



Readings for this week:

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| Monday | Reading Heb 8:1–9:10 Pray for <i>Nathaniel Herbert and family</i> |
| Tuesday | Reading Heb 9:11–28 Pray for Tim & Alison Ingram |
| Wednesday | Reading Heb 10:1–18 Pray for Annette & Mike Jones & family |
| Thursday | Reading Heb 10:19–39 Pray for Huw Jones <i>and his placement</i> |
| Friday | Reading Heb 11 Pray for Vivienne Kenyon |
| Saturday | Reading: Catch up Pray for Beverley Mitchell & family |
| Sunday 22nd Nov | Reading Heb 12 Pray for Kingdom, Debi, David, Sarah & Faith Matsetlo |

Prayer requests:

- We pray for Nathaniel, Kemuel and Verona and family in time of mourning
- We pray that Huw's sermon will be helpful to all who listen; bless him as he continues in his college studies
- We pray for other college students linked to our church, Katie C, David R, Viv B and Denis H; not forgetting Simona who works there in finance
- We pray for Mick, Debbie & Mikey
- We pray for the coming Advent season, asking that it will not be void of its special meaning to our faith

- Pray for Huw's family; mum, Non, brother, Tomos, sister Rhodd, and his grandparents

We are delighted to welcome you again to our celebration of the Lord's Day! We look forward to Huw Jones preaching as part of his **College Placement** with us. Under the present circumstances, Huw has been involved in all our Sunday services since his placement started and has met up weekly with the pastor to make a minimum of six hours, as agreed with the College placement manager. We continue to offer every opportunity possible in ministry in the local church as part of his learning process.

Our **church board** will meet this coming Friday evening. An important part of this meeting will address the final plans for Advent, coming up very soon, and the commencement of Rev Michael Kane's ministry in February 2021.

We can only continue with **the church at prayer** each Wednesday morning from 10.30am on Zoom for the foreseeable future. We do encourage you to join us for this thirty-minute period to praise the Lord, pray for our world in time of pandemic and of course, very importantly the needs of one another! The link to this Zoom meeting can be found on the email that includes this weekly Update.

Christine Herbert passed away peacefully in her sleep on Friday morning in Wythenshawe hospital following a period of illness. Christine was a faithful, long-standing member of our church and a servant of the Lord. Our prayers are for Nathaniel and all the family.

Like many people, I am sure your minds are taken up with such an array of challenges to normal life. Not being a people to give up or not care the church is, because of these very things, compelled to turn to the Lord in prayer and intercession. The recent Remembrance Day, emblazoned into our national annual calendar, reminds us of two aspects crucial for today; that soldiers were given a **Bible** as part of their essential equipment in the Great War and that the nation was called to **prayer** during the Second World War.

Many things have changed since then. However, I suggest to you that *the need for the Bible and Prayer has not vanished!* The necessity of these two sources of strength are vital for health and wholeness today. The great thing is that both are free. Most people have a smart phone and now multiple Bibles are free to



download on apps such as YouVersion. And while we can close our eyes and say a prayer almost any moment of the day, the coming together to pray has no equal.

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

Message: *Utterly Meaningless?* **Readings:** *Eccles 12: 1-11; 2 Cor 5: 16-21*

As a part of the wisdom literature in the Bible, Ecclesiastes seeks to give wisdom and knowledge to its readers and teaches us to draw our attention to God rather than “meaningless” things. But, as I have often found, the Bible doesn’t give out a simple set of instructions on how to do what we should do. Even the 10 commandments have a depth that goes beyond the dos and don’ts. Rather, God wants us to engage with the Bible; wants to have a conversation with us through it.

You see, a one-sided script can often be quite confusing. The Bible isn’t like a show where we sit back and spectate, and then talk about it afterwards, giving our opinion and reactions to it. God wants us to take part and be in conversation with his word because through that, the Holy Spirit enables us to be in conversation with God. Ecclesiastes takes us on a quest to find satisfaction and meaning in life; so I thought that I would do the same today; asking: “What does it mean?” as we journey through what could be an ordinary day together.

So, I close my eyes; take a deep breath, and wake up! It’s morning. Another meaningless, meaningless morning! The warmth of my bed and the sound of sweet birdsong and traffic outside my window are all utterly meaningless! As I get up, go to the toilet, get dressed, get ready, get myself a cup of tea; it all seems a bit pointless, as if everything is meaningless. Sitting at the table, I stare. Stare at the sunrise, it’s yellows and whites are slowly but surely illuminating the dew-covered cobwebs of the morning. It’s light, as it filters through the leaves, gently warms up the room, bringing to life the scent of my freshly potted lavender plant. Meaningless, as I stare at the sunrise. What does it mean? What, sun, do you mean when you rise in the morning and set at night?

But the day goes on, and work needs to be done. So, as one does in a time of lockdown, I don’t go very far, only return to my room, gather my things and start to do work. The books are piled high and the sound of someone drilling in the background is beginning to get quite irritating. After some slow, slow advancement that question pops up, as it tends to do every now and then; what’s the point? Isn’t all of this meaningless? I’ll never learn enough to be satisfied and I’m sure no one can actually ever reach their full potential. Success, no matter how great, will never be enough to fulfil your heart’s desire. My heart sinks when I realise I’m alone. And am I alone in thinking that being sad is meaningless? Sure, it builds up character and perseverance and can give you more time alone with God. But what does it mean to feel sad? To be left wanting? What does it

mean to suffer, to be in pain? One commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes writes: “The seemingly never-ending march of human generations thus appears to be as purposeless as the repetitive cycles of the natural world.” If there is never anything new, then isn’t everything truly meaningless?

Now let’s take a break, a breather, and a look at the life of Jesus... I’m sure the most of you know the story of Jesus stopping to heal the haemorrhaging woman on his way to heal Jairus’ daughter in Mark chapter 5. This woman’s life was full of suffering; physical suffering. She had been bleeding for 12 years and growing increasingly worse. But also emotional and spiritual suffering; being cast out of society, isolated from people, having been failed by so many doctors and denied access to the temple to worship God for twelve years. Her name isn’t even mentioned in the Bible. Meaningless. I’m sure she would have felt meaningless at many times during her life. For 12 years, there was nothing new for this woman. And with all the stigma surrounding her illness, society reinforced her meaningless; for if you were unclean, you had no use, no purpose. You had no right to be around, no right to worship God. But, there’s hope at hand. There is newness in the air and reconciliation around the corner. As this woman encounters Jesus, The Life-Giver, we see a new creation. She is healed, freed, lifted up and made new. The old and meaningless is gone, the new has come. Her life is changed forever! It will never be the same again. What does this mean? What does this mean for her suffering? Was it indeed meaningless? A waste of time, just waiting for Jesus? I don’t think so. What I believe her suffering meant is that she needed Jesus. And that’s not something to be ashamed of. Jesus adds meaning to the bad things that have happened! The meaning of all bad things that happen is that we need Jesus, that the world needs Jesus to create us anew and reconcile us to God.

Have we, honestly, ever looked at someone and thought to ourselves, this person’s life is meaningless? They’re lazy. They have no hopes or dreams or ambitions, no motivation. They just do nothing all day. If they have no purpose, then what’s the point of them being here? Have we ever thought this about ourselves even? That life is meaningless because we can’t do enough; can’t do as much as we used to, or hope that one day we will be able to do it all?

If so, consider asking the question: “What does this person mean to Jesus?” “What do I mean to Jesus?” Because no matter who they are, or what they do, humble Jesus thought they meant more than his own life and gave that as a sacrifice for them. Any person who seems meaningless is only so from a worldly point of view. And as the 2 Corinthians passage explained to us, we are to be Christ’s ambassadors, committed to the message of reconciliation for all people and all of creation. It is our responsibility to look through the eyes of Jesus and look for the opportunities for new creation, because as Saint Gregory of



Nazianzus said: "Faith, in fact, is what gives fullness to our reasoning." Faith in Christ is what gives fullness to our meaning, to the meaning of all things.

And so, when Solomon asks in Ecclesiastes: Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? We can answer 'yes' - in Jesus Christ. For the old has gone, and the new has come! But Solomon was right in saying that "It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time." For from the beginning, Jesus Christ was making things new, giving meaning to all things in creation. God's mercy and grace towards His people was consistent throughout the Old Testament, continually renewing them and giving them more second chances. But on the cross, by becoming sin for us, Jesus Christ reconciled the whole world to God again in the ultimate act of new creation; his resurrection. This leaves us with the responsibility of a "ministry of reconciliation". Now that's a mystery that I can't explain in full today. But maybe each of us can learn to participate a little more in this wonderful work of God. Perhaps in the way we look at the sunrise, our attitude towards work, or in our increasing attempt to truly love our neighbour as ourselves, no matter how frustrating they might be. If we look at the world through Jesus Christ, we might find it has a completely new meaning.

And so, in the morning, as you get up, go to the toilet, get dressed, get ready, get yourself a cup of tea; as you might sit and stare at the sunrise: its yellows and whites, and feeling the warmth of its fresh light on your skin. If you make Jesus Christ the focus of your mind, you might be inclined to check the verse of the day, which could happen to be Psalm 113:3 "From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised." With the Holy Spirit in the beating of your heart, maybe you would find the meaning of the sunrise to be that God has given another day to praise Him; another day to live for His glory. A new sunrise means a fresh helping of mercy and grace. True meaning can only be found when Jesus is put into the equation.

If, as the day goes on, you invite Jesus into whatever you're doing; your workspace, your thought process, you might find that the meaning of work, the meaning of struggle and strife is not hopeless failure and un-fulfilment, but simply that you need Jesus to get through the day. That your short-comings mean an opportunity for grace, new creation and reconciliation; drawing you closer to God. For it is as Jesus himself said: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." What does it mean that I am a sinner? That you are a sinner? It means that we are called by Christ. It means that we are saved by Christ and that Christ's power is made perfect in us. And so, when you see other people, other sinners, you should recognise that they are also called by Christ, that by faith they can be saved by Christ, and that Christ's power is made perfect in them too.

And as the day comes to a close, and we stare at the setting sun; with the Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth at the core of our being, we can be filled with peace and satisfaction, knowing that the sunset means we have lived another day in the love of God, and can now rest securely in the caring hands of a perfect Father.

Whatever comes next, as long as you put Jesus Christ into the equation, and at the centre of your lives, it will be "Utterly meaningful! Everything is meaningful."