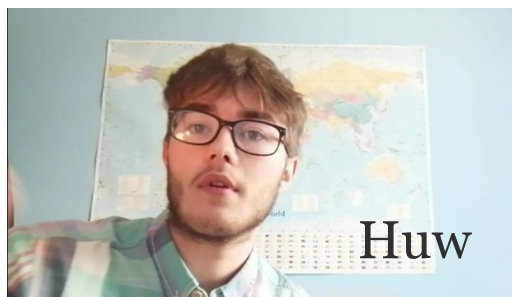


# Pandemic Times

Issue 55

Sunday 11 April 2021



Good morning all!

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” (Isaiah 60:1 NIV)*

It's Huw here today saying hello and sending greetings on behalf of your pastoral team at Brooklands Church of the Nazarene. Pastor Mick has been off on annual leave this week, yet as some of you know, annual leave in ministry rarely means rest; so we pray that in the midst of all the personal business that needed attending to, Pastor Mick will have had the time he needed to breathe, look up, and rest in the glory of God.

How wonderful it is to be here with you all on the week following that glorious Easter Sunday. For some of you, that excitement and celebration of new life has stayed with you through the week I'm sure; while for others maybe things have gone back to tiring, mundane rhythms. Either way, I'm here to remind you that the truth, hope and joy of resurrection are still here and are still working in marvelous ways.

As you might have already noticed, my favourite question is the all-important: 'What does this mean?'

What does resurrection mean? What does new life, spring, mean? I believe that just as gratitude has the power to brighten up our day, searching for God in every situation can bring us closer to His heart too. As our church continues to listen to God, I challenge you to ask God what this spring means to Him and write down in your own words what you figure out together. You could even try it in the form of an acrostic poem. Referring back to that verse at the beginning; what does it mean that the sun rises and shines, and that light comes in the day? I'll let you figure that one out for yourselves.

Today, Dr Samuel Hildebrandt, lecturer in Old Testament and Biblical Studies at Nazarene Theological College, will be preaching for us. I must say that classes with Dr Hildebrandt are a favourite of mine. He opens up the Bible in ways I never thought would be possible, and in his Spirit-led creativity and sensitivity, he invites us to participate in a dialogue with God's word. As all good preachers do, he creates a space to hear not only his voice but the voice of God in each and every one of our hearts.

Pastor Mick will be back with us for our weekly prayer meeting on the church Zoom link at 10.30am-11am Wednesday morning, and will be back preaching next Sunday. I for one am excited to see what happens next.

Grace and peace,

Huw.

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## Daily Reading and Prayer Guide

Date	Reading	Pray for
Monday 5th April	Luke chapter 9:37–62	Tim and Alison Ingram
Tuesday 6th April	Luke chapter 10:1–24	Annette and Mike Jones and family
Wednesday 7th April	Luke chapter 10:25 to chapter 11:13	Huw Jones
Thursday 8th April	Luke chapter 11:14–36	Vivien Kenyon
Friday 9th April	Luke chapter 11:37 to chapter 12:7	Beverley Mitchell and family
Saturday 10th April	Catch up	Kingdom, Debi, David, Sarah, Faith and Malachi Matsetlo
Sunday 11th April	Luke chapter 12:8–34	Dr. Herbert McGonigle and family

## Prayer Requests

This week, we want to pray for those in our faith community with specific needs.

- ◇ For healing for John B. For strength as he undergoes treatment, and for Ann, who so lovingly cares for him.
- ◇ We pray for Jon F, as he undergoes further treatment for his conditions.
- ◇ Give thanks that Bill Ellis is gradually getting better following his episode with Covid. Pray for Sue also.
- ◇ We pray for Isobel, who has such a positive outlook as she goes through a course of chemotherapy.
- ◇ Continue to pray for Claire S.
- ◇ Pray for those that have private physical needs.
- ◇ We pray for the Royal family as they grieve the loss of HRH Prince Philip.

*Pray without ceasing.*

# What does the resurrection mean today?

Exodus 15.11-18; Psalm 18.4-16; John 21.1-19

We are on the other side of Easter. We're looking back at last week's preaching and at last week's reflections, and of course, our central reflections about the resurrection. Jesus has come back from the dead. Jesus is alive. Jesus has risen, whatever we want to say about the resurrection, of course begins with Jesus. Before Easter we made the focus of our attention on the cross, and on the empty tomb. But now on the other side of Resurrection Sunday, we're looking back, and we're asking the question, "What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for us today?"

Resurrection is one of those Christian words that we don't often use in daily life. What does the word actually mean? We only really use this word in the context of Easter. Does the Bible have anything to teach us about what this word actually means?

In the Old Testament there are a few scenes—perhaps Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones being the most vivid one, and the most horrifying one. There is also Elijah, who brings a boy who has died back to life, so we see this transition from death back to life.

The New Testament is of course concerned with the resurrection, but as we saw in Mark's gospel, even there, it doesn't seem to be a vital part of the first message about Jesus—the women run away in fear.

In Luke and Acts, there is a bit more attention to the resurrection, and there is 1 Corinthians 15, but other than that, there is this feeling that the early church is trying to work out what the resurrection means.

One thing is for sure, is that the resurrection is incredibly important. Without it, the disciples on the Emmaus road would have been left puzzling; the woman in Mark's gospel would have run home and forgotten about the events,

What are we to make in our daily life of this narrative of this miraculous transition from the cross to the empty tomb? What does the resurrection mean for us today? Resurrection is of course one of those big Christian words that we don't really often use in everyday life. Resurrection. This, even if we look closer at the words, we take the "re" away from the beginning. "Surrection" – Is that is that a word. I'm not quite sure that we can define what resurrection really means and we really only ever use it in the context of Easter. Does the Bible, perhaps help us to understand a bit more what this word means, what it means for us today? And even there, the question about defining resurrection is a difficult one. In the Old Testament, there are a few scenes. Perhaps Ezekiel's valley of the dry bones, is the most vivid one and the most horrifying one, in some way. And there's also Elijah, who brings a boy who has died back to life, so there's this transition from death, back to life. The New Testament is of course concerned with the resurrection, but as we saw in Mark's gospel, even there, it doesn't seem to be a vital part of the first message about Jesus: the women run away in fear.

And Luke and Acts of course give a bit more attention to it, and then there's one Corinthians 15. But other than that, there's still a bit more working out of it, trying to understand in the early church, what the resurrection meant.

One thing is for sure that the resurrection is incredibly important. Without the resurrection, the disciples on the Emmaus road would have been left puzzling. Without the resurrection, the woman in Mark's gospel would have rushed home and forgotten about the events. Without the resurrection, you and I would not be sitting here. There would be no Christian faith, there would be no church. What would your life look like without the resurrection? So, if we think about it in those terms, we already realise that the resurrection is central to our life, and without it, our lives would look very different. So what does the resurrection mean for us today? How are we supposed to think about this and what understanding of the resurrection will help us in our day-to-day life as followers of Jesus? I think a place to begin to define resurrection is that it means a transition from death, back to life. But what

does that look like, how does it work. How are we supposed to understand this transition? And I think our readings today give us a bit of a glimpse into that and help us to put some flesh onto those bones in the spirit of Ezekiel 37.

Our first reading from Exodus takes us of course into the wider narrative of Israel being trapped in Egypt and it is really the narrative of death. You remember that Pharaoh kills all the Hebrew children that the Hebrew slaves have to work in deadly and life defying conditions, and even the plagues that God inflicts on the Egyptians to liberate these people have a lot of death in them. Darkness, the frogs, the rivers turned to blood, and finally the death of Pharaoh's firstborn son is a narrative of death. And so as we come to the Exodus moment of God's people passing through the waters. Exodus 15 asks us to break away from the narrative, and can only speak in poetic terms about what God has done in this situation. "Your right hand oh Lord. Glorious and power in the greatness of your Majesty you overthrow your adversaries you send out your fury, it consumes them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up the floods stood up in heap, the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea."

When God brings his people out of Egypt, out of this place of death, out of this grave, out of the south, something that's below the ground, he's bringing His people up. The writer of Exodus can only communicate it in these terms, that God is fighting a war, that God is fighting a battle, that God is pushing away the waters of death, and letting his people march through them.

We've become very preoccupied with the Exodus and how did the people get through. Where was the water, the miraculous side of the story? And yet, the Exodus text is giving us a picture of God fighting for his people. The basic message of the Exodus, it is of course about liberating people, but it is also about God fighting about God, bringing his people to new life. It's the creation of Israel, if you will. But this resurrection of Israel from Egypt, onto the other side of the water is not an end, in and of itself as the chapter reads on, "Stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them, you have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. You will bring them in and plant them on your old mountain. The place our Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary. Oh Lord, which your hands have established, the Lord will reign forever and ever."

Resurrection with Exodus is then not just bringing people from death to life, but it is to bring people from death to new life in the presence of God. A life that is with God that is in God's presence that is lived at the exact opposite – the polar opposite of death and destruction. So my theme takes us into very similar territory, to very similar language of death. In verses 4 and 5, "The chords of death encompass me. The torrents of destruction assailed me". Again this this water language of destructive raging waves that come. Again from the Psalmist, "The courts of shale entangled me, the snares of death confronted me". In the Psalms we often get the impression that the psalmist is already with one foot in the grave. But maybe it's better to say that the grave is already with one foot in his or her life in the Old Testament and I think in many ways still today. Death is not just something that is on the other side of a line that we crossed at some point, death is the power of force, something that invades life that makes life difficult that the waters that come over the shore, again. If you live in the right parts in Manchester, you might have experienced that, of course, in January, first hand – the waters of destruction assailed. And our psalmist cries out, cries out to God in God's temple, and God pulled them out of the waters, just as Israel in the Exodus, and grants him new life. And this is what this sounds like the

earth real than rock the foundations of the mountains trembled and quick “Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare.”

Can you imagine God coming down with all this fury, as the Psalm writer, giving us a picture of what divine intervention looks like. When God comes into the life of his people and delivers them. That's what it sounds like. That's what it feels like. It's the poetry of resurrection, the poetry of new creation, of pushing away the waters for this one person in this song to be saved. Exodus and Psalm 80 are resurrection texts, because they portray God as the Lord of Life, who shows up in the created order that we dwell in everyday, and to grab people who are surrounded by death. Who gives them new life, who defeats death, and brings them closer to himself. They are the texts of new creation, they are texts of new life and of following. They are texts that are difficult to embrace, difficult to translate into our day. They are texts of mythological imagery, of symbols, of poetry. But here, as with everywhere else in the Bible, whenever God breaks into human life, that's what it looks like. You can only talk about it in poetry. It is something from the outside that comes and defeats those forces.

Resurrection. We've seen a narrative about a nation, we've seen a narrative about an ancient king. And we get a bit of a glimpse of this of course at the Old Testament but what does resurrection look like for me today? What does resurrection look like for me in my day-to-day, in the areas where I struggle with despair, with disappointment. How does God resurrect us as we struggle with these opposing forces, the life of faith and in our life, in and of itself. Of course, there's no reason to doubt that God still intervenes in the spirit of Psalm 18 for you and me. There's no reason to doubt that God grabs people from a COVID deathbed, and sets them back on their feet. Many of us have experienced this many of us have heard about this. And yet at the same time. For most Christians, I think that the resurrection, looks slightly different and I think that John 21, our last little passage gives us a little bit of a sense of this. First of all, so of course important to notice that Jesus is portrayed to us here in this chapter, as the Lord of creation. He knows about the fish. He knows that there's more fish, and we get the same story basically that we get an Exodus – God and Jesus, powerful, and control over life on this world.

John 21 is a bit of a choppy chapter at the shore of the lake, a lot of different themes kind of woven in here about Jesus making a meal, about the significance of Peter, and the significance of discipleship and how can I be differently. It's the last chapter in John's very very rich and deep gospel that is weaving a lot of things together. One thing that stands out though in this chapter is of course the figure of Peter. And Peter I think in this chapter, undergoes his own resurrection, in a way that is very telling to us.

Simon Peter said to them in verse three, I am going fishing. They said to Him, we will go with you. On the other side of the cross. Peter goes back to normal life. They come back to the shore. And they have this conversation with Jesus and directs them to go fishing again. And as they pull in the fish, the disciple whom Jesus loved turns to Peter and he said, “It is the Lord”. And when Peter hears that it is Jesus, his first response is to jump into the water and to swim out to him first of all. The point here is probably missed on us very easily because we were looking forward to data or we can jump into a lake or go swimming in the ocean, whereas Peter shares much of the attitude to the waters that his old testament friends would have shared that the water is a terrifying place, that the water is a place of destruction and of death. And yet, Peter, in this moment, plunges himself into the water. On the other side, Jesus meets him, but he doesn't just stand there and wait for him, but he has prepared already a fire. Again the significance of this is easily passed by us if we read the text, just by itself. The last time that Peter walked himself at a fire was of course, when Jesus was tried. And then Peter stands in the courtyard warming himself on the charcoal fire with the soldiers and the servants of the high priest, denying Jesus, betraying Jesus. That scene really starts a slippery slope for Peter. Coming to this point, I think it's fair to speak of Peter's death as something of a combination of disappointment of a lack of faith, an abandonment of faith of a resignation – “I'm going fishing”. I thought Jesus is coming through for me. I thought Jesus was the Lord. I thought Jesus would deliver us. And then Easter happened. I'm going back to my old ways. I'm somewhat ashamed that I associated myself with this person who led us down again. Peter's death. Peter's resignation. Peter returning to his old ways.

And yet this Jesus, the one who just came back from death to life. How does he bring Peter back to life? What does Peter's resurrection look like? It comes to us personally, in the most delightful way. One of the most beautiful verses in the Bible, John 21:12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast”. Jesus brings new life to his ashamed and betrayed disciple Jesus feeds him, he takes care of his physical needs. He invites him to have breakfast. Strengthened and warmed, he approaches Peter and in what seems like a private conversation. He asked some questions. He draws him back in. He tenderly asks him, and so invites Peter to discover what is left of his faith. To tenderly discover for himself, where his priorities lie. Where his heart is. “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these”. Are “these” the other disciples? Are “these” the fish? Maybe both. Do you love me more than your normal work life? Do you love me more than the people around you? “Yes Lord, you know that I love you”. Yes, Peter, you know that you love Jesus. Peter doesn't come out with this language till Jesus asks him. It's all over in the Scriptures from Adam to Elijah to Peter to Paul to John, where Jesus and God asked questions, where they send people back onto their feet by asking them about the heart, about the love, about their care, and about their priorities. The question that he takes him through: Do you love me? Yes you know that I love you. Tend my sheep.

A new mission, not just resurrection for resurrection sake, as in the Exodus, God is resurrecting Peter. He is bringing him through the waters and drawing him to himself. He feeds him. He keeps him in his presence, and he commands him to go out into the world, as his ambassador, as a person of resurrection, as a person of faith and conviction, as somebody who has learned that he loves Jesus more than he actually thought he did.

The resurrection is something that we think about only once a year, but it is something that we experience on a regular basis. In the Scriptures we see resurrection as something so very, very powerful, as God draws people from the death of the waters. But in John 21. We're also see resurrection as something very personal, very tender as a private conversation after breakfast. Israel. The Psalm writer of Psalm 18. Jesus himself. Peter and Paul – they're all going through the waters of death to new life, as have you and me in our baptism. But we don't stay there. We are asked everyday again by Jesus our resurrected Lord, the Lord of life. “Do you love me”. Where are your priorities. Where's the new creation life that has given you. Look at me. Look at me. This is how I bring you back to life, not by whipping and forcing and working your heart like the Egyptian slave masters, but by feeding you, and by slowly drawing you out a conversation.

Resurrection is new creation. It is new priorities, it is a new heart, it is a new way of following Jesus and in Peter's case, it's a way of following Jesus. After the third question that maybe a bit, ironically, maybe but shockingly leads all the way to Peter's death. But it always ends in the same way. You are a new person, because you've put your faith in the Lord. You are a person of life, you are a person who no longer need to fear death because you are called, you are fed you are asked you are drawn in, you're brought in by the Lord of Life himself, who comes from the empty tube that feeds us, and speaks to us. And even today, as He resurrects our own faith as he resurrects what is left after our own doubts over the last year, says there's more love left in you than you think. And the more you look at me and see what I've done for you in the Easter story, the more you will discover that for yourself, the more you will be able to hear my call to you, not as a burden, but as a privilege, and as you're true life. Follow me, Jesus says, Follow me.