



Brooklands Church of the Nazarene

Pandemic Times

16 May 2021
Issue 60



FRIENDS

How good and pleasant it is, when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. – Psalm 133

As we gather for worship, it feels a little bittersweet to announce that this is Huw Jones' final official Sunday with us as a placement student from Nazarene Theological College. He has completed his hours with us and passed with flying colours! It's been such a joy to have him as part of the ministry team and Lucy and I will miss him as part of our weekly meetings. As a final task for him he is preaching this morning, completing our Easter series, 'Encounters with the Resurrected Christ' looking at Saul's conversion in Acts 9.

I have asked him to return next week and we'll take some time to thank him formally, and bless and pray for him as a church. Don't fear however, I don't think this is the last we'll see of Huw!

The ending of the season of Easter ushers in Pentecost, where our preaching journey through the Scriptures will continue with 'Encounters with the Holy Spirit,' beginning next week.

Next Sunday is of course Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the gift of God's presence to us in a new way – through the Holy Spirit. It's also the day we celebrate the birth of the Church which we read about in Acts 2. We do have plans, weather permitting, to mark this occasion with some congregational singing outdoors in the church grounds following the church service next week. More details will follow on this as we keep an eye on the weather forecast!

Let me remind you that there remains some space in the sanctuary for people to be present in person for Sunday worship. We are following government restrictions to ensure everyone's safety with distancing, mask wearing, good ventilation and, unfortunately, no congregational singing. Even with these restrictions it has been so good to have people there. If you want to be with us then please let myself or Mark Bolton know and we'll ensure there is space for you.

Finally, this week will be the last chance for you to contribute to our special offering for the work of the Church of the Nazarene amidst the Covid crisis in India. See last week's Update for details on how to transfer your donation or, if you would like to give by cash or cheque please speak to me, Mark Bolton or Sheila Strong and we'll make arrangements to collect this from you! Thank you for your generosity!

Peace,

Mick



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NAZARENE HOLIDAYS

The British Isles South District is hoping to put on a family holiday and a youth holiday this summer.

Both holidays will be from 18-22 August. They will be at the same location—Ellesmere School in Shropshire.

For further information about the *Breakthru* holiday, click this link to the [BISD Facebook Page](#).

If you would like more information about the Youth Camp, info@BrooklandsChurch.uk or nyuksouth-camp@gmail.com.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
Philippians 4:4-6

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS THIS WEEK

- Praise God for encouraging news about John B, and we continue to remember John and Ann in our daily prayers
- We pray for those who continue to need God's physical healing in their life: Isobel, Jon F, Claire, Bill, Mick (Pastor Mick's dad)
- Pray for Steph, Jon Fisher's daughter-in-law, for a full and quick recovery from Covid-19.
- Remember Pastor Mick and the church leaders as they prepare to shape the church ministry on the other side of this pandemic.
- Continue to pray for the Coronavirus situation in India and the work of the Church on the frontline there.

DAILY PRAYER AND READING GUIDE

Date	Reading	Pray for
Monday 17th May	John 2	Vivienne Best and family
Tuesday 18th May	John 3:1–21	Mark, Joanne and Tom Bolton
Wednesday 19th May	John 3:22–4:13	Audrey Bolton and family
Thursday 20th May	John 4:14–45	Jack and Leah Bolton
Friday 21st May	John 4:46–5:17	Robert Bond and Annette
Saturday 22nd May	Catch up	Bob and Eveline Branan
Sunday 23rd May	John 5:18–47	Ruth Copeland-Holtz



Church of the Nazarene (Official)

4 May at 14:30 · 🌐

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Please pray for India as the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths are breaking world records, with deaths nearly tripling in the last three weeks.

Nazarene churches in India have been actively involved in distributing aid since the beginning of the pandemic a year ago, and the Reynolds Memorial Hospital is providing frontline care. More information on how you can support these efforts is available at the link below.



Bessie Black

Thank you for what you're doing there making a difference helping people and being Christ like

Like · Reply · 1 w



Elaine Duell Pankratz

Praying for the medical personnel who are at Reynolds Memorial Hospital and other care groups! May God give our Nazarenes the strength and health to continue to minister to those in need!

Like · Reply · 1 w



Beverly McDowell

Prayers for people who n India

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Like · Reply · 1 w



Jeremy Hoffpauir

Awful what is happening there, but thankful the Church of the Nazarene has a presence and can help make a difference.

Like · Reply · 1 w



Suzy Schmidt
In prayer 🙏

...

Like · Reply · 1 w

The situation in India is critical. Over 400,000 new cases of Covid are being reported every day. A second wave of COVID-19 has left many hospitals without oxygen supplies or available beds.

Hospitals and health centres across India are struggling to cope with the sheer numbers of new cases. Patients in critical conditions are being turned away, many dying at home without access to medical help.

Frontline workers are exhausted, and relatives are searching for oxygen cylinders to help treat or comfort their loved ones at home.

The pandemic is at its height in India. Families need urgent help.

The Church of the Nazarene is on the front line in the fight against Covid. Please help by praying and if you are able, by giving.

HOW TO HELP

Pray

Pray for those who have lost loved ones, and pray for those who are trying to find medical care for their loved ones. Pray for the staff at all the hospitals, including Reynolds Memorial Hospital, who have treated an increasing stream of patients for weeks. Pray for those who are ill, that they would be healed and recover quickly, and pray for the spread of the virus to slow. Pray for those who are most vulnerable during crises, especially senior adults, individuals with disabilities, and people living in poverty. To send a prayer or note of encouragement, go to ncm.org/pray.

Give

Churches and individuals around the world can provide support through the COVID-19 Response – India. Donations will be used for immediate health needs.

100% of what is given to the India appeal will go to help those in need.

Donations can be transferred to our own church account, and should be referenced 'India'.

Account Details

Name: Church of the Nazarene
Sort Code: 20-55-59
Account Number: 50255769

BROOKLANDS CHURCH
OF THE NAZARENE

ENCOUNTERS WITH
THE RESURRECTED
CHRIST (5)

WHAT IF I WAS
WRONG?

HUW JONES

ACTS 9:1-31

SERMON NOTES

I've spoken on our passage today, the conversion of Saul, a couple of time before. But there's one thing I can't escape every time it pops up. One word: Testimony. Now I'm sure almost all of you have heard a testimony at some point. Most of you probably have a testimony of your own. In the Church, we understand testimonies as sharing our stories of coming to faith and growing with God. In doing so we are bringing glory to God, shining the saving light of the gospel onto the world and encouraging each other in love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

I'm a part of a Christian Community in Wales that shares testimonies for young people on Instagram each week. The format that they use is this....

"Before I met Jesus, I was . . . But after I met Jesus, I am now . . ."

What fills these blank spaces are different for each person. They might even change every time you share your testimony. The hymn Amazing Grace is perhaps one that most famously uses this kind of language: "I once was lost, but now I am found. I was blind, but now I see." Sometimes testimonies seem small, for example: "Before I met Jesus I was proud, but after I met Jesus, I am now learning how not to be proud." But sometimes Testimonies are big. Saul's testimony is huge; perhaps one of the biggest of all time! It's so big that it's almost as if there are two people separated by it; Saul, the murderer and persecutor of Christians; and Paul, the imprisoned Christian who is himself persecuted. In a couple of his epistles (Ephesians 2, Colossians 2:13), Paul uses the big language of moving from being dead in our sin, to becoming alive in Christ. You can tell that his testimony shaped him forever. The truth is, no matter how big or small our testimonies seem, if they bring glory to God then they are infinitely valuable and help the work of the Kingdom.

But what makes a testimony? There's a before and an after as we have just heard. But what happens in between? What sparks the change? What defines that life-changing moment that leaves us bewildered and filled with faith? Or rather, who? As far as questions go, this is not the most difficult to answer. Of course, it's meeting Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ, our radical saviour.

A couple of weeks ago, we heard of Peter's encounter with the resurrected Jesus around a fire and over breakfast. Now, you can call me a cynic, though I'm the furthest thing from it (trust me), but the thing that stood out to me was how uncomfortable it must have been for Peter; to hear that question three time: "Do you love me?" But if it was difficult for Peter, encountering the resurrected Jesus was infinitely more so for Saul. Just a couple of verses earlier, Saul was on what he believed to be a God-ordained mission of righteousness, persecuting and murdering Christians in the name of God. Saul hadn't been with Jesus during his life. He had not shared years of company, conversation and community with Jesus. They had not broken bread together. And Saul was not met with breakfast during this encounter.

I believe that it's important for us to understand that this light from heaven flashing around Saul was not a heart-strangely-warmed kind of experience. He fell to the ground! He was blinded! He was met with a very loaded question: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Imagine being met with those words from heaven. Saul might have hated followers of the way of Jesus, but he could not deny that this Jesus speaking to him was Lord (Acts 9:5). There's no doubt in my mind that this was the most terrifying experience of Saul's life. I can just imagine him trembling; his heart racing; completely disorientated. Let's not forget that Saul is now face-to-face with the one whom he's dedicated his whole life to hate and discredit. But the roles are now reversed. In this moment, all the power and authority and righteousness Saul thought he possessed are stripped away: it all belongs now to the Resurrected Jesus speaking to him. This was not a good thing for Paul. One cannot imagine him celebrating and praising God: thank you that I am wrong! I praise you for showing all this power you have over me. I'm grateful that you're taking this authority away from me. Oh, and one more thing; thank you for blinding me!

The power dynamic has shifted; Saul has now lost everything he thought was his and is now vulnerable and at the mercy of the one he persecuted. He has no ground to stand on. His world is upside down. And indeed, he is left by Jesus; broken, blind, confused and grieving.

We're going to leave Saul in that place for a moment. Since this morning is about testimony, I thought I'd share a short one with you. A testimony isn't always just your experience of meeting Jesus for the first time. It's every single time you meet him after that too.

At the beginning of last year, around February 2020, Jesus met me once again. But this time it was different than any other time before. This time it was very uncomfortable. The truth that was revealed under his shining light indeed left me broken, confused and grieving. I learnt some things about myself that has changed the course of my life; that has forced me to change my dreams and expectations, my views and my relationships with my friends and family. All of this led me into a time of anxiety; heart-racing, thoughts spinning, and I often found myself physically trembling. I wonder if any of you have experienced an encounter like this, either with God or with someone else? Words that have left you angry or heart-broken perhaps?

The truth for Saul, for me, and for so many people across the world is that an encounter with Jesus is not always as comfortable or nice as we often hope it would be. If God is good, which we believe he is, how can encounters with him be so, well, not good for some of us?

Let's look again at the passage and Saul's experience. After the light is gone, and Saul is led by his hand into the city, he prayed. He prayed and he waited for God to meet him for three days. I don't know about you, but the more and more I pray, the more I come to find that prayer is less about me telling God about myself and the world, but that it's more of listening to God telling me about himself and the way he sees the world. I was faced with a question from God this year: if everything I knew about the world and myself and my neighbours turned out to be wrong, if I was wrong, would I still be able to worship God with my whole being and crown Jesus Christ as Lord of it all? For Saul, his very idea of who God was, was wrong. And God confronted him with the truth as the resurrected Jesus showed him his glory.

"Why do you persecute me?" This is not a condemnation from God, it's not an accusation. Here, God is forcing Saul to reflect deeply on his faith. It broke him to pieces and it calls for a lot of prayer, but God is indeed good. And God never calls us to places where we cannot find him there. He will meet us and bring us out with him, better than before.

Testimonies remind me of butterflies. I'm sure you all know that they start off as little caterpillars before they go into a chrysalis and emerge as beautifully decorated butterflies, with wings to fly. But I learnt this week what actually happens inside the chrysalis. For up to 14 days, the caterpillars actually digest themselves. They break everything down and reduce themselves into sludge. Hands up if you've felt like sludge at some point this year! Do you see a theme yet? Transformation takes time, it can be painful, but the results are always worth it.

In his time of prayer and fasting, Saul is met once again by God. But this time, God sends Ananias, a disciple, to minister on his behalf. It's only after three days of waiting and persevering in prayer, but through Ananias, Saul's sight is restored. He is even baptised; he receives the Holy Spirit! Even though the resurrected Jesus took his power away from him, he now makes sure that Saul regains his strength. He makes sure that Saul's faith is now changed in such a way that he cannot go on living the way he did before. Spoiler alert, Saul's name is changed to Paul and he goes on to write half the books in the New Testament. This is what we call a testimony of God's saving grace!

But there's another testimony we haven't quite finished yet. I was in this place of devastation, loneliness, and prayer for the majority of this year. Despite incredible support from my friends and college family, it took a lot longer than three days, or even fourteen days for me to emerge from my chrysalis of sludge. But prayer. Prayer taught me so many things during this time. It gave me words to sing, words to write; it gave me communities to love and to be loved by. It gave me new dreams to follow. It gave me a new way of living. When God reveals a truth that deeply impacts or disturbs us; when he shines the light on those parts of ourselves we've hidden away or need to be addressed, just as we pray he would do in our holiness tradition; the Resurrected Jesus will be glorified.

To be honest, I still haven't quite gotten over last week's sermon yet. And that beautifully glorious image of Christ ascended to the throne, shining his glory and grace upon us has really stuck with me this week. That is why we have testimonies. They show that we are willing to be changed for the better, no matter the process, no matter the sacrifice, and that Jesus Christ is the one we glorify because of that.

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