

April 2012

# He Is Risen!

What Resurrection means for you -  
today, tomorrow, and forever

Scripture, Reflections,  
and Prayers  
to help you grow

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This month we reflect more on the events of Jesus' last week, including His last meal with His disciples (which we remember in Communion or the Lord's Supper; we walk with Jesus through the events of Good Friday (His crucifixion), and celebrate His resurrection (Easter Sunday). We will think about His ascension to heaven and His promise to return. We then move on to think about our own "eternal-ness" – our resurrection, eternal life, heaven, hell, and the hereafter! Lots to think about and pray about!

The prayers (mostly) are adapted from James S. Bell Jr & Tracy Macon Sumner, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Christian Prayers & Devotions* (don't let the title fool you – it actually is a very good anthology of prayers!).

## **Monday, April 2: Mark 11:27-12:12**

Yesterday we began thinking about our other "ordinance" (or symbolic act ordained by Jesus) other than baptism – communion or the Lord's Supper. It commemorates Jesus' last meal with His disciples in Jerusalem. That meal took place on Thursday evening. Jesus entered Jerusalem for the Passover celebration on a Sunday to much fanfare and celebration (Palm Sunday, yesterday). This week we'll read through the events of the week leading to Jesus' last meal (Thursday), His arrest, trial and crucifixion (on Friday, what we call "Good Friday"). He rose from the dead on Sunday (Easter Sunday).

Jesus does not have an easy time of it in Jerusalem (11:27-33)! But He never compromised His integrity, his convictions, or His compassion. *"What we see in Jesus,"* says Kevin Makins, *"is this man who is God who refuses to be pinned down, who dances around the questions but give answers to questions they weren't asking."* He certainly did have an "interesting" way of dealing with His critics – asking them some difficult questions (11:29) that forced them to deal with His identity as God Himself.

The parable in Mark 12:1-12 is a not-so-veiled description of how people have treated God's prophets over the centuries (people like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and John the Baptist). And it is an accurate description of what will happen to Jesus this week. The not-so-veiled challenge of Mark 12:9-10 is that there are consequences for rejecting Jesus (more about that in a couple of weeks).

At communion we often read these familiar words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: *"For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you.' Do this to remember me.' In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people – an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.' For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."*

We remember Jesus' death on the cross: He died that our sins might be forgiven, that we might have a renewed relationship directly with God, that the power of evil and death may be destroyed, that the penalty we deserve to pay for our sins might be paid in full, that the righteousness of God might be fulfilled, that we might have new – eternal – life today and forever ...

*"God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous,"* Paul writes, *"He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood"* (Romans 3:24-25). Lord, help us to believe ...

*Our heavenly Father, we pray that your blessing may rest on each one of us who profess to be Christians.*

*Lord, help us to love Christ more than we love ourselves.*

*Help us to be more like him in our way of life.*

*Help us, Lord, to walk humbly, prayerfully, consistently on, in the dust of our pilgrimage*

*so that others may not stumble over us and say, "They profess only, but they never do anything."*

*God, help us to live up to what we profess, through you, in Christ Jesus, and may it be shown in each one of us. Amen*

D.L. Moody (1837-1899)

## Tuesday, April 3: Mark 12:13-43

A lot of things happened during Jesus' last week. Mark gives us a variety of insights into what Jesus considers to be the real priorities of life ...

1. It's not all about money (12:13-17, 41-44)
2. It's not all about being smart (12:18-27) – the Sadducees were not really interested in the answer to their question; they were really interested in making Jesus look bad.<sup>1</sup>
3. It's not all about religion – in terms of ritual (12:41-44).

It is about ...

1. Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (12:28-30), and
2. Loving your neighbour as yourself (12:31-34)

It is about genuine love for God, not "being religious" or following religious traditions for traditions' sake (12:33-40).

Celebrating the Lord's Supper is not an empty religious ritual. It is an opportunity for us to think about God's amazing love for us ... and think though how we will respond: *"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us ... God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect."* (1 John 4:9-12, 16-17).

It is an opportunity for us to also proclaim that God's future is coming into the present. We do not simply remember a long dead Jesus: we celebrate the presence of the Living Lord! He is with us. And as we enjoy His presence we look forward to being with Him in eternity, too! *"At communion,"* writes Tom Wright, professor of New Testament at the University of St. Andrews, *"we are like the children of Israel in the wilderness, tasting fruit plucked from the promised land. It is the future coming to meet us in the present."* Communion reminds us that, through the Spirit, God is always with us.

Is your love "growing more perfect"? Ask Jesus to help you be more loving ... in your relationship with God, and with your "neighbour" ... (Who is your neighbour??? Read Luke 10:25-37).

*God, give me patience through tough times.  
How impatient and angry I am when I think myself unjustly slandered, maligned, or hurt.  
Christ suffers the indignity of the cross, the innocent for the guilty,  
yet I will not stand up under one negative word for His sake.  
Lord, grant me character and patience, power and strength,  
that I may take all adversity with a Christ-like character,  
and with faith in Him overcome it.  
And if necessity and your honour require me to speak,  
grant that I may do so with gentleness and patience, confidence and inspiration,  
that the truth and your glory may be seen by all.  
For yours is the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen*

Adapted from Miles Coverdale (1488-1568)

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<sup>1</sup> We often get sidetracked by the question, *"What does Jesus mean when He says that those who are resurrected will 'neither marry nor be given in marriage'?"* This gets many happily married people nervous! Can heaven really be all that good? Jesus is **NOT** answering this question here! Jesus **IS** answering *the Sadducees' question* about whether or not there is a resurrection at all. *The Sadducees* (not Jesus) present heaven as a continuation of life as we know it: you get married; you have children to inherit your property and care for you in your old age, you continue the same kind of life in heaven ... etc. *Jesus* emphasizes heaven is completely different from life as we know it now – after all there is no longer any death, pain, suffering, and so forth! So the purpose for marriage – *as the Sadducees understood it* (to have children to inherit property and continue your family line) – was no longer relevant.

### Wednesday, April 4: Mark 13

This is one of those chapters we struggle with ... it seems so ... odd? Frightening? Confusing? Obscure? Rather than trying to work through all the details, let's think about some of the big themes that come out of this reading:

- *We need to rely on God alone* – sometimes God has to take away the supports we rely on and shatter our preconceptions of what he wants to do so that we rely on him alone and learn to follow him in unexpected ways, trusting that he knows what he is doing. For the Jews, the destruction of the Temple would totally remove all of their religious foundations and force them to trust in Jesus ... or not.
- *Stand firm!* – Mark's readers had seen the destruction of the Temple, and were experiencing persecution. Why was God allowing it? Had they made a mistake in following Jesus? Mark reminds them that God knew all this would happen – Jesus had said so. God's word to us when we find life hard going is the same as Jesus' words to his disciples then: stand firm (v 13).
- *What's going to happen?* Jesus warns of a godless ruler desecrating Jerusalem. In AD 70 the Roman army ravaged Palestine, destroyed the Temple and crushed the Jewish people, causing unspeakable misery. According to tradition, Christians in Jerusalem remembered Jesus' warning and escaped to Pella. We don't need to search high and low to find out what God's future plans are. They are revealed in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus: There will be a day of judgment before God's king comes to establish God's kingdom.
- *Be prepared!* We have God's rough outline of the future but we don't have the details. If God has not revealed the exact date of Jesus' return, then we don't need to spend fruitless hours trying to work it out (see Acts 1:6-7). God tells us what the future holds so that we will be ready (v 33). The picture Jesus paints (vs 34–36) is not one of passive waiting but of vigilant action. Notice how many times Jesus exhorts his followers to *'watch'*, *'be on guard'*, and *'be alert'*. Are we making decisions and basing our lives on what God has said about the future, or are we listening to the 'false' prophets of our day who present us with a different version of the future?
- *Jesus is coming back!* Jesus knows how easily the urgent demands of daily life preoccupy us. If we don't keep his return in mind, there is the danger that instead of doing what God has assigned to us, we will get distracted or tired of waiting (v 36) and fill our days with other things.
- *The task God has given you* ... We may not all be evangelists or preachers, but we are each asked to be witnesses for Jesus to the people we meet every day, and we are each called to serve God's Church (see Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:27–31).

*Lord, because you have made me, I owe you all of my love.  
Because you have redeemed me, I owe you all of myself.  
Because you have promised so much, I owe you all of my being.  
Lord, please make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge.  
Let me know by love what I know by understanding.  
I owe you more than my whole self, but all I can give you is all that I am.  
Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of love.  
I am wholly yours by creation. Make me all yours, too, in love. Amen.*

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

### Thursday, April 5: Mark 14

A lot can happen on a Thursday! Most of this actually happens Thursday evening! It is one of the most (if not **the** most) intense chapters in Scripture.

Mark 14:1-11 sets the scene for the events that are about to transpire: Jesus is turning his face toward the cross. *"She has done what she could,"* Jesus said, *"and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time"* (14:8). We have no idea what motivated this lady to express her worship and adoration so profoundly at this time, but the depth of her love for Jesus is clear. Compare her heart – full of worship – with that of the disciples (14:4-5) and Judas (14:10-11). *"The contrast of reactions as Jesus goes to the cross invites Mark's readers to ponder their own position, feelings and attitudes. 'Were you there,' asks the old song, 'when they*

*crucified my Lord?' Yes, but the more important question is, 'What was going on inside you?' Were you part of those who wanted to look the other way, because some people were so exuberant in their devotion? Were you, like Judas, hoping that, if Jesus were determined to die anyway, you at least might make something out of it? Were you glad to be rid of such a trouble-maker? Or were you ready to give everything you had to honour this strange man, this unexpected Messiah, this paradoxical Passover-maker?"* (Tom Wright).

As Jesus shares the traditional Jewish Passover meal with His disciples, He reinterprets it for the present moment. The Passover recalled the Jews' miraculous deliverance from Egypt (Moses, the plagues, Red Sea, etc.). At the Passover they retold the story – again and again – of God's deliverance: they are God's free people. It was a deeply religious act, but also a deeply political act. Even when Israel was occupied by foreign powers (like Rome), the Jews emphasized that, despite appearances, they were God's free people. Nothing and no one could ever take their true freedom from them.

Jesus emphasizes that real freedom is not political freedom – it's not in religious ritual – it's in a living, ongoing relationship with Him. Instead of linking the bread and wine back to the Exodus (as the Jews always did), He links them directly to the death He would die and to the coming of the Kingdom of God that would come through His death. His death would set His people truly free – freedom from the slavery of sin, freedom from the oppression of judgment, freedom for a wonderful hope for the future ... (Romans 6). Nothing and no one could ever take their true freedom from them (Romans 8:31-39).

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remind ourselves, again and again, of the freedom we have thanks to the incredible love and sacrifice of Jesus. We remind ourselves, again and again, that we are a free people – we can be forgiven, we can have a personal relationship with Jesus, we don't have to go along with the values of the culture around us ... No sin, no temptation, novice need have control over us. Nothing and no one could ever take our true freedom from us.

But it's a choice we make, day by day. Last month we read in Romans 8:12-13: "*You have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.*" We have choices. Like Judas, the disciples, Peter, the anonymous woman, we choose every moment how we will live ... We can choose to give up our freedom and allow temptation, sin, peer pressure, money, sex, power (or a host other things) have power over us.

If you were in Peter's shoes, what choices would you have made?

What is going on inside you today? What choices are you making about Jesus? Your faith? Your life?

*God of love, we pray that you give us love:  
love in our thinking, love in our speaking, love in our doing,  
and love in the hidden places of our souls;  
love of our neighbours, near and far;  
love of our friends, old and new;  
love of those who we find it hard to bear,  
and love of those who find it hard to bear with us;  
love of those with whom we work,  
and love of those with whom we take our ease;  
love in joy, love in sorrow;  
love in life and love in death.  
In the end, may we be worthy to dwell with you, who are eternal love –  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – forever and ever. Amen.*

William Temple (1881-1944)

*Tomorrow is Good Friday (so named as either a corrupted version of "God's Friday" or because what Jesus accomplished on the cross is really, really good!). There is a service at 10:30 at St. Andrew's Presbyterian.*

## Friday, April 6: Mark 15 (Good Friday Service @ St. Andrew's Presbyterian, 10:30 a.m.)

If we were reading this story for the first time, we might think that things are spiraling out of control; the depths of human cruelty, bitterness, injustice, and inhumanity bubble to the surface in dreadful ways. But things are not out of control. Jesus has known from the beginning that this is what would happen – it is, in fact, what had to happen – because through his death Jesus destroys the power of sin and death forever. Through this merciless expression of evil, Jesus demonstrated the limitless mercy of God's grace and power.

The contrasts could not be more dramatic:

- Unchecked human nature leads to anger, jealousy, rage, lies, and violence (the Jewish leaders), greed (Judas), fear (Peter), and compromise and injustice (Pilate).
- God's character, modeled by Jesus, is integrity, compassion, patience, self-control, unconditional love, forgiveness, and peace.
- Human "wisdom" leads to an increasingly violent spiral of deceit, lies, cruelty, misery, and death.
- God's wisdom leads to an increasingly powerful spiral of forgiveness, love, and life.

The events of Good Friday are not a tragic accident. They are an essential part – the crucial part – of Jesus' mission to re-establish the Kingdom of God.

Paul writes, *"Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood ..."* (Romans 3:23-25)

*"... Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit"* (Romans 8:1-4).

Our response to the events of Good Friday should include

- Thankfulness - *"Most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners"* (Romans 5:7-8).
- Worship – *"Now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God"* (Romans 5:11).
- Commitment – *"Those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit ... letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace"* (Romans 8:5-6)
- What else?

*"You received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children,"* Paul writes, *"Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.' For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory."* (Romans 8:15-17)  
This is great news. This is why this is GOOD Friday!

*Lord, holy Father, show us what kind of man it is who is hanging for our sakes on the cross,  
whose suffering causes the rocks themselves to crack and crumble with compassion,  
whose death brings the dead back to life.  
Let my heart crack and crumble at the sight of Him.  
Let my soul break apart with compassion for His suffering.  
Let it be shattered with grief at my sins for which He dies.  
And finally, let it be softened with devoted love for Him. Amen*

Bonaventure (1221-1274)

## Saturday, April 7: Psalm 22

Imagine how Mary, Jesus' family, His friends, and the other disciples must have felt after the events of Thursday and Friday. Exhausted. Stressed. Totally drained. And on Saturday nothing happens. Silence. No shouting. Stillness. No commotion. Quiet. No angry crowds, bellowing lawyers, or swearing soldiers.

It is a time to think. To reflect.

On the cross Jesus had cried out, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') (Mark 15:34). Jesus didn't come up with this out of the blue. He was using language written by David hundreds of years earlier in Psalm 22.

Jesus suffered. His life was not a bed of roses. Peter, Paul, James and the other apostles all had their moments of intense suffering, too. Right after Paul writes, "*You received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children,*" Paul writes, "*Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.'* For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory ..." (Romans 8:15-17) he adds: "*But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering*" (Romans 8:17). We don't like that bit!

But let's be honest – that's life. And if our faith in Jesus is going to "work" in our lives, it had better be able to handle the tough times as well as the good times! If we think that "*Since I'm a Christian, I can expect total prosperity*" and "*Since I'm a Christian, I can expect everything will always go well with me,*" we haven't looked too closely at the examples in Scripture or what Jesus, Paul and the others teach us. The problem with this kind of "prosperity-only" theology, too, is that it cannot come to terms with health problems, relationship problems, financial problems ... real life!

But Jesus can help us through these things. He's been there, done that.

Psalm 22 can help us through, too. David has been there, done that. What is the good news in Psalm 22? How can this encourage you?

Paul, also, can help us through these things. He has been there, done that. He writes, "*The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them*" (Romans 8:26-28).<sup>2</sup>

Ignatius (martyred for his faith in 107 AD), prayed, "*Help us to bear difficulty, pain, disappointment, and sorrows knowing that in your perfect working and design you can use such bitter experiences to shape our character and make us more like our Lord.*"

*God of our life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down,  
when the road seems dreary and endless,  
when the skies are grey and threatening,  
when our lives have no music in them,  
when our hearts are lonely and our souls have lost their courage.*

*Flood the path with light.*

*Run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise.*

*Tune our hearts to brave music.*

*Give us a sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age.*

*Quicken our spirits so that we may be able to encourage the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life ... (continued)*

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<sup>2</sup> Note, this is **NOT** saying, "*God causes everything that happens!*" It is saying that **through everything that does happen** (by human choice, natural events, random chance, or God's leading) He can work things out for good.

*Lord, who though you were rich yet for our sakes you became poor,  
and you promise in your holy Gospel that whatever is done for the least of your brothers you will receive as done to you:  
Give us grace, we humbly ask you, to be always ready and willing to minister,  
as you enable us, to the needs of others,  
and to extend the blessings of your kingdom over all the world.*

Augustine (354-430)

## **Easter Sunday, April 8: Mark 16**

I have been in several caves. But on one particular day in southern France it was so hot that the chance to visit la Grotte des Demoiselles to cool off seemed wonderful. When Marianne and I first went into the cave it was, frankly, disappointing: the roof of the initial chamber had collapsed decades ago shattering most of the stalactites and stalagmites. Everything was covered in debris. The guide was speaking French far too quickly for me to understand well – I was beginning to regret the decision to come to the caves at all.

Then we went through an air tight door into another chamber – called la Cathédrale des Abîmes. I was flabbergasted. It was a jaw-dropping, incredible sight with spectacular 60+m high limestone formations, sheer drops, amazing shapes, and glistening colours. It was the most spectacular cave I have ever been in! And it was a complete surprise!

Mary Magdalene, Mary and Salome were going to anoint Jesus' body – an act of loving reverence and to mask the odour of the decaying body for when other bodies would be buried in the tomb. They were discouraged, devastated, despairing the sudden, violent death of a person they loved dearly. They were wondering how they would move the huge stone that had been rolled across the entrance to the chamber. Their lives had collapsed.

But when they arrived they were flabbergasted! Their jaws dropped! The stone was moved. A man in white was sitting there. *"Don't be alarmed!"* he said. *"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'"* (16:5-6). This was a complete surprise! And it was the most amazing, incredible, astounding news anyone could ever hear!

Mark's gospel ends at 16:8. It appears Mark wrote an ending but it has been lost or destroyed. Much later (based on the Greek text and manuscript sources) 9-20 were added to provide a more satisfactory ending.

But it is interesting to end at verse 8. It does leave the story unfinished. But that gives us the opportunity to become part of the narrative. We have the good news – He is risen! What are we going to do with that?

- Are we going to say nothing because we are afraid?
- Are we going to tell other people?
- Does Jesus' resurrection matter? What difference does it make in my life?
- How can I live differently because Jesus is risen?

Mark 16:9-20 do help us think through the "So what?" of the resurrection.

- Do we struggle with unbelief? With a lack of faith?
- Do we need to hear Jesus saying to us, *"Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone ..."*?

*Holy Jesus, who came down from heaven and was pleased to pay the ransom on the cross for us,  
so that you might redeem us from all sin, and purify to yourself a precious people, zealous for good works.*

*We ask that you write your law on our hearts that we may understand it,  
that we may know you, and the power of your resurrection,  
and express it in turning from our sinful ways,  
that you may rule our hearts by faith,  
and that we, being dead to sin and living rightly, may bear fruit leading to holiness,  
may grow in grace, and in the practical knowledge of you. Amen*

Henry Hammond (1605-1660)

## Monday, April 9: John 20:19-31

Mark leaves us with three ladies “*trembling and bewildered ... saying nothing to anyone, because they were afraid ...*” (Mark 16:8). John paints a similar picture of the other disciples. On that Sunday evening, Jesus’ followers were together, with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Although Jesus had clearly foretold His resurrection, neither his disciples, nor the other ladies had understood what He had meant. They didn’t understand. They certainly didn’t expect Him to actually rise from the dead!

On the contrary, they were disillusioned, disheartened, and terrified. Their hopes and dreams had died on the cross and were buried in the tomb. They were trying to figure out how to pick up the pieces of their lives, return to their former communities and jobs, and get back to how things used to be. They were working out how to go back to the old ways.

The last thing they expect is Jesus’ resurrection! So how would you feel if you were one of His disciples?

Thomas certainly doesn’t expect it and doesn’t believe it! Can you empathize with Thomas? Have you ever felt like he does?

Part of the convincing evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is that no-one was expecting it and no-one was planning on it. In fact, the gospels emphasize that just the opposite was true – people were clearly not expecting it or banking on it. They assumed it was all over on Friday. The resurrection came as a radical shock to everyone! Certainly no-one invented the story – nobody imagined it or even believed it!

Practically, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead changes everything! Sin, evil, and death are not the ultimate powers in the universe. In fact, they are not even competing powers with the forces of good. They are soundly, completely, and unequivocally defeated. The resurrection proves – without any doubt – that God is (as He has always been) the ultimate power. There are no competitors.

How then do we live? Robert Webber reflects on the reality of the resurrection in terms of our worship ... and in our lives: “*A Christ-centred worship can never be static and merely intellectual because what happens is an actual and real communication of the power and benefit of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Worshiping churches recognize that every gathering of worship is ultimately a praise and thanksgiving for the overthrow of evil by God in Christ. This victory not only happened two thousand years ago, but it happens today in the lives of people who bring to worship their own struggles against that evil which shatters relationships, oppresses the poor, and brings constant dislocation into life.*”

We can bring our own struggles, our own sense of moral indignation, our own brokenness, our own desire for justice to God. His power, the power of the resurrection, can bring about real change in us ... and through us. How does the resurrection change your worldview?

*Father Almighty, creator of everything and the source of all that is good and satisfying,  
help us to be more devoted to you with all that we are and with all that we have.  
Forgive my wandering, lustful heart that is always looking for something else to quench its insatiable thirst,  
when what I really desire is the grace to be more devoted to you and your Word.  
I have a “God-shaped” hole that can only be filled as I consecrate myself to your service.  
Let me be wholly set apart from all that desecrates, and consecrate both my inner and outer life,  
my possessions, relationships, and career, to the cause of Christ and his Kingdom.  
I pray that the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, meditation, fasting, good works, solitude, and corporate worship  
will be pleasing in your sight as I go deeper in your love. Amen.*

James Bell Jr.

## Tuesday, April 10: John 21:1-14

Some people (often men, I’ve discovered) have an ability to compartmentalize their lives. Jack (not his real name!) is really in love with his girlfriend, Jill, but goes to work and never thinks of her all day. When work

is done, Jack puts work away, has fun with friends and never thinks of her until mid evening. Then, when he calls her, Jack focusses on her. For Jill, Jack's personality is tough to deal with – it seems like he just doesn't care because for much of his life he doesn't think about her. In fact, he really does care, passionately; he just lives his life in focused, compartmentalized ways. He is not a good multi-tasker!

Other personality types are completely opposite. In Jill's world, her relationship is integrated into everything she does. She thinks about Jack at work, when she's with friends, when she's doing the laundry ...

Jesus' disciples are compartmentalizers. They have gone back to their fishing. They have boxed up the last three years with Jesus and put them away. They are getting back to their old lives. What seemed like real hope, the real Messiah, and the real Kingdom of God had been killed on the cross. So they block it out, and get on with life ... They did not expect, hope for, or imagine resurrection. It's over. Back to "normal."

When Jesus comes to His disciples He comes to where they are. He meets them in their lives.

It's good to know that Jesus meets us where we are. He meets us in our lives.

We sometimes think about the resurrection in terms of going off to be with Jesus in heaven. But actually, when Jesus was raised from the dead, he came to His disciples. He came to be where we are.

*"Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about,"* writes Tom Wright (referring to the phrase, *"Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ..."*). Jesus' resurrection is not about getting off this earth to heaven, it is about the risen Jesus walking with us through our day-to-day lives ... Of course we experience this as the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus came announcing, *"The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"* (Mark 1:14-15), He has given us the task of carrying on His mission! And He walks with us. In fact, He provides what we **need** (not necessarily what we **want** ...) (*"Give us this day our daily bread ..."*). These weary fishermen needed a catch and breakfast: what did Jesus provide? A catch and breakfast! Be encouraged. And be willing to trust in Him for what you need.

Jesus says to us: *"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."* (Matthew 6:33-34)

*Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us; let peace rule in our hearts,  
and may it be our strength and our song, throughout our pilgrimage.  
We commit ourselves to your care and keeping this day.  
Let your grace be mighty in us, and sufficient for us, and let it work in us  
both to will and to do of your own good pleasure, and grant us strength for all the duties of the day.  
Keep us from sin. May your Spirit rule over our own spirits, and keep us from speaking unadvisedly with our words.  
May we live together in peace and holy love, and grant us your blessing, which is eternal life.  
Prepare us for all the events of the day, for we do not know what a day may bring forth.  
Give us grace to deny ourselves; to take up our cross daily,  
and to follow in the steps of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

### **Wednesday, April 11: John 21:15-25**

I love Peter! He reminds me so much of myself ... impatient ... impulsive (he's the one who cut off the high priest's servant's ear) ... and a failure (he denied knowing Jesus three times, even though he promised he'd be faithful.

How does Jesus deal with that? Does He get angry? Does He blast Peter? Does He ignore him? Does

Jesus walk away from him? Does He give up on Peter?

Jesus deliberately seeks out Peter for a special conversation. Jesus loves Peter so much that He works to restore Peter's relationship with Himself. He loves Peter so much that He works hard to restore Peter's shattered self-confidence and bruised self-image. And for each of the three times that Peter denied Him, Jesus recommissions Peter to be His follower ...

When I'm impatient, impulsive, and a failure ... how does Jesus deal with that? Does He get angry with me? Does He blast me? Does He ignore me? Does He walk away from me? Does He give up on me?

Jesus deliberately seeks me out. Jesus loves me so much that He will do everything He can to restore my relationship with himself. He loves me so much that we will help me to restore my self-confidence and self-image. And Jesus will recommission me to be His servant and His follower ...

Jesus comes to you, just as you are ... What do you need to talk with Him about?

*Lord, I make you a present of myself.  
I do not know what to do with myself. So let me make this exchange:  
I will place myself entirely in your hands,  
if you will cover my ugliness with your beauty, and tame my unruliness with your love.  
Put out the flames of false passion in my heart, since these flames destroy all that is true within me.  
Make me always busy in your service.  
Lord, I want no special signs, nor am I looking for intense emotions in response to your love.  
I would rather be free of all emotion than to run the danger of falling victim once again to false passion.  
Let my love for you be pure, without any emotional clothing. All I am, I give to you. Amen.*

Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

#### **Thursday, April 12: Philippians 3:1-21**

What can I do to be good enough for God? What can I do to earn His grace?

Peter failed Jesus miserably, yet Jesus still loved Him. Jesus restored His broken self-image and battered self-confidence. And Jesus still had a special purpose for Peter in His Kingdom!

Paul reminds us that we do not earn our salvation by what we do – it's God's gracious gift to us. This is one of Paul's great convictions. Echoing these words in Philippians 3, he writes in Ephesians 2:1-9: *"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil – the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.*

*"But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*

*"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."*

Because of this amazing, gracious blessing from God, Paul writes: *"I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!"* (Philippians 3:10-11)

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is His gift to us. As Jesus gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, He gives us the personal presence of God Himself ... and all the power that comes with Him! The Holy Spirit empowers us, gives us wisdom, inspires us, corrects us, gifts us, guides us, opens doors for us, even sharpens our memories! *"We are God's masterpiece,"* Paul writes. *"He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago"*(Ephesians 2:10):

- You are God's masterpiece! How does that make you feel about yourself?
- "We" – His church – are God's masterpiece! How does that make you feel about our church?

We are empowered with His mighty resurrection power – the Holy Spirit – to "do good things." These things do not save us! They flow out of our salvation, out of our identity as God's masterpieces.

This morning, a retired friend said, *"You know I actually listen to your sermons now and then (that was encouraging!). And I've decided I'm going to do one nice thing for another person **every day**. Not for my family (that's my duty anyway). But for someone else. Even somebody I don't like. And no-one will ever know about it. Not even my wife. I'm just going to do it and nobody will ever know. It may even cost me some money. But every day I'm going to do something."* What good thing can you do today?

*Lord, I am an empty vessel needing to be filled; my Lord, fill it.  
At times I doubt, and am unable to trust You;  
I am weak in faith; strengthen me.  
I am cold in love; warm me and make me passionate,  
so my love may go out to my neighbour. Amen.*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

### **Friday, April 13: Ephesians 1**

Does God love us? Does He care about us? Are we secure in our relationship with Him? As you read through Ephesians 1:1-14 reflect on these questions. What is Paul's answer?

Because of this incredible gift of salvation (*"For this reason ..."* 1:15), Paul prays continually for the people in the church.

- He gives thanks – how good are we at being thankful? What are you thankful for?
- He prays for others – how good are we at that? Who can you pray for?
- He prays for wisdom and insight – what do you need wisdom for?
- He prays for hope and assurance – do you need God's assurance, hope and peace?
- He prays, *"That you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms"*(1:19-20).

When you think about Jesus' resurrection – yes, it is about power! Absolute power! God demonstrated complete and unquestionable supreme power over all the forces of evil, sin and death. There are not two, equal, competing forces of good and evil in the universe. *"Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else – not only in this world but also in the world to come,"* Paul writes (1:21).

Paul goes on to say, *"God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself"*(1:22-23).

As you go through your day-to-day life, reflect on who you are in Christ (1:1-14) ...

And reflect on the power of the God who walks with you and fills you (1:14) ...

If God is for us, who can stand against us (Romans 8:31)?

*My God, I don't ask You to take me out of this life, but to prove Your power within it.  
I don't ask for tasks more suited to my strength, but for strength more suited to my tasks.  
I pray for a vision that moves me, strength that endures, and the grace of Jesus Christ,  
Who walked our earthly life as a conqueror in triumph. Amen."*

William Edwin Orchard (1877-1955)

### **Saturday, April 14: Colossians 2:6-23**

*"You were buried with Christ when you were baptized," Paul writes, "And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).*

He goes on to explain: *"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross." (2:13-15).*

Jesus completely destroyed all evil powers, sin, and death through His death and resurrection. Our faith in Jesus, symbolized by baptism, outwardly expresses that we, too, share in that incredible resurrection power! It is through faith in Jesus that we are saved. We do not earn it. We are not "good enough" for it. It is His gift to us. All we can do is accept it.

The human tendency is to think that we have to deserve God's love. We like to think that if we try hard enough, work diligently enough, follow rules enough ... then God will like us. But God loved us so much that He gave His Son, **while we were still sinners** (Romans 5:8)!

Yes, Jesus said, *"If you love me, obey my commandments"* (John 14:15). But this is our response to God's love! It's just how we should act! It doesn't save us! (In the same way, if a person selflessly and extravagantly loves us, we should act in a loving way in return – the person has already blessed us with their love ... but we could be expected to love them as a result, not a condition).

Paul is emphasizing that the resurrection power of Jesus changes us from the inside out. It's not about outward rules and regulations. It's about an inward transformation – allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us.

*"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him," Paul writes. "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity" (Romans 12:1-2). Pray that God will help you resist the pressures of the world to squeeze you into its own mould. Pray that God may re-mould you from within ...*

*Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and I feel my weakness and helplessness,  
Give me the sense of your presence, your love, and your strength.  
Help me to have perfect trust in your protecting love and strengthening power,  
so that nothing may frighten or worry me,  
For, living close to You, I shall see your hand,  
your purpose, and your will through all things. Amen.*

Irenaeus (130-200)

### **Sunday, April 15: Colossians 3**

In Colossians 2, Paul talked about being raised to new life in Christ, through the power of His resurrection. But what difference does that make in our lives? *"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ," Paul goes on, "set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:1-3).*

Some people take this very literally – they believe everything in this life, on this earth, is evil. It's all about heaven. This is curious, because God, of course, created the earth and everything in it ... and created it good (Genesis 1:1). And God Himself chose to come and be part of this world!

Notice, that Paul goes on to explain this in very practical, real world terms! He doesn't see this as pie-in-the-sky stuff. For him it is eminently practical! It's about how we handle our sexuality, money, anger, and language. It's about honesty. It's about treating all people as equally beloved children of God. It's about loving our neighbour as ourselves in down-to-earth ways: with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. "*Make allowance for each other's faults,*" Paul says, "*and forgive anyone who offends you*" (3:13). In right-here, right-now language, he advises us to teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives and to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts (3:16).

Eternal life (in John 3:16 terms) or resurrection-power life (in Paul's language) is not just about life-after-death with Jesus (although it includes that). It begins now – the instant we believe in Jesus. His Spirit guides us now. And we can experience His power, wisdom, inspiration, correction, joy, hope, guidance, peace and love – NOW – if we open up our lives to Him.

"*You **were buried** (past tense) with Christ when you were baptized,*" Paul writes, "*And with him you **were raised to new life** (past tense) because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead*" (Colossians 2:12). Resurrection-life is not just about something off in the future ... it's already ours!

So ... read through this entire passage reflecting on what God is saying to you ...

- "*Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.*" (3:10).
- "*Clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.*" (3:14-15)
- "*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives.*" (3:16)
- "*Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*" (3:17)

What specific aspects of your life is God speaking to you about? What will you do about it?

*Who can tell what today may bring forth?  
So cause me, O God of grace, to live every day as if it were going to be my last, because for all I know it might be.  
Cause me to live now as I will wish I had lived when it is time for me to die.  
Grant that I may not die with any guilt on my conscience or any known sin I haven't repented of,  
so that I may be found in Christ, who is my only Saviour and Redeemer.  
Enlighten me, good Jesus, with the brightness of internal light and cast out all darkness from the home of my heart.  
Grant me, Lord, to know what is worth knowing,  
to love what is worth loving,  
to praise what is worth praising, to hate what is unworthy in your sight,  
to prize what to you is precious,  
and, above all, to search out and do your holy will.  
Write your blessed name, Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraved,  
that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from your love.  
Be to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation,  
a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble,  
and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers in this life. Amen.*

Thomas a Kempis (1480-1471)

## **Monday, April 16: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

As Christians we believe in Jesus' resurrection ... we also believe in our own personal resurrection. In this chapter Paul talks a lot about that! But he begins reminding us of the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

The resurrection is the centre point of history. If it's not true ... nothing about Jesus or Christianity is true. If it is true, then everything about Jesus and Christianity is true ...

*"Dead men cannot take effective action,"* wrote Athanasius (296-373 AD), *"their power of influence on others lasts only till the grave. Deeds and actions that energize others belong only to the living. Well, then, look at the facts in this case. The Saviour is working mightily among men, every day He is invisibly persuading numbers of people all over the world, both within and beyond the Greek-speaking world, to accept His faith and be obedient to His teaching. Can anyone, in face of this, still doubt that He has risen and lives, or rather that He is Himself the Life? Does a dead man prick the consciences of men ...?"* A good question!

It's an important issue! So Paul wants to make it clear that the evidence is overwhelming. If you struggle with Jesus' resurrection, there are lots of great resources in our library including the books of Tom (N.T.) Wright, Josh MacDowell, Lee Strobel, and William Lane Craig.

*"If Jesus rose from the dead,"* Tim Keller writes, *"then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead."*

If Jesus did rise from the dead ... then you have to accept all He said ... How do you feel about that? What things did Jesus say that you really like? (John 3:16? His promise to be with us always?)

What things did Jesus say that you don't really like? (Love your enemies? Taking up your cross? The first will be last?) Why do these things bother you?

*"Christianity isn't a set of rules,"* says Tom Wright. *"It isn't a path of spirituality. It isn't a rule of life. It isn't a political agenda. It INCLUDES, and indeed gives energy to, all those things, but at its very heart it is something different. It is good news about an event which has happened in the world, an event because of which the world can never be the same again. And those who believe it, and live by it, will (thank God!) never be the same again either!"*

What difference does Jesus' resurrection make in your life?

*God, whose I am, have mercy on me.  
Have mercy on me so that, in love and faith,  
in righteousness and humility,  
I may follow You with self-denial, steadfastness, and courage.  
May I meet with You in the silence.  
Please give me a pure heart that I may see You,  
a humble heart that I may hear You,  
A heart of love so I may serve You,  
and a heart of faith so I may live in You. Amen.*

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961)

## **Tuesday, April 17: 1 Corinthians 15:12-34**

What if Jesus hasn't been raised? After all, isn't Christianity just a nice way to live anyway? Jesus taught great ethics ... so what if He was wrong about His own resurrection? It's not a big deal is it?

It's huge, Paul thunders! The resurrection is what it is all about. Without the resurrection the saints of the past are liars, we're idiots, our faith is useless, and we have no hope for forgiveness, a relationship with God, or life hereafter. Without the resurrection we're fools. Christianity is a fairy tale. And all of Jesus' teaching, ethics, and values are nothing more than the ravings of a madman ... How could Jesus possibly be so right about ethics and so wrong about His own identity?

Without the resurrection, Christianity is certainly nothing to base your life on, risk your neck over, or go

through any kind of suffering about.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was very clear about His own resurrection in His own teaching, even though the disciples didn't get it. After His death many people still struggled to get it. It just didn't fit their version of reality. But God's reality is a different than ours (thankfully!). In God's reality, resurrection is very possible!

*"People," C.S. Lewis says, "often say the really foolish thing about Jesus: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher (including His promises about His resurrection). He would either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and Call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*

When we begin to think about God's reality – a reality in which resurrection happens, where God reigns, where Jesus is Lord – our perspective on things changes. In this reality we live differently. We have different values. Life is not just about eating, drinking, and whatever other 'fun' things come along. Truth is not relative. I don't know everything. It's all about God, not me. Ultimately, He is very much in charge!

In God's reality, we are part of something much, much bigger and more amazing than we can imagine ... We believe in a God who can do things more incredible than we can dream ... And we anticipate a future more incredible than ... I don't know! (words fail me!) We have hope. *"Hope is what you get when you suddenly realize that a different worldview is possible, a worldview in which the rich, the powerful, and the unscrupulous do not after all have the last word. The same worldview shift that is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus is the shift that will enable us to transform the world."* (Tom Wright).

But in the meantime, the strong message of the New Testament is that we have a job to do ... *"Jesus is raised, so we must act as his heralds, announcing his lordship to the entire world, making his kingdom come on earth as it is heaven ..."* (Tom Wright). How does living God's reality change your worldview? How do you live differently in a world where God reigns, resurrection happens, and God's word is true?

*My soul's desire is to see the face of God, and to rest in his house.  
My soul's desire is to study the Scriptures, and to learn the ways of God.  
My soul's desire is to be freed from all fear and sadness, and to share Christ's risen life.  
My soul's desire is to imitate my king, and to sing his praise always.  
My soul's desire is to enter the gates of heaven, and to gaze upon the light that shines forever.  
Dear Lord, you alone know what my soul truly desires; and you alone can satisfy those desires. Amen.*

Celtic prayer

### **Wednesday, April 18: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58**

People in Corinth are denying the resurrection – of Jesus and of people – because everyone knows that just doesn't happen ... right??? In their worldview this sort of thing just doesn't fit. Throughout this chapter Paul is emphasizing that Jesus has been raised ... and so will we be!

What this mean has been a source of debate for centuries. The challenge is figuring out what Paul meant ...

The key words are often translated "physical body" and "spiritual body" (15:44). But these simple English translations can give us a totally wrong impression about what resurrection is all about.

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<sup>3</sup> 15:29 – the "baptism of the dead," is curious. Paul is not condoning or teaching this. Apparently some people were doing it (perhaps because they were afraid that some loved ones who were believers had been killed or died without being baptized and they worried about their salvation – this is a clear misunderstanding of baptism. Baptism is a symbol, not magic). Paul is simply asking, "Why are you bothering to do such a crazy thing at all if the resurrection isn't real?"

- The first word, *psychikos*, "does not mean "physical" in our sense of having a physical body. It comes from the Greek *psyche* meaning our human life force or "soul." In Greek thought (remember Paul is writing to Greeks – Corinth is only a few kilometers from Athens!), when you use an adjective like *psychikos* "you are not talking about what the body is made of, but what power or energy makes it go."<sup>4</sup> Paul is talking about our present bodies, powered by the normal human life force (or "psyche") that we all possess. It gets us through the present life but ultimately breaks down, falls apart, dies, and decays ... (those of us who are aging – all of us! – know all about that!).
- The second word, *pneumatikos*, "does not mean "spiritual" in some ethereal, non-bodily sense. It comes from the Greek word *pneuma*, "spirit." Paul is talking about a future body – just as physical or bodily in our sense of the word – now powered by and filled with God's Holy Spirit.

Tom Wright comments on this passage, *"What Paul is asking us to imagine is that there will be a new mode of physicality, which stands in relation to our present body as our present body does to a ghost. It will be much more real, more firmed up, more BODILY, than our present body as our present body is more substantial, more touchable, than a disembodied spirit. We sometimes speak of someone who's been very ill as being a shadow of their former self. If Paul is right, a Christian in the present life is a mere shadow of his or her FUTURE self, the self the person will be when the body that God has waiting in his heavenly storeroom is brought out, already made to measure, and put on over the present one – or over the self that will still exist after bodily death."* That's a different way of thinking about things, isn't it?

When Paul emphasizes that *"flesh and blood will not inherit the Kingdom of God"* he is using a synonym for this *psychikos* physical body of ours – corruptible, transient, doomed for death. This is in contrast with the *pneumatikos* physical body of ours – incorruptible, eternal, destined for everlasting life.

*"This underlies the remarkable concluding verse of 1 Corinthians 15 ..."* Tom Wright adds. *"For Paul, the bodily resurrection does not leave us saying, 'So that's all right; we shall go, at the last, to join Jesus in a nonbodily, Platonic heaven,' but, 'So, then, since the person you are and the world God has made will be gloriously reaffirmed in God's eventual future, you must be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.' Belief in the bodily resurrection includes the belief that what is done in the present in the body, by the power of the Spirit, will be reaffirmed in the eventual future in ways we can presently only guess."*

*"1 Corinthians 15 is a spectacular chapter, but one of the most remarkable verses in it is the last (verse 58), where Paul doesn't say 'therefore enjoy the presence of Christ', though he might have done, or 'therefore look forward to your glorious future', though he might have said that as well. He says 'therefore get on with your work in the present, because in the Lord your labour is not in vain.' That is at the heart of the meaning of the resurrection."*

Life now matters. What we do in the present somehow lasts into God's future. Our challenge is to build the Kingdom of God now ... that means sharing the good news about Jesus, and seeking to see His will, justice, hope, and values come on earth as they are in heaven ...

*Lord our God, teach us, we pray, to ask you in the right way for the right blessings.  
Please steer the ship of our lives towards yourself, the tranquil haven of all storm-tossed souls.  
Show us the course in which we should go.  
Renew a willing spirit within us.  
Let your Spirit curb our wayward senses,  
and guide and enable us toward that which is our true good:  
to keep your laws, and in all we do to rejoice always in your glorious and gladdening presence.  
For yours is the glory and praise from all your saints, forever and ever. Amen.*

Basil of Caesarea (330-379)

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<sup>4</sup> It's like difference between asking, *"Is this an iron ship or a wooden ship?"* (**what it's made of**) or asking, *"Is this a diesel powered ship or a sailing ship?"* (**what it's powered by**). **Paul is talking about what powers us ... not what we're made of!**

## Thursday, April 19: 2 Corinthians 4

The Christians in Corinth really struggled with this whole resurrection thing. So Paul comes back to it in a later letter. The Corinthians struggled to believe in the resurrection. They were focused only on life here and now. Paul is encouraging them to find balance. On the one hand, he never wants us to become "so heavenly minded we're no earthly good." On the other hand, neither does he want us to be "so earthly minded we're no heavenly good."

Paul always tells it like it is (4:2). Others may water the gospel down to make it more appealing, they may promise prosperity and unlimited blessing, they may give the impression that believing in Jesus is all about you (what you want, what you like) – but never Paul. He focuses exclusively on Jesus (4:5). In comparing our lives to a 'clay jar' – a fragile, everyday item, but not rubbish – Paul gives God centre-stage (4:7). As we think about our lives here and now, and after death, it's good to remember that we are not the centre of the universe – God is. His will – to redeem the world – is what it's all about. It's not about us at all. Really.

Paul is deeply affected by hardship of all kinds (following Jesus is not always a walk in a rose garden!), and yet he is confident that they can never destroy him (4:8). On the contrary, God is regenerating him from the inside out, in spite of what's happening to the outside (4:16). As he shares in Christ's sufferings, Christ's resurrection power is also evident (4:16-17). Even the worst trial pales into insignificance compared to all we have and will have in Jesus (4:17)!

This life is not all there is. Right now there is struggle – but one day there will be rest. Right now there is battle – but one day there will be victory and peace. Our weakness is only temporary. There is lasting peace in the presence of God to come.

None of this is easy. We are focused on the now and its pressures. We live in a world where what can be seen and analyzed, tested and dissected is regarded as real and everything else as an illusion. Our challenge is to keep it all in perspective, in light of the resurrection. The REAL world – God's world – is so much bigger and more incredible than we can imagine. There's far more to life than we think.

What's really important? The important is remembering that

- God is God! It's not all about me! (This is good to remember, especially when it comes to church. It's all about Him. I need to worship Him, not be so concerned about what I like or don't like!)
- I have a mission this side of eternity! I have good news for my family, friends, neighbours, colleagues. etc.
- Even though life may be difficult, God is always with me. His resurrection power will get me through. And I do have the certain hope of resurrection life with God down the road ...
- While my *psychikos* body is winding down (as if I need reminding!), my *pneumatikos* – Spirit-empowered – body is winding up. I can look forward to a perfect eternity with the Lord.

*Father, I don't understand why you choose to trust me to share your love with my neighbours.*

*Too often I mess it up. I make stupid choices. I say the wrong thing or put my foot in it.*

*But you **have** chosen me, with my weaknesses, faults and confusion.*

*I guess if I was perfect or could do it all by myself, people would focus on me, not you.*

*I don't want them to focus on me.*

*You're the best thing that ever happened in my life.*

*I want them to move from hearing about my God to them knowing you for themselves.*

*So, I put myself in your hands. I want to be more available to you, and to the people around me.*

*I know that I'm nothing impressive or special, but in my weakness let your strength be revealed.*

*As you and I work on making me more like you, let people notice the changes in my behaviour.*

*I want to explain to them – **that's God, that is!***

*Father, being vulnerable and sharing weakness can hurt.*

*Please give me the courage to follow your path and accept pain, ridicule or rejection.*

*But let me know the power of your presence both now and when those times come. Amen*

Sarah Bingham

## Friday, April 20: 2 Corinthians 5

The ultimate statistic: one out of one dies! Many people are scared of that fact. What about you? Paul just had to deal with it (we all do!). He faced many very serious threats – even to his life – and he would have been a fool not to reckon with the probability that he did not have long to live. He ended up dying young, executed by the Romans. Paul is very realistic about his body: no attempt to defy death through health farms, gyms, cosmetic surgery or other attempts to cheat the aging process.

While Paul certainly didn't despise or misuse the body that God had given him, he was always aware that it was like temporary housing – soon to be pulled down in favour of something much better (5:1–3). Indeed, the new premises are full of light and life and health. He almost can't wait to get there! Gone will be all the groaning and aching; hello to joy and peace (5:4-5). And he already knows about this because he experiences God's energizing Spirit living in him, a foretaste of what is to come (5:5).

It is the hope of the future that drives Paul in the present. Only then will we be all that we are intended to be. The present is shadowy, limited by mortality. It will vanish to be replaced by life as it was intended to be (5:5). Present pain, discouragement, and hardship pales into insignificance when seen against our hope for the future, which is where our focus really lies. C.S. Lewis used to say, *"This is only the land of shadows. Real life hasn't begun yet."* But Paul still lives, passionately and purposefully, in the present.

John Hosier writes, *"Imagine receiving the promise of a top summer holiday. And because it's expensive there's to be a special bonus. You will fly to the resort for a winter weekend to get a foretaste of what you can expect to enjoy in full when the summer comes. Imagine looking at a blue sea, walking along a golden beach and enjoying the delights of a pleasant hotel. But it's only the foretaste. The sea is too cold to swim in, but come the summer, you'll jump in to cool off... The beach is good for a walk in the breeze, but in the summer, you'll sunbathe on it. The hotel is great, but falls short of the luxury of the promised summer venue. You've got a foretaste, but there is a lot better to come."*

*"In 2 Corinthians 5:5, Paul tells us that God has given us the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. The word 'deposit' really carries the meaning of a first installment. Right now, as believers, we enjoy a life in the Spirit that is a first installment of what life will be like in eternity. Think about your life in the Spirit. God gives you spiritual gifts. You benefit from the Spirit's gifts to others. Think of the worship times when it seemed for a moment that heaven touched earth. Or think about some insight you received during inspired preaching or through a prophetic word. All these things are only the first installment; guaranteeing that there is more and better to come."*

*"You can use your own imagination to think about the marvels of eternity based on the foretaste that you have already known. Or you could read through Revelation 21 and 22 to help stimulate your thinking. What a wonderful world we live in now, but there is going to be a new heaven and a new earth that will be our future home where we will live with our God for ever..."*

*"Since, then, we know all this ..."* Paul writes (5:11) ... we tell other people about it! More than that, we model it! We tell people about God's reconciling love ... and we love other people with that same love ...

*Lord, make me see your glory in every place:  
if mortal beauty sets my heart to glow, help me see your grace shining even brighter;  
if natural wonders stop me in awe, may your Majesty cause me to worship you even more.  
You have given me on earth this spiritual soul, a prisoner behind these weak walls of flesh;  
how can that soul break free? How can my spirit find its true life?  
Dear Lord, I cry to you for help. Your Spirit alone can save me.  
May your Spirit flow through my will and my senses,  
redeeming what is sinful, empowering and inspiring what is good.  
All goodness, Lord, must fail without your Spirit:  
for you alone have the power and glory. Amen.*

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

## **Saturday, April 21: Romans 8**

(We have read this chapter before, but it is very relevant as we think about resurrection life)

Read Romans 8:9-11 and 8:23 a few times. What is Paul saying?

If the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, God Himself, is in you, then the One who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies as well. God will give life – not a disembodied spirit. It will be a physical existence. The Bible states that, then moves on, repeatedly challenging us with the "*So what ...?*" question.

Paul typically answers the "*So what ...?*" question with "*Therefore ...*" (8:1, 8:12, and a longer version in 8:31). And his answer is inevitably – "*Because of this hope, live the Kingdom of God, right here, right now ...*" Our certain hope of the resurrection changes how we live – now!

Think back to Jesus: He rarely spoke about the distant future. He was very interested in helping people reset their priorities right now – from being obsessed with accumulating money, gaining prestige, and exercising power over others, to seeking first the Kingdom of God and its priorities – loving God and other people. And Jesus was very interested in rescuing people from the corruption and decay in the world so they could begin to enjoy a new way of life – God's way of life – here and now. Yes, we are promised eternal life hereafter, but eternal life begins now, with a personal relationship with God.

The great evangelists in the book of Acts never deal with resurrection issues. They, too, are concerned with faith and life in Jesus ... now. Yes, heaven is real ... but right now we live God's Kingdom life in this world.

Salvation, as Jesus and the New Testament sees it, is just as much a this-time, this-place experience as it is something that is to come after our death.

Frank Doyle tells this wonderful story to help us keep things in perspective: "*I have a friend, a young woman, who works with children after school, in a homework club. She is kind and caring and she is fun to be with. She is a teacher herself and knows the value of education. But she is wise enough to know that there are many kinds of education.*

*"She asked me if, together, we could show the children how to make cookies and simple cakes. We set to work! The children rolled up their sleeves, washed their hands very carefully and formed a queue to weigh flour, butter and sugar. Breaking eggs was such a serious business! Mathematics came alive as they added the correct amounts to the mixture. Aromas were discovered – vanilla was a revelation. The boys wanted to know how fast the mixer could go if really pushed to its limit. The mixture was spooned, very carefully, into the baking tins and then placed in the ovens.*

*"Then came the clearing up – not such good fun. But while wiping and sweeping the children began to notice the sweet smell of the cakes 'happening' in the oven. They stopped to look through the glass door and one young boy gasped in wonder: 'That messy mixture went in and cakes are coming out'.*

*"Next the decoration of the cakes began and 'More is Better' was definitely the order of the day. Coloured icing, silver balls, little flowers and chocolate buttons were heaped with generosity on each cookie and cake. They emerged truly amazing: not classic in design perhaps, but definitely very interesting! The children were so proud of their work – the work of their own hands. They loved bringing their produce home. There was love all around that day.*

*"I ask myself if it is possible that God's intention for us on earth is this: that no matter what messy mixture 'goes in', something wonderful and unique 'comes out'?"* God can work good out of all sorts of messes!

- How do you sense God's presence, now? How do you experience the Holy Spirit in your life today?
- How can the promises of Romans 8 be an encouragement to you, today?
- With whom can you share this good news?

*My God, I believe most firmly that you watch over all who hope in you,  
and that we will need nothing when we rely upon you in all things.  
Therefore I am resolved for the future to cast all my cares upon you.  
People may deprive me of worldly goods and status.  
Sickness may take from me my strength and the means of serving you.  
I may even jeopardize our relationship by sin, but my trust shall never leave me.  
I will preserve my faith to the last moment of my life,  
and the powers of hell shall seek in vain to grab it from me.  
Let others seek happiness in their wealth and in their talents.  
Let them trust in the purity of their lives, the severity of their sacrifices,  
in the number of their good works, the enthusiasm of their prayers;  
as for me, my rock and my refuge, my confidence in you fills me with hope.  
For you, my divine protector, alone have given me hope. Amen.*

Claude de la Colombiere (1641-1682)

### **Sunday, April 22: John 14**

*"With the exception of the certainty of death," writes theologian Millard Erickson, "the one eschatological (future) doctrine on which orthodox theologians most agree is the second coming of Christ ... It is the basis of the Christian hope, the one event which will mark the beginning of the completion of God's plan."*

*"My Father's house," Jesus says, "has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"(14:2-3).*

Jesus promises He will return. It is a common theme in many of His parables. In John 14-17, as Jesus says farewell to His disciples on the night of His arrest, He comforts them with these words.

Other religious leaders have never made such radical claims (mind you, they never claimed to be God, either!). And other religious leaders have never made such incredible promises, either.

- How are these words encouraging to you?
- How are they challenging?
- How can this chapter shape how you live today?

*Almighty and merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep.  
We have followed too much the plans and desires of our own hearts and have broken your holy laws.  
We have left undone those things we should have done,  
and we have done those things we should not have done.  
There is no health in us, but you, Lord,  
have mercy upon us miserable offenders.  
Spare us, God, who confess to you our faults.  
Restore us who are repentant, according to your promises declared to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
And grant, most merciful Father, for Jesus' sake,  
that from now on we may live godly, righteous, and self-controlled lives. Amen.*

Anglican prayer of general confession

### **Monday, April 23: Matthew 24:1-44**

*"Tell us, when will all this happen?" the disciples ask Jesus. "What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?"(Matthew 24:3). Jesus definitely will return – that's a given (see 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44). However WHEN that will happen is a mystery: "No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows"(24:36-44).*

The "signs" Jesus talks about in 24:4-29 have actually been with us since the days of the early church. Jesus' warning about the sacrilege in the Temple almost took place within ten years of His own time. In AD

40, the Roman emperor Caligula tried to place a huge statue of himself in the Temple to put the Jews in their place; only his untimely assassination prevented it. In AD 70, this prophecy did come true – the Romans besieged and captured the temple, placed their banners in the Holy of Holies ... then destroyed it. The others signs – earthquakes, wars, famines, rampant sin – have been with us all along.

Jesus' points are

1. to remind us that we should not be surprised by all these things! This world, corrupted by sin, is winding down, and the Kingdom of God is winding up. But in the transition, things will be very messy! The Devil will not go down quietly! Our temptation will be to "fight fire with fire" ... that's not going to work. Tom Wright comments: *"To our secular contemporaries it makes no sense to suggest that Jesus is in charge of the world, and has been since Easter. Most people look at the continuation of violence, deceit and chaos over the last two thousand years and say it's ridiculous to say that Jesus is in charge. But when we read the gospels we get a different sense. Think of the Beatitudes, not primarily as offering a blessing to those who are described, but through them to the world. This is how Jesus wants to run the world: by calling people to be peacemakers, gentle, lowly, hungry for justice. When God wants to change the world, he doesn't send in the tanks; he sends in the meek, the pure in heart, those who weep for the world's sorrows and ache for its wrongs. And by the time the power-brokers notice what's going on, Jesus' followers have set up schools and hospitals, they have fed the hungry and cared for the orphans and the widows. That's what the early church was known for, and it's why they turned the world upside down. In the early centuries the main thing that emperors knew about bishops was that they were always taking the side of the poor. Wouldn't it be good if it were the same today?"*<sup>5</sup>
2. To remind us to always be ready. Jesus is not giving us these words as a checklist so we can try to determine the time and place of His return (remember no one – not even Jesus – knows!). Our challenge is to live as God's people every moment of every day! We are to live every day as though it's the last day before Jesus' return ...

Tim McGraw sings about a man who said: *"I was in my early forties, with a lot of life before me, and a moment came that stopped me on a dime. I spent most of the next days looking at the x-rays, and talking 'bout the options and talking 'bout sweet time."* McGraw sings, *"I asked him when it sank in, that this might really be the real end? How's it hit you when you get that kind of news? Man whatcha do?"*

The man said, *"I was finally the husband, that most the time I wasn't. And I became a friend a friend would like to have. And all of a sudden going fishing wasn't such an imposition; and I went three times that year I lost my Dad. Well, I finally read the Good Book; and I took a good long hard look at what I'd do if I could do it all again. And then: I went sky diving, I went Rocky Mountain climbing, I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu. And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter, and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying. Some day, I hope you get the chance, To live like you were dyin'."*

The reality is that we are all "dyin' " (to quote McGraw). We have no idea what the future holds. How then, as followers of Jesus, can we live wisely and well?

*I do not know, my God, what may happen to me today.  
I only know nothing will happen to me that you haven't foreseen from all eternity,  
and that is sufficient, my God, to keep me in peace.  
I adore your eternal designs. I submit to them with all my heart.  
I desire them all and accept them all. I make a sacrifice of everything.  
I unite this sacrifice to that of your dear Son, my Savior,  
begging you by his infinite merits, for patience in troubles,  
and for the perfect submission which is due to you in all that you will and design for me. Amen.*

Madame Elizabeth of France, written in prison while awaiting the guillotine (1764-1794)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Italian\\_Bishops\\_Christ\\_Risen\\_First\\_Fruits.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Italian_Bishops_Christ_Risen_First_Fruits.htm)

## Tuesday, April 24: Matthew 24:45-25:13

One version of the "gospel" is that as long as you "believe in Jesus" (perhaps you prayed a prayer once, or you made a profession of faith once, or you were baptized once) it really doesn't matter how you live. So ... you can live as wild and crazy a life as you wish. You can run your business with less-than-honest practices. Being faithful to your spouse, children, parents and friends doesn't matter. You have no obligation to care for the poor, have integrity, or care for anyone but yourself. You have no need of church or Christian community, obligation to support God's work, or expectation to pray or read Scripture ...

After all "*God will always forgive you; that's His job.*" That is true: God will forgive you, but ...

Jesus' gospel is much, much bigger! When you truly believe, begin to experience the reality of the Kingdom of God, and begin to live by its principles ... you discover a quality of life that far exceeds anything that any other approach to life could possibly offer. You discover a purpose in life – to try to live as a follower of Jesus, to make a difference in the lives of people, to build up the church, to see culture transformed. You discover a fulfillment, contentment, peace, and profound joy that transcends understanding. Jesus' gospel is an invitation to a whole new life – a life lived here-and-now as part of His amazing Kingdom.

The "I'm-saved-when-I-die-so-I'll-live-like-I-wasn't-saved-now" approach to Christianity sounds attractive ... but it's a miserable way to live. You live with the tension of knowing you are disobeying God while you say you love Him. The guilt and stress are awful! And at the end of the day, you have to ask yourself if you really do believe, anyway. Three times in John 14 Jesus said, "*If you love me, obey my commandments ...*" our faith is really shown in our love ... and our love in our obedience. You have to question if someone who lives contrary to everything Jesus taught and stands for really does love Jesus!

Of course none of us is perfect! Paul deals with this struggle in Romans 7:14-25. Peter wrestled with the fact that he stumbled and failed. God will always forgive a person who really does love Him and yet makes mistakes! That is the good news! But when we do fail, like Paul, Peter and everyone else, our challenge is to recognize that and put things right as soon as possible.

Jesus' challenge is that we need to understand our Christian faith as a whole new worldview, a whole new purpose to living, a whole new way of life ... a whole new life!

- In light of that, how do we live each day to the fullest, recognizing the signs of the times?
- How can we be faithful, sensible servants every day (24:45)?
- When we do fail ... how do we handle it? Remember how Jesus dealt with Peter (John 21)? Jesus meets us where we are, forgives us, and helps us carry on.

*How is it, my God, that you have given me this hectic busy life so I have so little time to enjoy your presence?*

*Throughout the day people are waiting to speak with me,*

*and even at meals I have to continue talking to people about their needs and problems.*

*During sleep itself, I am still thinking and dreaming about the multitude of concerns that surround me.*

*To me, my present pattern of life is a torment. Yet I do all this not for my sake but for yours, don't I?*

*I say, "I it is a sacrifice of love," but maybe I do it more for myself than for you?*

*I know that you are constantly beside me, yet I'm usually so busy that I ignore you. Is that worship?*

*Stop me from being so busy!*

*Please force me to think about and love you even in the midst of my hectic activity.*

*Release me from my busyness! Show me how others can take over my responsibilities.*

*God of love, help me to remember that Christ has no body now on earth but ours, no hand but ours, no feet but ours.*

*Ours are the eyes that see the needs of the world.*

*Ours are the hands with which he blesses everyone.*

*Ours are the feet with which he goes about doing good.*

*But he does not call me to forfeit my soul to serve him.*

*Help me never to forget you in my busyness to serve you. Amen.*

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

### Wednesday, April 25: 1 Thessalonians 4

This chapter talks about Jesus "coming." The key Greek word often translated "coming" literally means "presence" – "parousia" (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 1 Corinthians 15:23). In the first century "parousia" has two shades of meaning:

- It was used when you felt a strong spiritual "presence" – the sense of awe and wonder you sometimes have; you know God is there! You can just tell!
- It was used to describe a royal visit – you are invited into the king's "presence" as he comes to your town. Do you go? You bet!

Paul is using "parousia" in the second sense in 1 Thessalonians 4 – the King of Kings is coming, complete with trumpets, fanfare, and everything else. It is very similar language to 1 Corinthians 15:23-27, 51-54 and Philippians 3:20-21 (where Jesus is explicitly compared to Caesar). It is talking about the time when Jesus will once again be personally present, the dead will be raised, and living Christians will be transformed (as in 1 Corinthians 15). There is the overall sense that Jesus is returning to this earth ...

So how do we understand 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17? We need to be sensitive to the context: this letter was written by a Greek-speaking Jew (Paul) to a Greek city (Thessalonica) in the first century. How would they have understood it? Do you remember when Jesus came to Jerusalem? What happened? The crowds ran out to meet Him and ushered Him as their King (Mark 11:1-11). That's what people back then did – they ran out to meet the king and ushered him, with all the honour due royalty, into their city. It would have been treason to have the king arrive but the people could not be bothered to go out to greet him!

So when Jesus returns, Paul says, people will go out/up to meet Him – but not to stay there, away from earth. Instead, they will escort Him, royally, into what is truly His domain, but which we know as our world. We are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) ... and we are waiting for the King of Heaven – Jesus – to come visit us again! Paul's prayer at the end of 1 Corinthians is the simple Aramaic prayer: "*Marana tha*" – "*Our Lord, Come!*" (16:22). Paul is expecting Jesus to come back to be with us where we are ... and there to set things aright. John closes Revelation with same prayer, "*Come, Lord Jesus*" (22:20).

This understanding does justice to the Greek text. And it does affirm that Jesus is "present" with us now, through the Holy Spirit (the first meaning of "parousia" – God is here). And we can look forward to His personal return (the second meaning of "parousia") – the King is coming, personally, to reign.

How we understand some of the details ultimately is not that important (premillennial vs. amillennial vs. pre-tribulation vs. post-tribulation debates can wait!). The more important issue is, "*So what? How then should we live?*" This chapter (and chapter 5, tomorrow) challenges us to keep living as Kingdom of God people, day-by-day, too. When the King comes, we want our world to be as good as it can be! This concern is consistent with Matthew 24-25, isn't it?

After all, when the King comes to our town we want Him to find it to be a place where people "*act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8) ... don't we?

*You are holy, Lord, the only God, and your deeds are wonderful.  
You are strong. You are great. You are the most high. You are Almighty.  
You, holy Father, are King of Heaven and Earth. You are three and one, Lord God.  
You are good, all good, supreme good, Lord God, living and true.  
You are love. You are wisdom. You are humility. You are endurance.  
You are rest. You are peace. You are joy and gladness. You are justice and moderation.  
You are all our riches, and you suffice for us. You are beauty. You are gentleness. You are our protector.  
You are our guardian and defender. You are our courage. You are our haven and our hope.  
You are our faith, our great consolation.  
You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord, God Almighty, merciful Savior. Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

## Thursday, April 26: 1 Thessalonians 5

Like Jesus' teaching, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that we have no idea of the timeline for all this (what does this say to those media celebrities who love to try to figure it all out? Hmmm ...). We waste our time trying to discern if this world leader fulfills this little bit of Old Testament prophecy and if this event fulfills this parable. People have been doing this for centuries and getting it wrong EVERY time! They always will.

Paul's point is – live every day as if it were the last day! Get your life in order. He has very practical counsel for us. It's not brain surgery! It may require some heart surgery – allowing the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out so we live differently!

- Honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work.
- Live peacefully with each other.
- Warn those who are lazy.
- Encourage those who are timid.
- Take tender care of those who are weak.
- Be patient with everyone.
- See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.
- Always be joyful.
- Never stop praying.
- Be thankful in all circumstances.
- Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.
- Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said.
- Hold on to what is good.
- Stay away from every kind of evil.

Good, practical advice, isn't it? Take some time to look over these verses several times. What do you need to work on?

*My God, I believe in you, but strengthen my faith.  
All my hopes are in you, but please protect them.  
I love you, but teach me to love you more and more dearly.  
I am sorry that I've offended you; please increase my sorrow and my repentance.  
I adore you as my first beginning, and I aspire after you as my last end.  
I give you thanks as my constant benefactor, and I call upon you as my supreme protector.  
My God, conduct me by your wisdom, control me by your justice,  
comfort me by your mercy, and defend me by your power.  
I desire to consecrate to you all my thoughts, words, actions, and sufferings  
that from now on I may think of you, speak of you, offer all my actions to your greater glory,  
and suffer willingly whatever you shall bring into my life.  
Lord, I desire that in all things your will may be done –  
because it is your will, and your will is perfectly good.  
I beg you to enlighten my understanding, to inflame my will,  
to purify my body, and to sanctify my soul. Amen.*

Richard Challoner (1691-1781)

## Friday, April 27: 1 John 2:28-3:24

"And now, dear children," John writes, "continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming ("parousia") ..." (1 John 2:28).

He goes on, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (3:2). Like Paul, John anticipates a time when Jesus will appear and we will be transformed. Like Paul, too, John doesn't go into a lot of detail about how or when this happens. He just states it as a fact.

John *does* go into a lot of detail on the practical implications of all of this!

Rather than get caught up in the how or when of it all, God seems far more concerned that we live out our faith! What comes after, comes after. But right here, right now, we are challenged to live as his followers.

How does 1 John 3 help you understand who you are, as a person who loves Jesus, better?

How does John challenge you to live differently?

*Here we are in front of you, Holy Spirit.  
We feel the weight of our differences,  
but we are united together in your name.  
Come to us, help us, enter into our hearts.  
Teach us what we should do, what path we should follow.  
Do for us what you ask us to do.  
Be the only one to offer and guide our decisions,  
because only you – with the Father and the Son – have a glorious and holy name.  
Do not allow us to miss out on doing what is right,  
O Spirit who loves order and peace.  
Don't let ignorance lead us away from you.  
Don't let human sympathy bias us.  
Don't let people or positions influence us.  
Keep us intimately close to you, using the gift of your grace,  
so that we may be as one with you  
and so that nothing can separate us from your truth and love. Amen.*

Isidore of Seville (560-636)

#### **Saturday, April 28: 1 John 4**

This passage continues on from the previous bit: *"And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming ... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (2:28, 3:2).

What matters is not when and how Jesus will return, but how we live in the meantime. God will take care of that in His own time and in His own way.

- How does 1 John 4 inspire you?
- How does John challenge you?

John reminds us that Jesus has really not left us at all! He is still very much present with us as the Holy Spirit. He has not left as orphans – His Spirit is with us. So His return will not so much be the return of someone who is completely absent, but the true revealing of the true reality that has existed all along – the King is here among us. Right now we don't see Him physically. Then He shall be fully revealed.

The other Greek word used for Jesus' appearing is *"phanero"* – which means *"to become visible."* This is the word John uses in 1 John 3:2 (*"when Christ appears"*). It's also the word used in Colossians 3:4: *"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."*

Since God is with us, as the Holy Spirit, we ought to live as His people. *"Because God is already making his new creation,"* writes Tom Wright, *"all that you do in Christ and by the Spirit is part of that new world. Every cup of cold water, every tiny prayer, every confrontation with the bullies who oppress the poor, every song of praise or dance of joy, every work of art and music – nothing is wasted. The resurrection will reaffirm it, in ways we cannot begin to imagine, as part of God's new world."*

*"Dear friends," John says, "let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

The Second Coming, in Scripture is about living the Kingdom now. How then should I live?

*Use me, my Saviour, for whatever purpose and in whatever way you may require.  
Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel; fill it with your grace. Amen*

D.L. Moody (1837-1899)

### **Sunday, April 29: John 5:1-30**

Jesus is the Saviour who loves people. He has compassion on the suffering. He has mercy on those who sin. He died for His people while they were still sinners. He is the *"Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief ..."* He is the suffering Messiah who took our sin – and the world's judgment – upon Himself on the cross.

This loving Saviour is also the One who returns as Judge.

The picture of Jesus as the coming judge is the central feature of an absolutely vital and nonnegotiable Christian belief: that there will indeed be a judgment in which the creator God will set the world right once and for all. While the word 'judgment' carries negative overtones for a good many people we need to see that in the Bible judgement is actually presented as good news, not bad!

As Jesus comes again, He comes to confront the evil and sin in our world. Death and decay will be destroyed. This world – like our bodies – will be wondrously transformed into what God create it to be!

The story is not over! God will deal with the remaining problems in our world, once and for all. There will be a time when the wicked are firmly and finally put in their place, the poor have their needs met, the sick are made whole, and the weak are given power. That is good news!

In the meantime, we do our best to live this out. Of course we cannot build the Kingdom of God by our own efforts. Only God can make all this happen. But we can build FOR the Kingdom. We can make a difference in people's lives, today.

*"People who believe that Jesus is Lord and that he will appear again as judge of the world are called and equipped (to put it mildly) to think and act quite differently from those who don't."* (Tom Wright) If we do believe that Jesus is Lord and that He will appear again as judge of the world how do we live differently?

*Lord, teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek you.  
For I cannot see you unless you first teach me,  
nor find you unless you first reveal yourself to me.  
Let me seek you in longing and long for you in seeking.  
Let me find you in love and love you in finding.  
Lord, you have mercy on all.  
Take away from me all my sins,  
and mercifully set me ablaze with the fire of your Holy Spirit.  
Take away from me the heart of stone, and give me a human heart,  
a heart to love and adore you, a heart to delight in you,  
to follow and enjoy you, for Christ's sake. Amen*

Ambrose of Milan (340-397)

### **Monday, April 30: Matthew 25:31-46**

In 2002 the International Criminal Court (ICC) was establishing in the Hague. It is an attempt to try to provide some global consensus around issues of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. You may be cynical about its hope for success, but it is significant that the worldwide

community has come together to make a statement that certain horrendous behaviours are just not acceptable, the rest of the world will not stand idly by, and that justice can – and will – happen.

“Justice” is one of the most profound and deeply embedded longings within human beings. As Christians we believe this deep longing for justice exists because we are created in the image of God ... and so, just as God is passionate about justice, we have that yearning deep in our souls, too.

What is justice? We tend to think of it in terms of reward (for doing good) and punishment (for doing bad). But biblically it is really about things that are out of alignment being put to rights, or situations where there is suffering being healed, or places where there is evil being made pure and holy again. While reward and punishment may be involved, justice is about re-establishing “*shalom*” – God’s perfect peace and wholeness.

We need to keep in mind that God’s coming judgment is seen as a good thing – like the ICC! It’s something to be celebrated, longed for yearned over – in Old Testament imagery people shout for joy and the trees of the fields clap their hands when God comes to judge (Psalm 98). God’s judgment means, once and for all, an end to bullying, murder, rape, abuse, exploitation, poverty, racism, and wickedness of every sort. Isn’t that something to celebrate?

As those who believe in Jesus, we have nothing to fear. We are saved by faith. Not works. Paul makes this point again and again and again (Romans 1:18-19, Ephesians 2:1-10). Jesus Himself says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned ...”* (John 3:1-18).

But John 3:18 does continue: *“... but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”* Jesus continues (John 3:19-21): *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”*

The assumption is that if we do truly believe, it will change how we live. If we truly love Him, we will obey Him. Of course we will not be perfect – none of us is! But, because we love Jesus, our goal is to keep on trying ... As a loving Father, God will always love us, always forgive us, always give us another chance ...

But if we deliberately reject Jesus ... if we want nothing to do with the God who loves us ... if we repeatedly and dogmatically refuse to respond to the Holy Spirit’s nudges ... if we are cruel and unmerciful ... there are many warnings in Scripture about God’s impending judgment.

Keep I mind that, in general, God’s coming judgment is good news! The world will be put right. Evil will be destroyed. Death will end. But in the meantime what we do here and now matters; it’s important. We can make a difference now. We can’t just throw up our hands and say, *“The world’s a mess, so let’s just sit back and wait for Jesus to return!”* I once had a geography student who was outspokenly critical of my suggestion that as Christians we have a mandate to care for God’s creation (based on Genesis 2:15). Her comment: *“The sooner we destroy the environment, the sooner we force Jesus to return.”* Ouch.

When we pray, *“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth ...”* we are praying for that NOW! The Kingdom of God has begun! Jesus has risen from the dead. And in His resurrection power we can make a difference every day! While we cannot make the world perfect (that will only happen when Jesus returns again), we can make it much, much better. The way we choose to live – as those who love God and our neighbour – can provide a glimpse and a first experience of the Kingdom of God for those around us ...

Do something unexpected to bless someone today in the name of Jesus. His Spirit can work through you to make an incredible difference.

*Stay with me, Lord, and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, to be a light to others.  
 The light, Jesus, will be all from you.  
 None of it will be mine.  
 No merit belongs to me.  
 It will be you who shines through me upon others.  
 Let me praise you, in the way which you love best, by shining on all those around me.  
 Give light to them as well as to me; bring light to them through me.  
 Teach me to show forth your praise, your truth, your will.  
 Make me preach you without preaching –  
 not by words but by my example and by the sympathetic influence of what I do –  
 by my visible resemblance to your saints, and the evident fullness of love which my heart bears to you.  
 Fill my heart, Lord, with overwhelming love for you. Amen.*

John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

## **Tuesday, May 1: Matthew 11**

Remember – God’s judgment is good! It is a setting to right of all things wrong! It is a purifying of all that is evil. If we say that nothing is bad and everything goes, chaos is the logical ultimate consequence. There have been more than enough “apocalyptic” movies and books that highlight the “dark side” of human nature (remember *Lord of the Flies*, *Animal Farm*, and *Hamlet* from high school English?).

It’s only when we agree some things are true, good, and pure (and that some things are evil and wrong) that life becomes worth living. We need to rediscover that some things are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy ... and celebrate them (Philippians 4:8).

How do we deal with the hard passages, however, that bring us face to face with judgment? I appreciate this insight from Tom Wright, New Testament professor at the University of St. Andrews:

*"When human beings give up their heartfelt allegiance to God and worship that which is not God, they progressively cease to reflect the image of God. One of the primary laws of human life is that you become like what you worship; what's more you REFLECT what you worship not only back to the object itself but also outward to the world around. Those who worship money increasingly define themselves in terms of it and increasingly treat other people as creditors, debtors, partners, or customers rather than as human beings. Those who worship sex define themselves in terms of it (their preferences, their practices, their past histories) and increasingly treat other people as actual or potential sexual objects. Those who worship power define themselves in terms of it and treat other people as collaborators, competitors, or pawns. These and many other forms of idolatry combine in a thousand ways, all of them damaging to the image-bearing quality of the people concerned and of those whose lives they touch.*

*"My suggestion is that it is possible for human beings so to continue down this road, so to refuse all whisperings of good news, all glimmers of true light, all promptings to turn and go the other way, all signposts to the love of God, that after death they become at last, by their own effective choice, beings that once were human but now are not, creatures that have ceased to bear the divine image at all. With the death of that body in which they inhabited God's good world, in which the flickering flame of goodness had not been completely snuffed out, they pass simultaneously not only beyond hope but also beyond pity."*

C.S. Lewis used similar terms to try to express this:

- *"We must picture Hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment."*
- *"A man can't be taken to hell or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam ..."*
- *"The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; the doors of hell are locked on the inside."*
- *"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Your will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Your will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it."*

God will not violate our freedom. If what we want is money, money, money ... then that is what we get. If all we want is sex ... that is what we get. If all we want is power ... that is what we get. But when we have it all, the law of diminishing returns means you may have it all, but it won't bring any true gratification.

And if we really, seriously, don't want anything to do with God, that is what we'll get. He will give us what we want ... and eternity without God.

Of course being a successful rebel is not a good thing when it comes to God! It is so much more wonderful to hear Jesus saying, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)

*Father, this day may bring some hard task to our lives or some hard trial to our love.*

*We may grow weary, or sad, or feel hopeless.*

*But, Father, our whole lives to this point has been one great proof of your ongoing care.*

*Bread has come for our bodies, thoughts to our minds, love to our hearts, and all of these from you.*

*So help us, we plead, while we stand this morning on this side of all that this day may bring,*

*to resolve that we will trust you this day to shine into the gloom in our minds,*

*to stand by us in any trial of our love,*

*and to give us rest in your good time as we need.*

*May this day be full of resurrection power that shall bring us near to you, and make us more like you.*

*And God, may we so trust you this day that when the day is done our faith shall be firmer than ever.*

*Then, when our last day comes and our work is done,*

*we will trust you in death and forever, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Richard Collyer (1823-1912)

## **Wednesday, May 2: Revelation 20**

Revelation 20 makes us squirm a bit. Of course Revelation is the most difficult in the Bible to interpret with certainty since it contains so much symbolic imagery. But judgment – the final declaration that some things are good (such as justice, mercy, and compassion) and must be vindicated – and some things are evil (such as murder, theft, rape, abuse, etc.) and must be condemned – is the only alternative to chaos. If nothing is bad, nothing can be good. If nothing is bad, anything goes ... and the world dissolves into anarchy. Knowing what we do of human personality, the results of individualism run amuck will not be good!

*"God is utterly committed to set the world right in the end,"* writes Tom Wright. *"This doctrine, like that of the resurrection itself, is held firmly in place by the belief in God as creator, on the one side, and the belief in his goodness, on the other. And that setting right must necessarily involve the elimination of all that distorts God's good and lovely creation and in particular of all that defaces his image-bearing human creatures. Not to put too fine a point upon it, but there will be no barbed wire in the Kingdom of God. And those whose whole being has become dependant upon barbed wire will have no place there either. For 'barbed wire,' of course read whichever catalog of awfulnesses your prefer: genocide, nuclear bombs, child prostitution, the arrogance of empire, the commodification of souls, the idolization of race ..."*

To those of us in the relative peace and prosperity of 21<sup>st</sup> century North America, this seems hard. We may love to believe that God will be merciful to everyone – including the mass murderers, child rapists, and those who are responsible for starving their people while they live wealthy lives. Of course repentance is always possible; and some people who have done despicable things have certainly repented and received forgiveness. But fundamentally God takes justice VERY seriously. And so should we.

What does this mean for us? It means that we can be encouraged – and encourage others – that in the end God's justice will prevail.

It means that when we see injustice – whatever form that may take – we ought to speak up about it. And if we can, we should do something about it (*"All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing."*)

It also means that we need to ask ourselves some hard questions about how we live ...

Maybe we ask the wrong question: we may only ask, "Is my friend/family member going to heaven when they die?" We are satisfied if we can answer "Yes, my friend has accepted Jesus as their Saviour." That's all that matters. Our job here is done. Don't get me wrong, this is important! People do need the Lord!

But maybe the better question to ask is: "How can I bring a bit of heaven to earth (Your Kingdom come ...) through my life so others can see and experience the love of God?" When we live that way, more and more people will be drawn to Jesus and will put their faith in Him! As we live God's love, people are drawn like bees to flowers to discover God ... We can create such a "buzz" that people yearn to know God.

We need to think bigger – not just about our family and friends ... but about our whole community! How can we live in such a way that the light of Jesus shines through us to everyone we meet?

*O Lord Jesus, who came to be poor rather than rich, have mercy on all who are in need and want.  
Comfort them in all sorrows,  
supply their needs,  
raise up friends for them,  
and give them grace to learn of you,  
and always to put their trust in you.  
Have mercy, blessed Saviour, on all who are living in sin, who do not pray for themselves,  
and who do not care for their own souls.  
Turn them to yourself,  
and teach them to see the things that really matter.  
May I be of service any way I can to see your Kingdom come. Amen.*

The Narrow Way

### **Thursday, May 3: Revelation 21:1-22:5**

Heaven. Where do we begin to talk about this topic!?!? It's interesting that the Bible takes judgment, heaven and hell for granted, but really gives us remarkably few details. All sorts of books have been written from all sorts of perspectives on these topics ... we're not going to get too deep into these topics in these guides (this year anyway) – the possible literature is so vast!

We do know that for those of us who believe, our eternal destiny is to be with the Lord in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20, John 14:1-3, Colossians 1:5, 1 Peter 1:4-5). Here are a few other things we know:

- *Heaven is the presence of God.* God's intent from the very beginning was that He and us – His people – should be together in perfect fellowship (Genesis 1-2). Heaven is the re-manifestation of that perfect relationship – we shall be with Him, enjoying Him, worshipping Him, serving Him, celebrating Him forever (Revelation 21:3, 1 John 3:2, 1 Corinthians 13:9-12).
- *Heaven includes the removal of all evil, sin, and suffering.* "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4) – the source of all evil will be destroyed once and for all, too (Revelation 20:10).
- *Heaven will be glorious.* How literally we are to take the imagery of the New Jerusalem and restored Eden is a matter of debate ... it really doesn't matter! What matters is that it will be incredible! Words could not possibly describe it anyway!
- *We will worship and serve God.* Some of the images of heaven describe worship (Revelation 19:1-8, Isaiah 6:1-3). No, we will not be playing harps while sitting on clouds! Words, again, fail to capture even the smallest parts of what this all means. It will simply be very, very, very good.

There are lots of other questions about heaven! But the Bible is frustratingly vague. Maybe this is because human language cannot begin to describe it. And maybe this is because, although it is our eternal future and will be incredibly wonderful, God doesn't want us to lose sight of our mission right here, right now. If we knew everything we'd like to know about heaven, we might spend so much time pining for the future we wouldn't take our mandate to be God's ambassadors seriously.

Right now, Paul says, *"if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Although we wait for heaven – we ARE new creations now, too!

Although we wait to be with the Lord, we have a purpose NOW, too. How can we share God's good news with people, today???

*Glorious God, give me grace to change my life  
and to see, but not fear, death,  
which, for those who know you, is the gateway to an eternal life of blessing.  
Good Lord, give me a humble, lowly, quiet, peaceable,  
patient, charitable, kind, tender, and loving mind,  
in all my words and all my thoughts, to be filled by your Holy Spirit.  
Good Lord, give me a full faith,  
a firm hope,  
and a fervent charity,  
a love for you that cannot be compared to my love for myself.  
Good Lord, give me a longing to be with you,  
not to avoid the misfortunes of this world or simply to be in that joyful place called heaven,  
give me that longing to be with you today and every day, simply because I love you. Amen*

Thomas More (1478-1535 [executed by Henry VIII])

## **Friday, May 4: Romans 12**

*"The most important thing to say at the end of this discussion ... is that heaven and hell are not what the whole game is about. This is one of the central surprises in the Christian hope ... The question of what happens to me after death is NOT the major, central, framing question that centuries of theological tradition have supposed.*

*"The New Testament, true to its Old Testament roots, regularly insists that the major, central, framing question is that of God's purpose of rescue and re-creation for the whole world, the entire cosmos. The destiny of individual human beings must be understood within that context – not simply in the sense that we are only part of a much larger picture but also in the sense that part of the whole point of being saved in the present is so that we can play a vital role (Paul speaks of this role in the shocking terms of being 'fellow workers with God') within the larger picture and purpose. And that, in turn, makes us realize that the question of our own destiny, in terms of the alternatives of joy or woe, is probably the wrong way of looking at the whole question.*

*"The question ought to be: 'How will God's new creation come?' and then, 'How will we humans contribute to the renewal of creation and to the fresh projects that the creator God will launch in the new world?'*

*"The choice before us would then be framed differently: are you going to worship the creator God and discover thereby what it means to become fully and gloriously human, reflecting his powerful, healing, transformative love into the world?*

*"Or are you going to worship the world as it is, boosting your corruptible humanness by gaining power or pleasure from forces within the world but merely contributing thereby to your own dehumanization and the further corruption of the world itself?" (Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope, pp. 184-5)*

When we keep the questions of 'How will God's new creation come?' and, 'How will we humans contribute to the renewal of creation and to the fresh projects that the creator God will launch in the new world?' life, here and now, becomes incredibly significant.

We have a purpose. We have a mission. We can live with new passion. And we can make a real, tangible difference for God's Kingdom! What does that mean for you ... today?

*Today, I thank you for anything that happened to me  
that made me feel life is really and truly worth living.  
I thank you for all the laughter that was in today.  
I thank you, too, for any moment when I saw the seriousness and the meaning of life.  
I thank you very specially for those I love, for those who love me,  
for all the difference it has made to me to know them,  
and for all the happiness it brings me to be with them.  
May I love them as you love me. Amen*

William Barclay (1907-1978)

### **Saturday, May 5: 1 Corinthians 13**

This wonderful chapter is written about the church (Chapters 12 and 14 are all about the church being Jesus' body, using our spiritual gifts to build up the body, and living well with one another). This is how we are called to live now ... not off in the distant future.

While there certainly is a future component to our faith (we will be with Jesus eternally, after death), our new life in Christ begins the instant we believe. And so, personally and corporately (as a church), we live our faith day by day.

Wright gives us this wonderful vision for the church:

- *"When the church is seen to move straight from worship of the God we see in Jesus to making a difference and effecting much-needed change in the real world;*
- *when it becomes clear that the people who feast at Jesus' table are the ones in the forefront of work to eliminate hunger and famine;*
- *when people realize that those who pray for the Spirit to work in and through them are the people who seem to have extra resources of love and patience in caring for those whose lives are damaged, bruised, and shamed –*

*then it is only natural to speak of Jesus himself and to encourage others to worship him for themselves and find out what belonging to his family is all about.*

*"It is also natural for people, however irreligious they may think of themselves as being, to recognize something is going on that they want to be a part of."*

When people see us living our faith, they notice. And they are drawn to Jesus. When we live out the Kingdom of God, the word of God spreads.

Very few people come to faith by being frightened by preachers spitting hellfire and brimstone! Most people come to faith by seeing the love of Jesus lived out and shared by their friends, family, and neighbours – you and I.

*"They'll know we are Christians by our love ..."* As you reflect on the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13, which do you need to work on most? How can you practice this/these this week?

*Lord, help us to see in your crucifixion and resurrection an example of how to endure  
and seemingly to die in the agony and conflict of daily life,  
so that we may live more fully and creatively.  
You accepted patiently and humbly the rebuffs of human life,  
as well as the tortures of your crucifixion and passion.  
Help us to accept the pains and conflicts that come to us each day  
as opportunities to grow as people and become more like you.  
Enable us to go through them patiently and bravely,  
trusting that you will support us.  
Make us realize that it is only by frequent deaths of ourselves and our self-centered desires  
that we can come to live more fully;  
for its only by dying with you that we can rise with you.*

Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

### **Sunday, May 6: Psalm 98**

This is a wonderful song of praise to God! Notice the themes of

- God's love
- God's power
- God's justice (remember it is good news – He is restoring things to the way they ought to be!)

Simply enjoy offering your worship and praise to God today!

*Sing a new song to the LORD, for he has done wonderful deeds.  
His right hand has won a mighty victory; his holy arm has shown his saving power!  
The LORD has announced his victory and has revealed his righteousness to every nation!  
He has remembered his promise to love and be faithful to Israel.  
The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.*

*Shout to the LORD, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy!  
Sing your praise to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and melodious song,  
with trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn.  
Make a joyful symphony before the LORD, the King!*

*Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!  
Let the earth and all living things join in.  
Let the rivers clap their hands in glee!  
Let the hills sing out their songs of joy before the LORD.  
For the LORD is coming to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with fairness.*

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who is and was and who is to come!  
Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
Worthy are you, Lord, our God, to receive praise, glory, honour and blessing.  
Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
Praise god, all you his servants, and you that fear him, both small and great.  
Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
Let heaven and earth praise his glory,  
and every creature that is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.  
Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and forever shall be.  
Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)