

1\* Easter 2019: Welcome to VICTORY SUNDAY – but let's begin at the beginning!

2\* Separation from the ones we love is a very difficult, even deadly, thing. We hear of couples who've been happily married for years and years dying within days of each other – one passes away and the other cannot survive without them and so within days or weeks the spouse left behind also passes away.

3\* We also hear that loneliness (as a result of felt or actual separation from others) is one of our culture's greatest problems. The Guardian wrote an article on the subject saying: Loneliness is thought to be a universal, inevitable, even psychological affliction. The UK and vast swaths of post-industrial populations across Europe, the USA and Japan report heightened levels of loneliness, with attendant implications for public health.

The findings of a recent survey by the BBC on loneliness found that a third of respondents often felt lonely, that there was shame attached, that it could affect people of all life stages, that it was connected to social media use and linked with ill health. Most research acknowledges the role of modernity in the 'loneliness epidemic' - the rise of single households, less face-to-face interaction, the influence of social media - all these contributing to modern [& destructive] ways of thinking about the self and society.

We were never meant to be a separate people; we were always meant to be closely connected to one another and more importantly, closely connected to God. The Bible tells us it is in our connectedness to God and His great love and purpose for us, that we find out who we are truly created to be:

4\* Acts 17:28-30 (TPT): It is through Him that we live & function & have our identity; just as your own poets have said, 'Our lineage comes from Him.' This is also translated 'Our nature comes from Him; We are His offspring, kindred or family (taken from His genes).

5\* God who is Himself a loving family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, made us to be family with Him, creating us in His image, with His nature, and giving us great destiny and purpose in relationship with Him and each other. But a separation came into being when we chose to ignore His place in our lives, and His guidance, and decided to go it alone.

6\* The consequences were catastrophic: uncontrolled selfishness, and self-gratification with no regard for others ruled and reigned; death, sickness, poverty, war, environmental destruction all entered our world and separated us from each other and from God.

And we couldn't put things right and we couldn't find a way back. And this is the main point of my message today – what was impossible for us, God made possible!

7\* Mark 10:27 TPT: Jesus looked at them & replied, 'With people it is impossible, but not with God—God makes all things possible!'

God opened up a way back for us. What we couldn't do for ourselves, God has done! The Father sent His Son Jesus to make a way for us to come back into family relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit and with each other.

8\* Matthew 27: 45-54 TPT: Let's remind ourselves of the death of the Saviour: For three hours, beginning at noon, darkness came over the earth & at three o'clock Jesus shouted with a mighty voice in Aramaic, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?'—that is, 'My God, My God, why have you deserted me?' Some who were standing near the cross misunderstood and said, 'He's calling for Elijah.' One bystander ran and got a sponge, soaked it with sour wine, then put it on a stick & held it up for Jesus to drink. But the rest said, 'Leave Him alone! Let's see if Elijah comes to rescue him.' Jesus passionately cried out, took His last breath, and gave up His spirit.<sup>51</sup> **At that moment the veil in the Holy of Holies was torn in two from the top to the bottom.** The earth shook violently, rocks were split apart & graves were opened. Then many of the holy ones who had died were brought back to life & came out of their graves & after Jesus' resurrection, they were plainly seen by many people walking in Jerusalem. Now, when the Roman military officer & His soldiers witnessed what was happening & felt the powerful earthquake, they were extremely terrified. They said, 'There is no doubt, this man was the Son of God!'

Jesus, on the cross, took the consequences of our selfishness and wrongs; our guilt and shame; our wounds, sorrows and sicknesses; our poverty; our separation from the Father – upon Himself. We see that the greatest agony He bore for us was the separation from the Father - 'My God, My God, why have you deserted or forsaken me?' And despite the fact that at His command thousands of angels would have come to His rescue, He remained there until He breathed His last breath – taking all these vile and sad things to the grave with Him – where they were disempowered. [For as we know – no-one can continue to be selfish or evil after they've physically died].

9\* And I love the detail about the temple curtain. Before Jesus came, in the place of worship of God, the Temple, there was a curtain 60' high and 1' thick that separated God's presence from the people. In that 'holy of holies place' God dwelled among them. But they couldn't access Him fully because coming into His holiness and purity in their state of unholiness and impurity would have killed them. So the curtain was a necessary separation for their sakes – a temporary measure until Jesus came with a better way. When Jesus died on the cross, removing our guilt, shame and impurity

from us forever, this massive Temple curtain ripped from top to bottom (Heaven to Earth) opening up the way back to the Father and making Him totally accessible to us. This tearing open of the curtain from 60' up was a miracle in itself, pointing to the bigger miracle of what was happening through Jesus for us all. And now because of Him, we collectively as the Church, can be the Temple in which God dwells by His Holy Spirit!

10\* But at this stage there was still one ruthless enemy to be fought and conquered – Death itself – and at this point it looked as though Death had the victory. The Son of God was dead and buried and our futures lay in the grave with Him.

11\* But on the third day after His crucifixion Jesus was raised up from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. His coming alive from the dead cancelled out the final separation through sealing the victory over Death, along with the other victories, and making it possible for those of us who believe and place our lives in Jesus, to be forgiven, healed, accepted and alive forever with Him and each other.

This was evidenced at the time, by followers of God who had died being raised up out of their graves and being seen walking about. Miraculous resurrection life had come from Heaven to Earth!

Jesus' death and resurrection permanently opens up the way for all people to return to a full and close relationship with God, and have the life eternal they were always meant to have.

12\* No longer do we need to fear death or the separation from Him or loved ones because in relationship with Him we have an eternal future and destiny together.

This is the good news those being baptised today have experienced personally. They have chosen to accept God's invitation to forgiveness, healing and eternal relationship with Him; they have taken the way opened up to them by Jesus, a way they couldn't make happen for themselves. In baptism the Bible tells us the Father sees us included in the death and resurrection of His son Jesus – we become dead to our old life and rise again to a life filled with the Holy Spirit and lived for God. Those being baptised will share their stories with you a bit later!

13\* Romans 6: 4-5NLT: For we died & were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with Him in his death, we will also be raised to life as He was.

14\* So that's why we're calling this VICTORY Sunday! That's life everlasting in the family of God if we want it! And the invitation is for everyone here today.

If you have heard the victory story of Jesus today and your heart wants to respond and accept Him as your Saviour and Friend; if your decision is to rekindle relationship with the Father and live in relationship with Him and following His guidance – then pray this prayer with me and come and tell me afterwards so we can pray with you and give you a small gift to help you on your way:

Prayer: Jesus thank you that You made a way for me when I couldn't find a way. Thank you for taking the consequences of my wrongs upon Yourself and for taking them to the grave with You. Thank you for loving me enough to die in my place. And thank you for rising up again and offering me a new, pure, guilt-free, shame-free, eternal life in relationship with You. I'm sorry for my wrongs and I accept your complete forgiveness and cleansing. I choose to live the life you always intended for me and I receive your Holy Spirit to show me the way, the truth and the life. Amen

#### CONNECT GROUPS:

Discuss and share times and experiences of God opening up a way for you when it was impossible for you.

For example – God told Bev to find new patterns and space at the end of 2017 and although she tried, the arrival of Knox and her mum's dementia meant time was less available and tasks increased at church and home during 2018. God continued to speak through 2018 and 2019 resulting in this 3-4 month creative sabbatical where God will be able to speak and lead her and CL into life-bringing changes (at least that's what God has said!).

Please pray for that and pray for each other - for God to open up ways for us to live better with Him and for Him – and for us to see breakthrough in the healing and salvation of many.

Pray also for those who are bereaved that they may take comfort that God has taken down dividing walls and they will see and be with their loved ones in Jesus again. (Pray for Kings Church and the Orton family particularly with the recent loss of Fiona).