have been both praying much for, and preparing much for – particularly as the Rev Michael Kane is today's guest preacher. It is also our second live-streamed service. It is with God's grace and the expertise of a group of gifted people that things have gone so well. Such technology allows us to proclaim the gospel to a wider audience **now, and after** the present pandemic.

Plans for Huw Jones' College Placement will be finalised this week. We want to encourage our college NTC students, including Huw, Katie and David, to get involved and find God's plan for their lives. Incidentally, because some funds are still coming, the final sum raised for our Harvest offering will be ready in two weeks,. If you have planned to give to this, please do so by next Sunday if you can – many thanks!

I have been thinking a lot about how things are in our community, city, and country – indeed our whole world. Sometimes it seems as if our anchor has been lost as so much appears topsy turvy. I read an intriguing article recently about how everything has become politicized. So much so, that almost everything said these days is sieved through a political filter. I was taken by this viewpoint because I think it is true – and it is turning into a blame game. Even as I write this, it could well be misunderstood as politically driven (which it is not). Almost every inquiry that is called for seems to me to end up pointing the finger of blame (as in the Manchester Arena Inquiry).

I wonder who is to blame for the 'Virus'? The 2020 Didsbury Lectures are due to begin steaming at 7.30pm on Monday 26th October, examining *the problem of Evil*. If we look much deeper beneath the surface of everything bad that happens in society (and, dare I say it, in the Church too) we find a 'virus' the Bible calls 'sin'. There is an illness of soul, mind and spirit that manifests itself in all kinds of ways. A huge topic, but can I draw our minds to this point... When it comes to blaming and finding fault, **only one person is above blame and without fault and it is the Lord Jesus.**



A very sobering passage of scripture – more than that . . . *an incredibly humbling declaration* - is this, '**All have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory**' (Romans 3: 23). More humbling still; Jesus took our blame, our faults, and all our sin and (as the hymn states) made them his very own. **Jesus took our blame** – thank you, Lord! Paul also stated, '*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...*' (Rom 3: 22). I have many faults, but I also need and *have* a Saviour.

Blessings to all... **Grace & Peace!**

Message: By Rev Michael Kane **Readings:** Psalm 2: 1-12 John 9: 1-34

I love this story in John 9 about Jesus healing a man born blind. The story begins with a question of theology - who sinned that this man was born blind? Was it him or his parents? You see, the wisdom of the sages suggested that if someone was sick, or suffering, or, in this case, blind, it was likely the direct result of someone's sin. The fact that this man was born blind threw that whole theory into question. Was he sinful before he was born? Was his parents sinful and he is living with the consequences? It's a question we still wrestle with today - why is there brokenness and pain and suffering in the world? What does one we do with the problem of evil?

And so they ask Jesus and as always Jesus' reply is interesting. "You're missing the point," he says, "this isn't an opportunity to do theology, this is an opportunity for God to be glorified. Watch this!" And he spits on the ground makes mud and rubs it on the man's eyes and the man can see. It's quite incredible isn't it?

Now if you know your Bible, and if you're paying attention, at that moment you'll notice something really important in the story here. As Jesus uses dirt to heal, or create, the sight for the man who was born blind we have this amazing echo of the creator God in Genesis 1 and 2 who used the dirt of ground to bring humanity into existence. If you're paying attention you'll see another clue in the story as to who Jesus is - if you're paying attention.

But some people aren't paying attention. Some have more questions: How did this happen; Should he be doing this on the sabbath; Is this even the same man who we know to be blind? And so the Pharisees investigate. They interview witnesses. They interview the man's parents. And they interview the man

himself. And they want to know how. How was this man Jesus able to do this? Isn't he a sinner? Isn't this the Sabbath? And the man born blind knows that they are missing the point. He knows that something significant has happened. He knows this isn't a time for understanding, this is a time for wonder: "I don't know how he did it! I don't know if he is a sinner! All I know is this, I was blind, and now I can see! Yesterday my story was beggar, blind, needing assistance every moment of every day and now Jesus has spoken a new story over my life - I can see! For the very first time in my life, I can see! And you want to ask how? I don't care how, I can see!" Or words to that effect, right?

Because sometimes in Christianity, understanding needs to give way to wonder, right? Don't get me wrong, there's a time for understanding. We do that most Sunday's together, don't we? We gather around the Scripture and we seek to understand and to apply it to our lives. That's a good thing to do. But sometimes we don't understand, sometimes we experience moments where God just reveals himself to be God and in those moments our first response isn't to try to understand, it's to sit in awe and wonder.

"I don't know how it works. I don't know if he's a sinner or prophet. All I know is this, a new story has been spoken over my life. I was blind but now I see." This is why we come together as followers of Jesus and sing praises week by week. This man's experience is our experience. It's the Gospel. A new story has been spoken over our lives, we were lost, broken, blind, now we are found, healed, we can see!

My own story was one of abandonment, violence and addiction. One of my earliest memories is watching my dad walk out of our family home when I was 6 years old and I knew then that he wasn't coming back. My dad has had a challenging life battling a heroin addiction and this has meant he has not been capable of fulfilling his duties as a father. That's how I understand it now. But as a six year old all I knew that my dad had left, chosen something other than me, my mum and my little sister. That was my story.

This, complicated by the fact that I grew up in a single parent household in the poorest neighbourhood in the UK ensured that by the time I was a teenager alcohol, drugs and gang violence were all regular parts of my world. Alcohol and drugs were used to numb the pain of the abandonment and violence was an outlet of the anger I had built up in my heart.



Even after I came to know Christ - kneeling in tears in a hostel in New Dehli India with my wife Debbie (a story for another day, perhaps) - there were times were I still felt the pain of that abandonment, that old story.

But major breakthrough for me came around 11 years ago when I was a student at Nazarene Theological College. I lived on campus with my wife Debbie and the community of resident students that we now get the privilege of leading. I was at that time getting up at dawn and enjoying my daily prayer and Bible reading on the beautiful back lawn of the college. I was praying through the Psalms, line by line verse by verse, which is a very effective way of praying. And I just happened to be in Psalm 2, which we read earlier.

Psalm 2 starts in a similar way to John 9, with a theological question. "why do the nations conspire and the people's plot in vain?" Why is there wars? Why are there kings and queens and rulers who lead their countries in ways contrary to the ways of God? It's another moment of seeking understanding. But... right in the middle of the Psalm, in verse 7 there is a statement. And the statement has importance for theology, and Christology and all those things that help us understand all these things better. But in the moment of that morning as I prayed my way through this Psalm God spoke these words in a way that I knew he was speaking directly to me just like I am speaking to you now.

Here's what it said: "You are my son; Today I have become your father."

As I read those words I knew God was reminding me of the new story that had been spoken over my life and I just broke. Floods of tears. This was not a moment of understanding. This was a moment of wonder. My story had gone from abandoned by a father to knowing that my father was the God of the universe. That's my story! I was blind but now I see. It's our story!

It's the same story we tell and are told as we gather around the table of communion. It's our family story. A family story that tells us, "because of Christ we are now God's children. This day, he is once again our father."

In the weeks that lie ahead we want to invite a small number to join us at church for our live streaming of the Sunday service. There will be social distancing and people will be asked to wear a mask. We want to be fair to everyone, so could you please inform us by text, email or phone call if you would like your name on a list of people to invite. Those attending would include people participating in readings and prayers etc.

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Important Note: