

## Thought for the Week - Easter 2020

**A very Happy Easter to you all!**

It's a pleasure to be able to talk to you again as we celebrate the most significant date in the Christian calendar – the day when our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Apologies that I was not able to do a Thought for the Week last Sunday, but, as I am sure most of you know, I unexpectedly spent a little time in hospital during the previous week. I am well on the road to recovery, and although I am not officially “back to work” yet, I did not want to let Easter pass without sharing some thoughts with you.

It's amazing what a difference three days can make! Last Monday week I suffered some chest pains and attended the Antrim Area Hospital Emergency Department late in the evening. I was seen very quickly and although the initial ECG did not show up anything, a blood test did, so they admitted me overnight. On Tuesday morning the consultant decided that I should go the Royal Victoria Hospital for an angiogram (dye test). I was taken to the RVH on Wednesday morning and by lunchtime had had the procedure and an angioplasty with a stent fitted to one coronary artery (the others were OK). I was then discharged on Thursday morning. Everything done and sorted within three days, so I certainly have nothing to complain about regarding our NHS. Indeed, I could have nothing but praise for the treatment and care that I received in both hospitals, especially considering the pressures under which the NHS is working at the moment.

And of course, those three days are going to make a difference. While it is good that I did not suffer a severe heart attack and needed only a small procedure, I am aware that I will have to make some changes in my lifestyle and my diet (*Killead & Loanends ladies, you will have to stop making such delicious tray bakes!*). Those three days have also reminded me that I am getting older and that I cannot take the very good health which I have enjoyed up until now for granted and even that life on this earth will not go on for ever.

With that thought in mind, I want to turn our thoughts to another three days that made a difference. Indeed, they were the most significant three days in all of human history. You can read about them in the final chapters of all the four Gospels in the Bible, and, although I am sure the story is familiar to you, I would encourage you to take out your bible and read through it again. The three days began on a Friday long, long ago in Jerusalem when Jesus, the Son of God, was condemned to death and nailed to a Roman execution cross on a hill just outside Jerusalem. His friends and his followers thought it was the end of the world – the end of everything they had hoped for in Jesus. He was going to be the long-awaited Messiah who would restore the kingdom of Israel, just like the good old days of King David. But now it had come to nothing as they saw him die a cruel death like a common criminal. They were afraid of the future – uncertain of their own destiny. But what they didn't know was that God had a plan in it all. What they thought was a defeat was actually a victory! Yes, Jesus had to die, his blood had to be shed to pay the price for all our human sin. He stood in our place, taking upon himself the penalty for our sin. But death could not hold the innocent Son of God and so, on the third day, he rose again. And in doing so he established not an earthly kingdom like Israel of old where they had to go through regular ritual sacrifices to atone for their sins, but an eternal one in which we all can share by putting our faith in trust in Jesus who died once and for all, the complete and sufficient sacrifice to enable God to forgive us all our sins, give us a whole new life while here on earth for a little while, and them for all eternity in heaven with him.

So, although three days last week have made a difference for me – and I must confess that at times I was afraid and uncertain of what the future would hold, I was reassured by the fact that those three days

recorded in the gospels have made an even greater difference in my life. I know that whatever this life may have in store for me, be it long or short, because I trust in Jesus, I can say with Paul *“I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”* (2 Timothy 1:12). Yes, I can celebrate what the wonderful NHS staff were able to do for me over three days, and I have an even deeper appreciation of their dedication and service; but even greater than that, I can celebrate what my Saviour did for me over the three days between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Despite all that is going on across the world today with the coronavirus pandemic, despite the strain it is putting on our medical professions, despite the inconvenience we are all having to put up with, we have something **great** to celebrate the Easter season. It was great to be able to join our neighbours on Thursday evening to clap and cheer for the NHS Staff and others who help us, but we can raise an even greater shout and cheer for our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Rev. William Sangster was the influential minister of the Methodist Westminster Central Hall in London during and after the years of the Second World War. Later in life he contracted a progressive muscular atrophy that gradually paralysed him. On his last Easter Sunday in 1960 his daughter visited him. Unable to speak, he scribbled a message for her with his stiffened fingers; *“How terrible to wake up at Easter and have no voice with which to shout, ‘He is risen!’”* But then he added, *“But far worse to have a voice and not want to shout.”*

We may not be able to come together in our churches and shout or sing together *“He is risen!”* on this particular Easter Sunday (but we can, of course, still do so on our own or in our families) – but how much worse to have a voice and not want to shout!

#### Prayer

*God of Promise and God of Hope, who through your great mercy has granted us new birth through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we praise your wonderful name!*

*God of Glory and God of Might, who through your great power has granted us new strength to endure all things through faith in Christ our risen King, we praise your wonderful name!*

*But Lord, we confess that we are often not the Easter People that we should be, living in the certain knowledge of your great mercy and love.*

*Distracted by the world around us we wander off the path, we fail to hear your voice, and we hide our faith when it is challenged.*

*Forgive us, we pray and restore the love that we first had, a faith that can endure. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you, Lord, and with you at our right hand we shall not be shaken.*

*We pray for our world and for our land at this time of unprecedented crisis with the coronavirus pandemic. We pray for the leaders of the nations and our own nations. In particular we pray for the recovery of our Prime Minister, Boris Johnston and for those who minister to him at this time. We pray for all those suffering from Covid19 and those who care for them.*

*Lord, although we cannot see it at this time, we know that you have a purpose and a plan in all this, so we leave everything and ourselves in your loving hands and claim the promise that you do work all things together for good to those who love you and are called according to your purpose.*

*In Jesus name, Amen.*

As I close, may I say a very sincere thank you to everyone who has been praying for me, has send cards or phoned their good wishes. It is all very much appreciated. I will be back with you soon.

Please do listen to the longer worship services being provided by the Moderator of the General Assembly and many other churches – details are all on our church websites – [www.killeadpc.org](http://www.killeadpc.org) & [www.loanendspc.org](http://www.loanendspc.org) as well as on our facebook pages.

*A video recording of this thought is available on [www.vimeo.com/406236046](https://www.vimeo.com/406236046)*