



Picking up the Pieces

Lent Course 2021

Forward

Picking up the Pieces

Over the years I have wrestled with the reality of Easter Saturday.

It's a place to pause - the challenge is to be held in the tension of Easter Saturday to fully recognise the trauma and tragedy of Good Friday, before fully embracing the power, glory and triumph of Easter Sunday.

Holy Saturday can be seen as a place to pause, where creation holds its breath for what God might achieve in the power and mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Bishop Graham King talks about "*the 'holding grief' of Holy Saturday, when even God kept his Sabbath.*"

It is to such a moment that I come, as I start to frame my thinking of journeying through Lent during the second day of a national lockdown. We are caught between the tragic impact of Covid and the future hope of vaccinations and a return to 'normal'.

Midweek groups are often the engine room for faith. I am usually more than happy for leaders to find their own material for their study groups and if asked I'm happy to recommend decent material that is available. This year feels different and I am moved to come up with something myself, as we grapple with a time like no other in living memory.

For the title of this Lent course I have plumped for 'picking up the pieces'. The thought being that if something has smashed, then it needs to be picked up, an assessment made of the damage done and then a need to look at "what next". My suggestion is that we treat Covid as a trauma that has smashed our nation and that we now need to reflect with God on how we respond.

Working with this analogy, I recognise that actually a number of us will not be able to immediately 'bounce back' straight after lockdown



Epilogue

Holy week is a profound journey of destruction and restoration that impacts for all time. Aside from John 21, the encounter of Jesus' followers on the road to Emmaus provides us with another moment of God working from brokenness to restoration. Jesus' followers need to process the events of the last week and we hear their grief in their account. Their hearts are strangely warmed as the new companion opens up scriptures to explain how this was all foretold.

Profoundly, the wise stranger is persuaded to eat with the followers and it is in the giving thanks and breaking of bread that the risen Jesus is fully comprehended. As we fellowship through Lent, we recognise that we are defined as people who 'break bread' together and yet are unable to. As we yearn for the day to worship together, we need to be like those on the road to Emmaus, whose hearts are 'strangely warmed' and welcome Jesus into our home through prayer and various screens and media.

In Job, we find God responds achingly slowly, but God's almighty majesty is revealed. In Elijah we have a God who restores us physically and calls us to journey on, beyond the big and spectacular to a still small voice of peace. A God who travels with us through desert experiences like that of the fugitive David. A God who walks majestically over chaotic waves and catches us as we fall in our walk towards him. A God who reinstates us from a place of brokenness and binds our calling with a need to fully share in his love.

Thank you for engaging with this study the Lord bless us all as we journey forward in hope. Andrew +

Many thanks to Cathy, John, Valerie and Tim.

and beyond. It may take quite a bit of time before people are ready to 'pick up the pieces'. Within the Church nationally there is a recognition that folks will need to grieve. There has been trauma from such a worldwide event and we need space and time to reflect and lament. In fact, before we 'pick up the pieces', we probably need to catch our breath, look at the pieces and then collect ourselves before resolving to pick up the pieces!

What I have wanted to do here is explore a number of snap-shot moments where people in scripture are experiencing a moment where they are 'shattered' and then see what happens next, what God does next and explore what we can learn from such moments.

Every blessing on your Lent journey, Andrew +

The Pause

Sentences, like people,
need spaces to breathe.
Between the full stop
and the Capital
lies the pause.

Without the space,
sentences are breathless;
without the Sabbath,
life is restless;
without the pause,
the rest is lifeless.

Sentences, like God,
have a preferential option
for the pause.

Rt Rev Graham Kings

www.grahamkings.org/poems.php?sect=Poems&subject=Prayer

Job's suffering – God's eventual reply

Read: Job 6:1-10 NIV

Job has seen his whole life stripped away through tragedy. In the midst of his grief he has every right to curse God and yet bears his suffering faithfully, calling out to a God who appears to have abandoned him. As the ancient book of Job develops, we examine a soul in pain, with God remaining quiet for an uncomfortably long time.

What makes matters worse is that Job is surrounded by companions who do extremely well at supporting him, right up until they open their mouths! Amidst questioning and wrong council, Job defends himself and looks to the Lord.

- How do we cope with wrong council as various thoughts, comments and accusations fly around during the pandemic?

Read: Job 38:1- 30

- What do we make of God's reply when he does respond?
- How do we allow creation to point to God's sovereignty?
- As Christians, we have the privilege of calling Jesus our friend. In Gods' response to Job we hear of an Almighty God. How do we balance a God who knows us by name and a creator God who rules overall and knows all?
- During this time of pandemic, do we have a sense of a God who intimately walks with us and who is also sovereign and holds all things in his hands?
- How do the two sides of God's character help us to 'pick up the pieces'?

Time for Prayer.

Jesus reinstates Peter

The boat rocks and mocks,
a fruitless night.

A spotter on the shore,
a silver haul harvested.

Peter, convinced,
plunges forward.

Dragged nets, approach a fire,
cook's hands have holes, a Saviour's welcome.

Warm bread and fired fish,
A breakfast with the divine.
We eat in the presence,
love has overcome death.

The denier is asked about love,
a threefold quest.
Sheep and lambs to tend,
one of three, speaks for eternity.

Jesus reinstates Peter – brokenness and calling

Read John 21:1-19

The last chapter of John is probably the one I would take to a desert island if I was only allowed one chapter of the Bible! It is one of my favourite resurrection accounts: the miraculous catch of fish; the dawning realisation of the disciples; Jesus cooking breakfast for his friends with holes in his wrists! There is also the humbling inclusion of how the leader of the early Church is reinstated after his three denials.

The disciples were bewildered by Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection seems to scramble their minds further. They go to Galilee and seem to hit upon fishing as a good idea, almost sleep walking back into a former life.

The spotter on the shore gives advice for the fruitless toil and then the magnitude of the catch signals that the Kingdom of God is at work. Jesus must be present.

Peter impulsively puts on his clothes and dives into the water in his rush to be with Jesus.

Jesus momentarily deals with Peter's earlier denial with three questions of "do you love me?", each one going deeper than the last. As Peter is called to shepherd for Jesus, his vocation is uncovered.

- As we 'pick up the pieces' what themes do we notice about Jesus' actions to assist Peter and the disciples?
- How does Peter move from brokenness to restoration and calling?
- How do we identify with Peter and the disciples in their journey of John 21? What do we see Jesus doing in our context?

- How can this inform how we approach God, pray to God?

Time for Prayer.

Job

I have heard that in acute suffering,
people can disconnect from their groans.

A dislocated man of suffering,
creaks, cries and shrieks.

Embarrassing.

Humiliation at the hands of the universe.

Friends wince,
in desperation they chide.

Job, swallowed by life,
sinks to the depths.

Questions grow, thoughts consume,
a heart smelted pure.

The desperate weight of grief.

A life folded up and thrown,
chooses to land prone,

And offers prayers to God – who moves a stone.

Elijah fed in the desert, spoken to on the mountain

Read: 1 Kings 19:1-8

Elijah has been riding high, victorious for the Lord as he challenges the prophets of Baal in high profile showdowns. But suddenly he is caught out: Jezebel threatens him and there must be some infernal power behind it, as it strikes fear into Elijah and he effectively runs for his life to the desert and wants to die.

- Let's reflect on Elijah in this moment, amidst heightened emotions. How does God respond to Elijah?
- How does the role of eating and resting inform our response to lockdown and the pandemic?
- What can we learn from God's provision for Elijah and for us?
- How are we thankful for simple things like food and rest?

Read 1 Kings 19:9-18

Elijah is fed and rested and after a powerful demonstration of the elements, God speaks through a whisper.

- Amidst the drama of the pandemic, aside from the newspaper headlines, what is God whispering to us in this time?
- An emotional Elijah pours out that he is isolated. God puts his claims back into perspective. What are the dangers of viewing our situation in isolation? What's the blessing of knowing that there are faithful people around?
- What lessons can we learn from how God deals with Elijah that can inform how we can 'pick up the pieces'?

- How does this majestic picture of Jesus help us 'pick up the pieces'?

Time for Prayer.

Jesus walks on water

You walked on water, I wobbled.

Even after a miraculous meal,

hopes fade in the early hours,

oars fight back against bloody hands.

Conversations return in waves,

how did I get here?

The storm rages,

what is that?

A ghost upon the water,

becomes a majestic king.

Amidst the waves,

we know it's you.

"Come to me'...I step.

The water holds as my heart sings,

but then the sinking doubts.

You catch me, you hold me, you always will.

Jesus walks, Peter wobbles

Read Matthew 14:22-33

One of the sections of the Gospels that keeps coming back to me during this pandemic is the account of Jesus walking on water.

What I think is so striking is the trouble that the disciples are in as they sail across Galilee ahead of Jesus. Let's be very clear, they are being obedient and following Jesus' request directly and this has landed them straining at the oars, buffeted by the wind and the waves.

Jesus approaches the disciples but they are so taken aback that they think they have seen a ghost. It is at this point that Jesus calls to the disciples and identifies himself.

- As we read through this passage, can we identify times when we think we are being obedient to God's call on us and yet we struggle?
- Can we think of further of times when we sense that God is answering our prayers and concerns but not in a way that we can first recognise?

One of the themes that we have picked up in these studies is being overwhelmed by circumstance. Peter's walking on water is an amazing miracle but also a graphic illustration of someone becoming overwhelmed and failing.

- How does Jesus respond to Peter's failure and the disciples' fears?
- What would Jesus say to us as we share with him our struggles over the pandemic?

(Hint: Jesus always gets the right balance between love and challenge).

Time for Prayer.

Elijah in the desert

The prone body lies flat on the dirt.

A vacant expression stares at the sky,
desiring for the ground to pull down and enfold.

Death.

Angels tend,

sleep and rest.

food for the soul,

heavenly shepherding.

Then on again,

Carmel fire left behind,

and the darkest of threats,

for a mountain climb.

Amidst earthquake,

Ruach wind and fire.

Silence, divisive silence for the soul,

you whisper...still.

David: The fugitive and the Shepherd

Read Psalm 23

Psalm 23 provides comfort for so many people and yet as we read the poetic words, we perhaps forget that this is a Psalm where David was on the run for his life. The Negev desert is not a welcoming place and it certainly doesn't have much lush green grass to lie upon. As the fugitive David ekes out his various dried rations and runs from cave to cave, we hear of someone who has a banquet laid before them that they can eat in front of an enemy.

- How can circumstances overwhelm us?
- What do we learn from David who looks beyond circumstance to God?
- How do we turn our current experience of lockdown and the pandemic to one of prayer and praise?

David goes through various phases of being broken and restored. After the triumph over Goliath, David's ascension to King is difficult as a jealous King Saul rages. A victorious king who has led a nation in battles is suddenly caught out by the attractive Bathsheba bathing. Overcome by desire, he beds Bathsheba and her husband is rubbed out on the front line. His child with Bathsheba dies and David's grief turns to joy at the birth of Solomon.

David's own son plots against him but the glorious reign of Solomon approaches. Amidst the joy, triumphs and tragedy we see emerge a picture of God's faithfulness and a passionate man of faith who is all too fallible.

- How does tracking our lifetimes reflect God's faithfulness?

- How does reflecting on our life's timeline help us to 'pick up the pieces' as we reflect on this current time?

Time for Prayer.

Psalm 23

Merciless desert,
oven heat in the day,
plummeting cold at night,
the constant search for water.

Shrunk in a cave,
the shepherd courtier sleeps.
He wakes at first light,
looks over his dry rations.

Another day to run and hide,
where is home?
Restless in resting,
hopes and dreams deferred.

And yet ...
The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want,
He leads me beside still waters.