

New Life

Good morning everyone.

- 1) Although it can still be a pretty daunting thing to do, I feel so blessed to be able to preach.

It is such an incredible honour to be provided with this great space, and even greater company in which I'm able to stand before you all and either reiterate to you the details of our incredible, wonderful, amazing and loving God, or maybe you're just hearing about Him for the first time.

Either way, to be able to share with you all, the things that He has done for us, is doing for us and will do for us is something that I never expected to do with my life and I pray that it is something that I never get used to doing.

That it always remains just as special and equally as daunting.

- 2) I love to preach at all times throughout the year, but I think that this time of year (particularly May) has to be by far my favourite, and this is for many reasons.

I know that there is Christmas where we celebrate the birth of Jesus and Easter when we celebrate Him defeating death and raising to life, but there is just something seemingly so special about this time of year.

We're really touching the height spring right now. This brilliant cross over between winter and summer.

- 3) Overall, spring itself probably isn't my favourite season.

Spring is slow and laborious.

The start is cold, wet and unpredictable.

Much like these people behind me, you get deceived.

Maybe you're deceived into thinking you'll be safe to hang washings outside in April, only to have to dash around in the hail to bring it in like my mum did last month.

While she did that, we all gave her support in the form of laughter through the dining room window.

Perhaps you've shaken the dust off your shorts that have sat in your wardrobe since September, only for you to go out for the day and then wonder if you'll ever feel your legs again after the sharp wind has gotten to them.

While you were out and your legs were freezing off, you somehow still managed to get a little sunburnt just a as a little reminder to buy some sunscreen.

Sunscreen that you'll not actually end up using for a month and a half because as Andy told us at Christmas, it's statistically more likely to snow at Easter than it is Christmas.

All of this topsy turviness is a pain and it just seems to go on forever.

But... As we edge out of this uncertainty of spring in March and April, we push towards the height of spring with...

- 4) Marvellous May.

we see this fantastic beauty start to bloom, where it is almost impossible not to draw close to God as all things really start to shine to show how great His creation is, as we see an absolute peak of new life in every area and a breath of freshness seems to engulf us all.

- 5) Our gardens begin to team with life. We move from hardy rooted food to fresh vibrant greens and the first juicy fruits begin to ripen.

Does anyone here grow in their gardens or allotments? What sort of things are you starting to yield now?

- 6) Asparagus, spring onions, new potatoes, peas and rhubarb will be here. Strawberries will just about be beginning to appear as will cherries, gooseberries and one of my favourites to smell whilst out walking.
- 7) Wild Garlic!
- 8) Flowers begin to bloom, and the landscape is transformed into a vibrant range of colours with bluebells, hyacinths, cherry blossom trees and tulips of every colour imaginable all appearing throughout the country.

And who can forget these beauties...

- 9) (delightful dandelions)?
- 10) Of course, all of this fresh surface level produce encourages the animals out of hibernation as they now have more easily reachable food sources available to them, and so the great British wildlife begins to emerge and in turn, they reproduce and their younglings are born or hatch.

11) I have a little quiz for you now.

I want you to guess baby animals and creatures that I show you. These are all things typically found in May.

I want to know what the animal depicted is the baby of, what its actual name is, for example, a baby horse would be a... foal.

and then I'll tell you an interesting fact about each.

Some are easy and some are a little more difficult.

...And, Norman. I expect you to get all 10 here.

Can I have a few young people down at the front with me to give your guesses down the microphone?

So, what is this the baby of and what is it they called?

12) 1. baby ducks.

13) Ducklings. They're born without waterproof feathers.

14) 2. baby rabbits.

15) Kittens. They're born completely blind and hairless

16) 3. roe deer.

17) Fawn. The deer have a very peculiar and unique breeding system. They regularly mate in July and the egg is fertilised then, but the egg lays dormant and isn't implanted until January so that the baby doesn't grow before there is food ready for it in spring.

18) 4. Baby fox.

19) Kit, Cub or pup. They are raised and live in family groups where not only parents but older siblings from previous years will help raise them.

20) 5. Baby Douglass.

- 21) Dylan (Thing 1) and Oscar (Thing 2). Both of these strange creatures were born exactly a week apart, one on the 5th of May, the other on the 12th.
- 22) 6. baby swan.
- 23) Cygnet. They often get to ride on their mothers back for safety, warmth and to save energy.
- 24) 7. baby dragonflies.
- 25) Nymph. Technically they're not born in May. The baby Nymphs are typically born in August and will live for about 5 years underwater before coming out in May as beautiful dragonflies. One interesting fact. The Nymphs breath through their bums.
- 26) 8. baby hedgehog.
- 27) Hoglet. Hoglets are born with about 100 white spines but these are hidden under a membrane for the first 48 hour to ensure the mother gets protected during childbirth.

Norman. These last two are of the avian variety so I'm looking to you for these last two.

- 28) 9. Baby Cuckoo.
- 29) Chick. Cuckoo chicks grow more rapidly than other chicks and the parents struggle to keep up with their growing appetite.
- 30) 10. Baby blackbirds.
- 31) fledglings. Apparently, blackbird fledglings often leave the nest at 2 week which is before they can fly and spend up to 5 days in the undergrowth.

Did anyone get 10/10?

Did anyone die from a cuteness overload? Great stuff.

So, May is teeming with new life, and what better time for it?

May.

Immediately following Easter and most importantly, the resurrection,

- 32) Which is described in this way by Paul in Romans 6:4.
Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father so that we too may walk in newness of life.

And so, as we see all of this new life appear before us, how can we not be brought to ponder and rejoice our own opportunity at new life that we have been given through Christ.

And I say opportunity as this new life isn't simply a given.

Yes, this new life is FREELY given to us by God, through Christ, but as with any gift, it is something we must choose to receive.

Let me give you an example here.

Sandia, I have a free gift here for you.

Please come to the front.

I have this free gift of these lovely mushrooms for you.

do you want them?

no?

But you know that mushrooms will make you big and strong.

Mushrooms are a key source of Vitamin D and so they provide a strong immune system, but also enhance brain health which would help you make quicker key decisions when you're playing on your football team.

Still don't want them?

All these benefits, but You just don't like the taste?

What if I told you that all you have to do is believe in me and then when you accept this free gift of mushrooms, you'll find that the flavour has really changed and now they taste incredible.

Once you've tried them while believing in me, you'll realise how amazing they are. You'll reach this point and it's so great that you can't even imagine ever living life without this knowledge?

This is similar to what God offers to us.

This new life in Him.

But just like this bag of mushrooms, it is up to you, whether or not you are willing to accept this new life that is being offered up to you, to be born again, in Christ.

Accepting this gift of new life can seem pretty scary to your fleshly body and may seem counterintuitive, because if you aren't already born of the spirit, you'll definitely see it as going against your urges and desires, similar to eating that food that you really don't like.

But if you do accept it, and are born again, you'll never want to go back.

33) This guy here is a comedian and podcast host. I won't tell you his name because I'm not sure that his comedy is a great thing to endorse in church (particularly at an all age). but he was where I drew some inspiration for today's reading of John 5:1-6.

I'm quite backwards in how I write my sermons. I don't normally like to pick a verse and build a sermon around that.

What I normally do is, I'll usually decide a bit of a theme, (like for this one, I was hoping to talk about sowing seeds).

I pray and start to write and then the Holy Spirit usually completely changes direction from where I wanted to go and gives me something different to talk on.

So I'll continue on writing and then while writing, I'll find a verse that is right for the sermon.

And this is what I've done for today. I've nearly finished writing the whole sermon and was going to leave it at Romans 6:4, when I remember seeing this video where this comedian mentioned John 5.

He had this to say:

34) "I've been starting to feel something different.

I was looking on this Bible and there's this story called John 5 and it's about this guy who was at these pools and Jesus is at the pools and it's in Bethesda, and there's this sick man there and he's been sick for a long time. And Jesus asks him; Do you want to be healed?

He asks him. Do you want to be healed?

35) And that's a crazy question because, you know, if I get healed, then I'm different.

You know, if somebody gets healed, then they have a new story. So that's just been something I've been having to ask myself. It's like, do I want to be healed?

Do I really want something different?

And sometimes, a lot of the answer is no. I don't.

36) I don't know if I'm scared. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I don't want to do what it takes, I can't even tell what it is.

It's hard for me. Some of the stuff is a little bit hard for me to say, I think.

I don't know why. But I think I want a new story."

37) I love this. What a great way of looking at this account from the beginning of John 5. Not simply as another miraculous healing that Jesus has performed on one of those who has been waiting their whole life to be made right, but to actually hear what Jesus is asking.

Do you want to be healed?

So...

Do you want to be healed?

Do you want to accept this gift of being born again?

Like the comedian, have you been feeling something different, a calling to change your life, to turn from the old and accept the new?

He says "I think I want a new story", but let me tell you that it is not a new story, it is simply a new chapter.

38) And the best thing is, it is only chapter one.

Although all of the time leading up to this moment may seem like it has been forever.

That was simply the prologue of the book.

Just as in this image behind me, you have an absolute heap of writing ahead of you and as is the case in our Bibles, the text is written in this teeny tiny font to fit in as much as possible.

39) Imagine that this line is where your time on earth ends, you then have all this time here remaining, and I have deliberately cut off the bottom of the book because regardless of which path you choose, whether that be in the newness of life being reborn of the spirit or in separation from God and all things good, it will go on for eternity.

You know right now if you are being called, if like the comedian, you're feeling something different. You feel like you should turn away from the things you've been doing and live your life right with God.

So, what is stopping you?

40) Some of you might be waiting for the right time.

Waiting for the perfect moment. For everything to line up, be in place and be right for you before you take that step to committing yourself to the Lord.

Let me ask you something.

Did Jesus wait until you were perfect and free from sin before dying for you on that cross?

No.

As Romans 5:8 says: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"

Jesus died for us while we were still sinners.

You don't have to be perfect before coming to Christ. Come to Him with that baggage that has been weighing you down, lay your burdens at the cross and He will give you rest.

If you're waiting for the time to be perfect, let me tell you. The time will probably never be perfect, so stop waiting, make that time now.

I will tell you something though. If you do accept this life that is being offered to you. I can't promise you that it is an easy ride. That all of a sudden, every one of life's problems are going to go away, you'll become a millionaire, never have to work another day in your life, you'll never face any illness or hardship. No. in fact, quite the opposite is true.

41) and if we think back to this little section of book, here while we're alive on this earth. That section is going to be filled hardship, and challenges.

But God will be there with you, through them all.

42) While we're on the topic of books, let me tell you about the writings of this man.

Do any of you know who this is?

This, is C.S Lewis. He was the writer of a very popular fantasy book series.

Do any of you younger people know what series it was?

43) The Chronicles of Narnia.

Well, C.S Lewis actually became one of the most influential Christian thinkers of the 20th century. But he wasn't always a Christian.

In fact, he spent a large amount of his formative life as a staunch atheist who actively tried to disprove Christianity and reason it away.

He viewed faith as uninspiring and a collection of myths, preferring pagan mythology before his intellectual journey led him to become a Christian in his early 30's.

The main reason that it took him so long to become Christian was because he sadly lost his mother at the age of 9 and so he constantly wrestled with the question of "how can a good God let evil happen?" this lead him to live his formative life as an atheist.

Eventually though after a good amount of debate with friends such as J R R Tolkien (most widely known for being the author of The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit), C.S Lewis came to believe in Christ, and not only did he believe, but he became born again and went all in with his new found faith and wrote tons of books about and defending the Christian faith.

44) The reason that I am telling you about C.S Lewis is because he writes about this new life and being born again in his book "Meer Christianity".

C.S Lewis puts the experience of accepting this new life that we're offered in this way:

45) C.S Lewis says: "Imagine yourself as a living house". Are we all there? Do you have your imagination caps on? Good.

46) "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised.

But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the

one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

What a fantastic picture that Lewis paints for us here. A near perfect analogy of what it is like to be shaped when we come into this new life and are born again.

And this is something that NEEDS to happen.

47) In John 3, a Pharisee named Nicodemus snuck out in the night to meet with Jesus so that the others wouldn't know that he was meeting up with Him.

Nicodemus said to Jesus, "'Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied to Nicodemus by saying, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

Now, Nicodemus was confused by this. He asked, "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

So, Jesus Himself tells us, we MUST be born again.

Thinking back to the picture that C.S. Lewis painted for us where he said; God is building a palace and He intends to come and live in it Himself.

48) Do you remember this big old temple that I showed you last time I preached?

Remember how big and impressive it was?

How much complexity and grandeur it had with each individual section?

well, that temple pales in comparison to the building that you are to be made into. That temple was built by mere human hands. You are to be rebuilt by God Himself.

What of your living house?

Is your living house a tidy place, or do you have drains that need clearing, leaks in the roof. Did you put your toys away or are they left out to be tripped over?

I'm sure that there might well be jobs that you know need doing.

But here is the great thing.

When we speak of Lewis's analogy here. Who is it that comes in to fix up the living house?

Who is it that comes to finish those jobs that you know need to be done?

Is it left for you to do? No!

49) God Himself is the architect. He is at the door. He is knocking and wants you to let Him in so that He can get to work in you!

Don't you want to be free from the burden of knowing there are things that you want changing but know that you'll never get round to them.

Those things that every time you assess them, they seem to have gotten bigger and so you back away and leave them for another day.

All you need to do is go answer that door. Allow God in and let Him get to work in you.

Acknowledge that personal sin in your life, repent of it. Truly believe that Jesus Christ died for those sins and rose again. Confess Him as your Lord and saviour, and ask the Holy Spirit to come guide and transform you!

50) Even if you've been going to church your whole life, you are called to do this.

I ask you, to ask yourself.
When were you born again?

I'll paraphrase here, but Billy Graham once put it this way,

51) "Your mother and father could be the best born again Christians in the world, but that doesn't make you a born-again Christian.

You could have been born in a garage, but that doesn't make you a car.

Similarly, there are many people out in the world and probably even some in here today that might think they're a Christian because they were born into a Christian home.

Well, they're not. That isn't how it works.

52) You might have decided to take a reformational approach. Be seeking to heal some of these things yourself.

You yourself are trying to make this nice cosy cottage for God to come and live in.

You might be thinking, I'll turn over a new leaf, I can do this myself.

If I start going to church every once in a while, if I read my bible a bit, try and live some parts of a good Christian life, I can earn myself some righteousness through my own works.

But we read in Isaiah 64:6

"All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

Continuing with Billy Graham. He grew up on a farm and so he put it this way.

53) It's like taking a pig inside and giving it a good old scrub in the bath to make him shiny and clean, you've given him head and shoulders to stop dandruff, lathered him in your favourite aftershave or perfume to get him smelling good, put a lovely bow on him, and then presented him in the lounge as a new pig,

54) a perfect gentleman.

But, when all is said and done, you leave the door open and the pig is left with the choice of staying inside

and being a clean but pretty strange house pet, or go roll in that enticing mud and stick its head in the trough full of rotten fruit.

Where's that pig going?

Yes. He's going right back out the door.

Why?

Because you've merely altered his appearance, you never changed his heart, only the outside has been changed, and that is the case with some of you.

55) We've been brought up in a Christian home and acted a certain way because that's how your parents brought you up or that's what you think would be expected of you.

But to truly be born again, you need to ask God for the Holy Spirit to enter you, to transform you, be born again and have your heart changed.

to no longer act like a Christian but to be truly made one.

For God to move in and turn you into His mansion, His dwelling place.

And so what if you have decided to answer the door, allow God in and be born again?

If you come to Christ. If you make the decision to give yourself to Christ, who are you in this new life?

I'll leave that to you to tell us.

If you have been born again. If you have experienced this radical conversion in your life. I'd love to give you the opportunity to come to take the microphone and briefly tell us who you were before you knew Jesus personally, how you acted, how you thought and the things you would do and how you have been changed and who you are now.

We'll have a few of you speak and then I'll invite you to end in prayer.

If you've been feeling that calling on your life, if you've felt convicted by the message today or maybe from Beth last week but put off coming to Christ because you felt too nervous or didn't feel like you were good enough for God but want to now, I'd like to invite you to pray this prayer with me.

I'll put the prayer on screen momentarily for you to read and make sure it is something that you agree with. Please don't blindly follow the prayer if these words aren't true for you, if this isn't what you desire.

56) Let us pray:

Our mighty and powerful God.

I have heard You knocking, and I open my door to You.

It is with a humble heart that I ask You to fill me with life anew.

To be born again of Your wondrous Holy Spirit.

Come fill me, O Lord. Take my life and make it wholly Yours.

Change me and transform me.

Make me Your mansion; come, fix me, and live in me eternally.

Everything I have, and all that I am. Let it be Yours.

In Your Holy name, I ask this, Lord.

Amen.

