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Dear all,

### Briefing 14: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2020.

*"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into Heaven." Acts 1: 11b*

I heard someone say the other day that for many people the lockdown restrictions are a little like an ongoing bereavement. Although we have technology through videoconferencing, emails and telephone calls, we still feel cut off from those we love, unable to hug them, or eat with them. Perhaps you share some of those sentiments. The last 8 weeks have certainly been a rollercoaster ride for our emotions.

I imagine that's how Jesus first disciples felt as well. They had gone from the joy of Palm Sunday, to the agony of Good Friday to the Earth shatteringly good news of Easter Sunday. The 40 days that followed that were spent with Jesus. He taught them, ate with them, walked with them, even went fishing with them. He explained to them some of the things he had continually tried to teach them all along, that the Christ must suffer and be raised from the dead.

But then, 40 days after his resurrection, he left them. Acts chapter 1 records Jesus' ascension into heaven, and that the disciples were left staring into the sky, mouths open, trying to get their heads round yet another astonishing event concerning Jesus. But they aren't left wondering what this means. The two men dressed in white, (angels), who came and stood beside them, told them that Jesus had been taken up into heaven, but that he would return in the same way that they had seen him go.

As we read through the New Testament, we find out a little more about what Jesus is doing now.

He is **SITTING DOWN**. Hebrews 10 verse 12 tells us that Jesus is now sat at the right hand of God. Why is he seated? It's a sign of his authority (see below), but it also a clear reminder to us that his work is finished. Unlike other priests who had to make regular sacrifices, Jesus gave his life on the cross once and for all. No other sacrifices are necessary. No acts of penance are needed to top up our forgiveness. Jesus work is done. Full forgiveness is available through faith in Christ. Hallelujah!

He is **RULING**: Ephesians 1:20 tells us that Jesus is exercising the authority that was given to him by the Father. From the right hand of the Father in heaven, Jesus is ruling over the world, directing history for the good of his kingdom; that is, the church.

He is **PRAYING** for us: Romans 8:34 tells us that Jesus is now praying for us. What an astonishing thought! That comment comes in a passage about the sufferings we experience in life and the things that might, perhaps, separate us from the love of God. But Jesus is praying for us so that nothing, neither death nor life, nor angels or demons, nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God.

He's our **ADVOCATE**. Advocate is a legal term which means that Jesus defends us before the father. So when Satan tries to accuse us of wrongdoing, and says that we no longer deserve God's love, Jesus is our advocate and he reminds the Father of his work for us on the cross so that fresh forgiveness can come.

He is **HELPING** us stand firm and grow in faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:5 is a good example of this. Here Paul prays that the Lord would direct his reader's hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. Jesus helps us be more righteous by guiding our thoughts to love God and be patient with others. And of course, we

don't do that alone. As we will be celebrating next weekend, Jesus also sent the Holy Spirit to us, to live in believers, as his guiding, sustaining presence, to equip us to live holy lives.

He is **WAITING**. One day, Jesus will return '*in the same way*' his disciples saw him go. His return will be glorious, and earth-stopping, and every eye will see him. It will be the day his perfect eternal kingdom comes into being, a day of joy and celebration and homecoming for the believer. But for those who have rejected Jesus, it will be a day of mourning and sorrow. A day when it will be too late to be saved.

Such a prospect should stir us to be people of prayer and people of action. There are a few ways to be encouraged to pray for the lost of the world listed below. But let's make sure we are also people of action. The world needs to hear this good news and it is our duty, as well as our joy as disciples of Jesus, to speak out and live out the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we await the return of Jesus.

Let's look for ways that we can all do that this week.

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*

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**11 DAYS OF PRAYER:** For the first disciples who had just seen Jesus ascend into Heaven, the wait for Pentecost was a time of prayer. It can be for us too. Here are **4 ways** to join in with the great annual wave of worldwide prayer.

**CHURCH PRAYER GATHERING ON ZOOM: THIS FRIDAY NIGHT (22<sup>nd</sup> May) AT 7:30PM.** Do join us as we pray for the church, the country and the world. There will be a focus on both our mission as a benefice, our mission partners and for God to change and empower us for his work. If you'd like to join us, please email me before 7:15pm on Friday night and I'll send you the link.

**THY KINGDOM COME 2020** Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension Day (21<sup>st</sup> May) to Pentecost (31<sup>st</sup> May) for more people to come to know Jesus. If you have a smart phone, there is a great App you can download free. There's also a weblink to receive the daily encouragements and prayer helps: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/lightuptheworld> The focus will be to pray for 5 friends or family to come to faith in Jesus, and for the empowerment of the Spirit to enable us to be more effective in our witness.

**PRAYERMATE:** This is something else for smart phone users. Do download it free from the Appstore and join in. It's a great way to inform your prayer times and to keep in touch with the prayer needs of others in the congregation. Mike and Evelyn are managing that side of things. Please email them for more details.

**PRACTICAL BOOKS ON PRAYER:** 100FTHOSE.COM have a range of books called '5 things to pray for.' They are really helpful and very cheap. If you struggle to know what to pray for, why not check these out. They can all be found at: <https://www.100fthose.com/uk/products?q=5%20things>

A reminder too that 10 ministers from Churches Together in Stevenage will also each be releasing a short reflection and prayer, one for each day – and these will be available via the CTIS website as well as on individual church YouTube channels. (*I'm doing Sunday's reflection*)

**CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED:** Starting Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June at 7:30pm we will be running a virtual Christianity Explored course. We will start to advertise this from this Sunday, and place ads on YouTube as well. Please pass them on your friends and family, and share the links widely. And if you'd like to join in and refresh yourself on the basics of our faith, then please do.

**READING FOR SUNDAY:** If you want to read the passage ahead of Sunday, it is Genesis chapter 1. But you might like to read on to the end of chapter 2 as well!

**MEN's VIRTUAL BREAKFAST:** The men are gathering for another virtual breakfast at 8:30am on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May. For a link to join in contact Mike on [mikewilton@hotmail.com](mailto:mikewilton@hotmail.com).

**SAD NEWS.** Two former members of our churches died over the last few days. Dave Young, who (along with his wife Mary) used to sing in the choir at St Nick's, died in a care home at Benslow early Saturday morning, and Daphne Poynter, a long-time member of St Mary's Graveley, died in Pinelodge last week. Please remember their families and friends in your prayers.

**BUILDING WORK UPDATE.** The security fences around St Nicholas are now down because the work is drawing to a close. Almost all of the work will be completed this week, but the sliding doors into the Parish Room and the reinstallation of the AV System will follow some time later. We still have the final bills to pay- more of that in the next couple of weeks- but huge thanks to all those who have made this possible.

### **SOMETHING FOR YOUR SOUL...**

**Interview of the week:** A couple of weeks ago I plugged a book called 'Beyond the Big C' by Jeremy Marshall. Jeremy attends St Nicholas Sevenoaks, and was recently interviewed by Matt Taylor (Anthony and Sandy's son) who is curate there. The video is well worth a watch, and if you'd like a free copy of his book do let me know and I'll drop one round. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=630759467510549>

**The song for the week** is a great hymn that reminds us of Jesus' power and glory. It is All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name, given an orchestral flavour here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgQ9ER-fdWQ>

### **THE LATEST VIDEOS...**

There is a new **all age family worship service** available from today. Do take a look at our YouTube Channel to watch them. **PLEASE** remember to **share** them, **like** them (that's the thumbs up sign!) and leave your **comments!** It's here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAaIRTsJuKFRBvkLjAtQ>

You'll also find **the full-length interview** I did **with Nigel Brown** AND an invitation for people to join our next Christianity Explored course. PLEASE share this video as widely as you can. You might want to consider coming on the course yourself too.

### **REMINDERS...**

**PREVIOUS LETTERS AND INFORMATION:** These can all be accessed via our websites or Facebook pages.

If you'd like to lead the **PRAYERS** or do the **BIBLE READING** for our on-line service, please get in touch!

**KEEPING IN TOUCH:** Please do keep going with the **4UP/4DOWN** challenge and call people regularly and let me or Lynda Matthews (Pastoral Team leader) know of any concerns you have. Let's not let 'lockdown fatigue' stop us from loving one another.

**SERVICE DOWN A TELEPHONE LINE:** A reminder that our '*service down a telephone line*' is now up and running. The message will be updated every few days with Evening Prayer services and the Sunday sermon. Simply dial this **local number 01438 907143** (**you'll need the area code as well**), and listen.

**PRAYER:** We are still gathering on Tuesday mornings from 7am to 8am for a virtual prayer meeting. If you'd like to join us, send me an email and I'll send you an invite.

**NEED HELP?** Do ask! We are a family after all. If you or a neighbour need help that you can't provide, contact Herts Help on 0300 123 4044 or via <https://www.hertshelp.net/hertshelp.aspx>.

**WANT TO VOLUNTEER?** See <https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS> or <https://www.thvolunteering.org.uk/>