

All age – Emotional Rollercoaster

Welcome

I hope that you've been having a lovely Easter period. I am here today to remind you that we are actually still in the middle of the overall time of Easter as Pentecost Sunday is just around the corner on the 8th of June.

Pentecost is such a great time to draw us to open our hearts to renew our faith once again as we speak of the Holy Spirit.

The timing of this each year is perfect. The sun has begun to become more of a permanent fixture in the sky, fresh flowers start to bloom and animals start to bear younglings. All of these things added together make it particularly easy to think of being born again and of life anew as we head on into the bright year ahead with a fresh thought of living life in the Spirit and what it means both for us personally and also for all of the people around us.

But Pentecost Sunday is actually next month, and before we jump on into this time of great invigoration and excitement that so naturally comes along with talk of the Holy Spirit. I ask you. Is there anything that we've missed? Anything that we might not have thought much about or even skipped over entirely?...

Well, in a way. YES.

I think that it's safe to say that we all know the roundabout story of our Lord and saviour, Jesus?
Yes?

He was: Born

He Lived

He Taught

He Sacrificed

He Died

He Rose

and He is Living...

But how many of us know or think about the time He spent with us here on earth after the resurrection? First of all, can anybody tell me how long it was that He spent on Earth between resurrection and ascension? Let me tell you now, that during those 40 days, a really crazy amount of (for want of a better word) "stuff" happened. Lots of "Stuff" happened.

And I tell you what. When you add all of these events together, it really helps us to set the scene for and understand where the apostles find themselves spiritually, physically and emotionally at the beginning of the book of Acts as we head towards Pentecost.

With that being that case, I feel that now is a perfect time for us to try and do some unpacking. I want us to come together now and try our best to understand the mindset of the Apostles.

Try and imagine yourself not in their shoes, but in their sandals and think from a different perspective of what a life with Jesus looks like.

Living alongside Him. Seeing Him perform miracles. Hearing Him preach.

All sounds pretty fantastic, right? But was it? Is it?

A lot of people like to combine both the Gospel of Luke and book of Acts together. Can anybody tell me why?... as they were both written by Luke. That's right.

Luke's Gospel is similar to the other 3 Gospels in that it focuses on and tells us the story of the life of Jesus and his time with us here on earth.

Can anyone name the other 3 for me? Matthew, Mark and John.

The Gospels tell us of the Life of Jesus, His teachings, His mercy and His sacrifice.

I'm pretty sure that by now, we all know a great deal about what happened during Jesus's time with us here on earth. The famous accounts of incredible happenings.

Can some of you name me some Miracles recorded in the Bible?people raised back to life, blind made to see and lame made to walk among many other miracles. Great.

As John puts it in his Gospel, “these are just a few of the miracles performed.” John theorises that, the whole world would not have enough room to hold the number of books that could be written recording the wonders that Jesus performed.

But what about afterwards? What about the 40 days between resurrection and ascension? And what about how the apostles would have felt?

What was it, what is it like to be a follower of Christ?

Have you all heard of the 5 stages of grief? Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance I promise you now that the 5 stages of grief pale in comparison for how the apostles must have felt.

Who here likes rollercoasters? Well, put on your imagination caps and strap in. Today, were hopping onto a rollercoaster of emotion as we journey through those 40 days.

We spend so much of our time focusing on Jesus himself and rightly so. Isn't He just amazing?! But what for the poor apostles, the disciples, the followers of Christ. Today, this is exactly what we're going to do. Let's take the time to look at the end of each Gospel and piece together what exactly the disciples experienced and how we might have felt.

The first two Gospels that we're going to look at do end pretty abruptly so it is hard to draw a lot of detail from them, but we're still given enough.

We begin with...

Matthew.

Matthew ends very swiftly. We see the 2 Mary's head to look over the tomb. There had been a large tremble upon the ground as an angel came down to move the stone out the way and the angel's appearance had caused the guards to pass out. The angel then greets the Mary's, tells them Jesus has risen and to tell the others that they will all see Him again.

Jesus then appears before them and tells them to go tell the others.

After this, if we quickly breeze over the mention of the Roman guards who are paid to fabricate a story of Jesus's body being moved and hidden in order to trick people and we head straight to the mountain where we see Jesus's reappearance to others in the “Great commission”. During the great commission, we get a clear understanding from Jesus as to who He was.

Jesus proclaims Himself as King, saying in verse that 18 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” He then commands His disciples to go out and to continue His work as we get to verse 19 19a “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” reminding us that ALL can join the Kingdom. There isn't a special select few to leave to God to pick and choose but anyone from anywhere has the free gift of life waiting if they should chose to accept it.

Continuing from where we left off in verse 19 and following on into verse 20, Jesus tells us to do this by “19b baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything” He has commanded us. He then finishes briefly with words of comfort for us all, saying 20b “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” resonating back to the old testament where He is described as “Immanuel” (God with us).

Although the ending of Matthew is fairly concise, it leaves us with a really strong message and clear instruction of what to do. Next, we head to...

Mark.

Incredibly, Mark ends even more abruptly than Matthew. Really, there is little surprise about this as after all, Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. I don't think it could have been ended any more abruptly if it tried.

If we were to follow the early manuscripts then, we simply see the women head up to the tomb to anoint the body. Then, when they look up, they see the stone already rolled away and an angel standing by the empty tomb. Due to this, they were very afraid.

That is it. Talk about a cliff hanger?!

Even if we do take the later manuscripts which we all have and include verses 9-20, Marks account is still very quick. Mary isn't believed, Jesus briefly appears before a couple of individuals (presumably Cleopas and the unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus) but we don't get any detail of their encounter and they are also not believed.

Jesus then appears before the 11 and rebukes them for their lack of faith and not having believed the sightings.

Although extremely brief, the end of Mark leaves us with the same resounding message as Matthew. He once again tells us "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." He then speaks of signs that will accompany those who are baptised and believe and then makes a relatively swift return to heaven.

John.

John gives us a far longer, much more detailed and loving look than the first two. We see the tomb found empty, Mary runs to Peter and John to tell them and they run back to the tomb. John beats Peter yet he waits to enter. When Peter arrived, he went in immediately and I love this because it shows his desperation and love for Jesus even after having denied Him three times. When Peter had entered, John followed him in. John saw and believed.

The two disciples then go home, yet Mary (Magdalene) remains outside the tomb, crying. Longing to know where Jesus's body is. As she bends to look into the tomb, she sees 2 angels, seated where the body would have been. They share and exchange and I can only imagine the anguish in her voice as she tries to find out where His body is. As Mary turns, she sees yet another figure. a man who she thinks is a gardener. The man, she doesn't realise is Jesus and understandably so. I mean, judgment is so easily clouded when you're overflowing with just raw emotion. But isn't it great that of all types of people that she could have seen Jesus to be, it was a gardener. A real throwback to the beginning of creation. God's time with Adam and with Eve, spent walking through the garden of Eden. Creator and carer of all things.

She asks, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will get Him". It isn't until Jesus says "Mary" that she realises with an exclamation of "Rabboni!", that This is her Jesus, stood before her.

Mary is told "Do not hold on to me". Jesus commands her to go tell the disciples 17b "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God".

Later on, Jesus then visits the disciples in the locked house. After proving Himself by showing His hands, He breaths on them, giving them the Holy Spirit and says 22b "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins will be forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. "

Jesus then makes an extra appearance for Thomas as he was not there the first time and takes the extra step to prove Himself by allowing Thomas to actually put his hands upon the nail wounds before professing that 29 "You have believed because you have seen; Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

The book of John then finishes with Jesus on the bank by the sea of Galilee where we see Him call over to a few of the disciples who were fishing and this interaction lead to Him reinstating Peter as He asked him if he loved Him 3 times over.

Finally, we have...

Luke.

Luke, again differs from the first 2 Gospels. We do get the same details that we've already been given, but instead of keeping it short and sweet, simply ending at the resurrection and ascension. Luke gives us this beautifully depicted story of other things that happened within the 40-day period of Jesus's return to this earth. This is spread between the final Chapter in Luke and the 1st chapter of Acts.

So far, we have only really scratched the surface. Simply recounted words written on a page. Once again, heard historical accounts that we've read many a time before. Yet, the Disciples have been on a real rollercoaster of emotion. And as we dig a little deeper, if we take the time to stop. To Breathe. To put ourselves in their sandals we can easily unfold an array of emotions and how they would have felt.

So I invite you now to take a look with me at what sort of things they would have experienced.

we've just had our Saviour who we love, admire, worship and hold in great esteem with every fibre of our being be ripped away and crucified. How do you think they've felt?

Angry, Sad, Hurt?

How about...

Abandoned.? Yes, even though we're definitely not, It can be easy to feel abandoned by God at times.

Jesus told them exactly what was going to happen. He told them that he would rise on the third day, but I guess people have a habit of either not listening properly or maybe it was a case of just not being able to think straight when feeling greatly distressed.

Jesus was Lazarus's best friend and Jesus Himself Deeply loved their whole family. Martha, Mary and Lazarus. So Lazarus knew Jesus very well. Lazarus had both seen and heard of the great miracles and wonders that Jesus was capable of, yet when it came to Lazarus's time of need. Where was God?

The family were distraught as their dear Lazarus passed away. It would be fair to assume that they may have felt some slight anger or resentment among their feeling of abandonment. Maybe confusion. How could Jesus have done all these great things for strangers and outcasts but when it comes to close friends, He is nowhere to be seen.

You know when your parents or your partner tells you that your tea is ready. They're just about to plate up but you're busy finishing something up, so you finish off and then begin the next task. If you're Ed, you might be in the garage working on your car, Chris might be at the lathe crafting some beautiful poles like the ones that adorn our stage here when it's not in use. Maybe you're playing on your games console and you say "let me finish this match first" but then start another round, or you're asked to tidy your room and you say "I'm on it" then it takes you 2 days to start.

Well Jesus did the ultimate version of this. It took Him 2 whole days from being told of Lazarus knocking on death's door until He eventually started making His way over. Obviously, He came through in the end, but there was still that moment for the family of feeling left out in the cold.

A journey with Jesus is not always an easy one.

So. Jesus has seemingly gone and the Disciples feel this same abandonment. They all split and run in different directions with only one disciple reportedly staying to see Him nailed upon the cross. Can anyone tell me who that was? Yes. John stayed to witness Christ on the cross.

With a feeling of abandonment, it can be a very confusing time and leave us not knowing which way to look, let alone head towards. Immediately after this, the Disciples while already feeling sad, Angry, Abandoned and confused are then alerted to the fact that Jesus's tomb is now empty and they get another emotion or two to top up their already overflowing pallet.

Disbelief and Dismay. What has happened? Where is His body? Who would do this? They say he is risen and walking among us. But where???

Well, they go and get their confirmation by visiting to tomb. Some feel acceptance, like John: we read, "as John saw, he believed". But others still felt uncertainty...

Great, we now have some belief, but we still have the burning question... WHERE IS HE? (show slide)

Get ready guys because He's right there at, his tomb. And this is where we meet another emotion or two...

Desperation. The begging for answers. We see the desperation of Mary. She longs to know where it is that the body has been moved to. She cries to the 2 angles, and then to the "Gardener" behind her. Finally, we get some good emotion. How do you think Mary felt upon the realisation that it was Jesus right before her?

Overwhelmed with Joy, Love, Relief?

Finally! We're getting some good emotions again. But then, immediately she is given an instruction which must have been so hard for her to follow. "Do not hold onto me"

Imagine, Mary falling to her knees as she declares "Rabboni", thinking her trauma is over yet then being told that she must let go.

Whether it is through death or the end of a relationship, I think we can probably all relate to Mary in some way. Understanding how hard it can be to let someone go.

Don't get me wrong though, this isn't to say that we're jumping straight back in to bad emotions again. Although it can be extremely difficult, there is great comfort to be found in being able letting someone go, and I'm sure that having seen and heard from Jesus once again, Mary felt a great amount of relief from her heartbreak.

After this, we come to the disciples who out of another emotion (fear) had locked themselves away from Jewish leaders. But when Jesus joined them and showed his hands and side, they were “overjoyed”!

Their feeling of relief was so powerful that they had all of their doubts, dread and anguish wash away. I’d imagine that even the fear they had of the Jewish leaders left their minds as they celebrated the return of the Saviour.

So, we’re now back on the road to Emmaus. As we saw before, Jesus didn’t allow them to know who it was they were speaking to. He took his time to walk with them, talk with them, speak of their emotions and teach them, re-grounding their faith and understanding in scripture as he did so.

I think that this will have provided great comfort to Cleopas and his companion as they travelled. As we have seen and will see with the others, Jesus’s immediate disclosure is a great distraction and he clearly needed to staple into them a clear understanding of scripture.

I mean, this just shows us what an incredible God we really have, doesn’t it? Who here has worked in a school or a teaching environment? It can be hard enough to teach people in regular times, let alone gather their willingness to listen while they’re under great duress of all these emotions. But Jesus uses this time, and reinvigorates their love and desire for the truth and for God.

We see this as they’re left astonished in realisation saying “Were our hearts not burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened scriptures to us?” (a showing of adoration). Having said this. I don’t think that all emotions felt from here on out would have been good ones...

The next disciple we see is Thomas. He was told by the others what had been going on but was in denial and said that “unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” So the Jesus proved himself to Thomas...

Yes. Thomas will have been pleased to see Jesus return and to know the truth, but surely as Jesus then stated “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Thomas must have felt Dejected, Deflated and a little bit of a buffoon for ever doubting his Lord.

Finally, we reach our Last disciple. Someone else who left himself feeling dejected and deflated. One who we see at the end of John and gets an entire chapter to himself.

Not only will Simon/ Peter have felt all these emotions that we’ve already emphasised using the disciples and the others that were close to Jesus, but also a tremendous amount of guilt. That sickening, gut wrenching guilt.

Have you ever been caught in a lie or hurt a friend by mistake or even through a deliberate action that you immediately regretted. Well... can anyone tell me what Simon Peter did before the crucifixion?

He denied Jesus 3 times. And this brings us back around to today’s reading.

John 21:1-19

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. ⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus Reinstates Peter

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

You know. We've been through an awful lot just now trying to empathise with the disciples. I truly found it exhausting to write today's sermon and exhausting each time I've read through it. There's a lot to take in and a lot to feel.

At the end of John, the forgiveness, the grace shown to Peter the relief and the feeling of not deserving any of it all, really epitomizes this life with Christ. Norman gave us a really great quote through our lent reading. "There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less."

Only He is worthy, yet He has chosen us to be saved through Him.

He kept Lazarus waiting, He kept the disciples waiting. They saw Him teach, they saw Him perform miracles and once filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they went on to carry out those miracles themselves and would later go on to die for His name's sake.

For us, the same can be said. If you decided to follow Jesus because you wanted an easy ride through life then I'm sorry to break your delusions. Following Jesus isn't always the easiest thing to do, but don't worry. Oh Boy is it worth it?!

We still see miracles to this day; we see the power of prayer and feel the Holy spirit move through us and others being saved.

Jesus gave us a promise. He will return for us at the end of days. He is now keeping us waiting. He kept Lazarus waiting but came through for him in the end.

He kept the Disciples waiting and He came through for them.

He is now keeping us waiting for His glorious return and evidence would suggest that He isn't in the habit of letting people down.

So, while we wait, no matter how tough situations may seem, no matter the trials you go through. Put your trust in our LORD God Almighty and follow the lasting message of each Gospel.

"Go out and share the good news, make disciples of all nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teach them to obey everything that we have been commanded."