



Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, Easter Sunday, 12 April 2020



Introduction and Invitation to Worship:

Good morning to you all! What a wonderful spring day it is: the birds are singing, the daffodils are dancing, and we are all sitting down, heavily, on our seats, 'cos we've eaten too many hot-cross buns for breakfast. It's Easter Sunday! A happy Easter to you all! Turn round and greet whoever you can with a big merry Easter. If you are on your own, choose someone (or as many as you like) and shout a loud 'Happy Easter...' to them by name. Right, that's enough... Now say loudly, **Alleluia, Christ is Risen!** And then repeat even louder: **'He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

What does Easter mean to you? When I (Colin) was a youngster, O so many moons ago, Easter in general meant four things:

- Chocolate eggs ('yummy'!)
- Two weeks of freedom from school!
- The start of the cricket season.
- Warmer days and lighter evenings. I enjoyed playing outside with my friends.

Now I'm older, Easter still remains the best time of year, but I would now include spring flowers (I adore daffodils) and trips out, though I would be happy to give gardening a miss! But more especially, as a Christian, Easter is the best time because of the good news, the fantastic news, the brilliant news of the Resurrection of Jesus. You see, Easter Sunday is **Resurrection Day!** Hallelujah! Hosanna! Hooray!

So, as Christians, we should be walking around today with a spring in our step, a twiddle in our hips (if it breaks out in a dance, so be it, though we might suffer tomorrow as a result!), and a smile on our face. Cast aside the troubles of the world for a day, including the coronavirus, serious though this may be, and let us come 'boldly' into the presence of our God with a heart full of prayer and praise, for this special Lord's Day is truly 'the day which the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it' (Psalm 118.24). And what better way can there be to begin our worship than to sing with gusto that great Easter hymn of Charles Wesley: **Christ the Lord is risen today.** Please stand to sing it, if you are able. Ignore the neighbours, let your voice rip! If they come round and complain, apologise and give 'em the gospel. There's no better day!

Song: *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*

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| 1. Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia! | Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia! |
| 2. Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia! | 3. Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids Him rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened Paradise, Alleluia! |

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| <p>4. Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!</p> | <p>5. Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!
Praise to Thee by both be given, Alleluia!
Thee we greet, in triumph sing, Alleluia!
Hail, our resurrected King: Alleluia</p> |
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Prayer: Blessed are you, Lord God our Saviour, to you be praise and glory and blessing for ever. As once you ransomed your people from Egypt and led them to freedom in the promised land, so now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your risen Son. May we, the first fruits of your new creation, rejoice in this new day you have made, and praise you for your mighty works. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Blessed be God for ever. Amen.

Then let's join in the Lord's Prayer together.

Birthdays: We have three birthdays in this coming week, as far as I'm aware: Morag (13th), Kate (14th) and Tim (18th), so you will have to fit in three names as we sing our birthday song. Here are the words, if you are unsure about them:

<p>Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Morag, Kate and Tim. Happy birthday to you!</p>	<p>Happy birthday to you; Only one will not do; Give your heart to the Saviour, And then you'll have two!</p>	<p>Happy birthday to you, To old friends and new, May God bless you and keep you: Happy birthday to you!</p>
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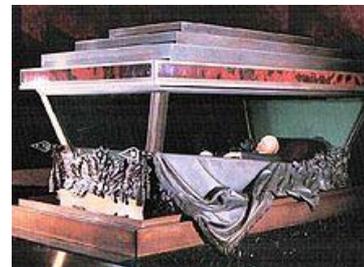
Spot the Main Difference between these Three Tombs



Jesus' Tomb



Muhammad's Tomb



Lenin's Tomb

Answer: Only the tomb in which the body of Jesus was placed is empty. The other two still contain the corpses of the deceased founders. In other words, of all the great religious and political leaders who have ever lived, Jesus alone has been raised to life by God and is now exalted on High as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Memory Text: At this point in our service, I would have had the young people hunting around the chapel in order to find twelve hidden yellow plastic eggs, each containing a numbered piece of paper and a chocolate cream egg for them to eat afterwards. Please remember our youngsters in your prayers: the children of Iona (Kain, Elle, Kiohan, Keegan, Kaiden, Zak, Ciolan, and Keelan), as well as Iona herself; the brothers Nadeem and Kim; Jonny's daughter Millie; Roz's son Jake; and brother and sister Zuzia and Szymon, who sadly haven't been to the chapel so far this year. The numbered sheets would have represented

jig-saw pieces on which you would have seen 12 parts of a famous verse. They are jumbled up here in a table. Can you work out what the verse is?

John	Life	the	said	Chapter 11	I
the	verse 25	am	and	Jesus	Resurrection

If you get stuck, go to the end of the service sheet and you will find the answer. Memorise it and then repeat it to yourself in spoken form three times without looking at the sheets.

Children’s Song – for Grown Ups As Well!: *Happy Day*

It’s a great song to Christ. I love it!

The greatest day in history,
 Death is beaten, you have rescued me.
 Sing it out, Jesus is alive.
 The empty cross, the empty grave,
 Life eternal, you have won the day.
 Shout it out, Jesus is alive,
 He's alive!

When I stand in that place,
 Free at last, meeting face to face,
 I am yours, Jesus, You are mine.
 Endless joy, perfect peace,
 Earthly pain finally will cease.
 Celebrate, Jesus is alive,
 He's alive!

Chorus:

And oh, happy day, happy day!
 You washed my sin away,
 Oh, happy day, happy day!
 I'll never be the same,
 Forever I am changed.

Chorus

O the blood of Jesus
 It washes white as snow
 I'll never be the same
 Forever I am changed
 Oh, the blood of Jesus!

“Happy Day” words & music by Ben Cantelon & Tim Hughes.
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Poem: *The Very Best Morning*

The following poem is based on the accounts of the resurrection in all Four Gospels (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21)

Jesus was gone. his friends were sad
 He died on Friday. It was bad!
 They went to the tomb, just had to go.
 They didn’t yet see but soon would know:
 It was the very best morning!

They wondered how they’d move the stone.
 When they arrived, they weren’t alone.
 An angel bright sat on the rock.
 They shook with fear; they were in shock.
 It was the very best morning!

“Don’t be afraid!” they heard him say.
 “This is a happy, happy day!”
 “He is not here,” the angel said,

“For He has risen from the dead!”
 It was the very best morning!

“It’s true! Come see! Believe! Then go!
 Our God wants everyone to know:
 Christ Jesus is alive today!
 He died; he rose! He lives! Hooray!”
 It was the very best morning!

They hurried off to tell his friends.
 The risen Lord appeared to them.
 “I am alive, not dead, you see:
 Believe – don’t doubt. It’s really me!”
 It was the very best morning!

“Don’t be afraid,” he said to them.
As they fell down to worship him.
“Go tell my friends,” they heard him say,
“For they will see me yet today!”
It was the very best morning!

This story that I’ve told is true!
Christ Jesus died for me and you.
He died to take our sins away
And rose again on Easter Day!
It was the very best morning.

Hymn: *The Head that Once Was Crowned with Thorns*

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow.

The highest place that heaven affords
Is his by sovereign right:
The King of kings, and Lord of lords,
He reigns in perfect light.

The joy of all who dwell above,
The joy of all below,
To whom he manifests his love
And grants his name to know.

To them the cross, with all its shame,
With all its grace, is given:
Their name, an everlasting name,
Their joy, the joy of heaven.

They suffer with their Lord below;
They reign with him above,
Their profit and their joy to know
The mystery of his love.

The cross he bore is life and health,
Though shame and death to him:
His people's hope, His people's wealth,
Their everlasting theme.

Bible Reading: Luke 24.13-32: *The Road to Emmaus*

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Prayers of Petition: We pray for all those of our fellowship who are ill at this time, for those who are still recovering from operations, and for those who are waiting for hospital treatment, as well as for those whose appointments have been postponed because of the Covid 19 virus. Be with them, we pray, that they may be aware in a unique way of your fatherly love and care for them, so that they may know that you have not abandoned them to some unknown fate, because your Will for every one of us is always paramount and is unaffected by man's indifference. We pray for those of our fellowship who are in care homes and for those who are still at home but struggling to get about. May they appreciate in a special way at this time that age and infirmity are no barriers to your boundless grace towards them. We also pray for those who are feeling the effects of loneliness because of the lock down. May they become aware that in their physical isolation they are a fundamental part of our Bethesda community of concern that is constantly being renewed with prayer in the power of your unrestricted Spirit and unconditional love. Our thoughts are also with those who grieve for the loss of loved ones; for Joan, as well as Paul and Judith. At this Easter time, may they rest in the assured hope and certain knowledge that the love that took Jesus to the cross for every one of us has through the resurrection conquered death and hell. Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer.

We pray for our nation at this time in its crisis over the coronavirus pandemic, especially for those families who have suffered the loss of loved ones due to this dreadful disease and for those who have lost their livelihood as a result of the lockdown. Lord, we ask that you will use this opportunity to speak to the people of our nation, not only so that they will look beyond the pleasures and pains of this world to grasp the spiritual reality behind the deeper issues of life, but also that they may seek your Word in order to find answers to their needs. Lord we pray for revival in our land. We don't know the reason why you have permitted the spread of this virus around the world, but we ask that in the midst of this crisis you will awaken those in authority, whether in government or academia, to the spiritual and moral wasteland in our country, that they may once again be guided by the Scriptures. Bless the Government, the scientists and the NHS and care home staff as they seek to stop the spread of this virus among our communities. Our thoughts are also with our prime minister, Boris Johnson, at this time as he struggles to shake off the effects of the virus. We indeed applaud at all times, and not just at eight o'clock on a Thursday evening, the doctors and nurses who are so valiantly seeking to care for the victims of this disease, often at great risk to themselves. Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer.

We pray for... (add a concern of your own to our collective prayer. It may be something personal, or something related to a family member or friend, or even something more general that worries you at this time)... Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer.

All these we ask, Our Father God, for the sake of your Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

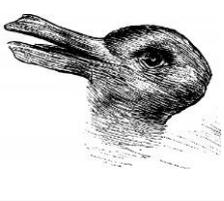
Message:

Here are two short but powerful readings from the Letter to the Hebrews for us to reflect on briefly this Easter morning:

Hebrews 2:9: But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 12:1-3: Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Look carefully at these images. What do you see?

				
A duck or a rabbit?	An old woman or a young woman?	Two men facing each other or a goblet?	A young woman or a male saxophonist?	The word 'GOOD' or the word 'EVIL'?

Of course, it is all a question of perception. So in life: what we observe and take notice of, as we mentally log our experiences, is often determined by our likes and dislikes, our wants and desires, our beliefs and values. We see what we want to see or would like to see. In other words, as the saying goes, 'beauty lies in the eye of the beholder.' When presented with the same evidence, people latch on to different aspects and end up with different conclusions.

This human trait reminds me of a children's chorus I used to sing in Sunday School, which recalls the occasion during the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, when twelve men were sent by Moses into Canaan to spy out the Promised Land and returned with contradictory reports about whether they would be able to conquer and possess the land.

Twelve men went to spy in Canaan; ten were bad, two were good.
What did they see to spy in Canaan? Ten were bad, two were good.
Some saw the giants, tough and tall; some saw the grapes in clusters fall;
Some saw that God was in it all: ten were bad, two were good.

Only Joshua and Caleb (the two 'good' men) had the faith (i.e. the spiritual perception) to believe that the people could indeed enter and possess the land, because all things are possible with God and *'the LORD delights in us... (and) he will bring us into the land and give it to us, a "land flowing with milk and honey".'*

As we celebrate Easter today, a crucial question comes ringing down the centuries to us: *'What do you think of Christ?'* (Matthew 22.42). How do you view him? If we did a survey around Blackburn, we would, I'm sure, receive a number of positive responses. Some would

no doubt say he was a good man, and possibly even a great man, who died a martyr's death in a noble cause, such as the rights of the downtrodden. Others would probably argue that he was a gifted man, a healer, or a godly man, one of the prophets, who was able to discern the will of God and teach the way of righteousness. Certainly the Muslim world believes this.

But as Christians, we see things differently, don't we? On this day of all days, we look upon our living Lord and Saviour through the eye of faith and confess with a deep passion, 'You are the Christ, my Saviour, the Son of the Living God.' Indeed, we would look *beyond* the cross, where Jesus tasted 'death for everyone', and the empty tomb, and 'see Jesus... crowned with glory and honour'. Our vision this morning is the same vision that the Apostle John had in his exile on the Isle of Patmos when, according to the Book of Revelation and chapter 1, he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and he saw the Risen and Exalted Christ in heavenly majesty and splendour. Wow! I know I'm jumping ahead to some extent to the Ascension, his heavenly Coronation, and to Pentecost, but the Resurrection was the First Fruits of the Lord's triumph, when he rose victorious over sin, death, and hell. Easter is the greatest VE Day – not Victory in Europe Day, but Victory in the Earth Day! The War of the Worlds is not over; there are still battles to be fought, but the end is in sight; and because of the Resurrection we have the certain knowledge and sure hope that because 'He lives!' we will live also! 'O Happy Day, when Jesus washed my sins away...!' (I'll leave you to continue the words of this well-known hymn for yourself). And what is more, through his Spirit 'Jesus lives in us, now' and will never depart from us, even at the point of physical death. That is what new life in Jesus means. Our Resurrection faith is the true spiritual antidote to the dread of this pandemic. Of course, this doesn't mean that we can be reckless with the way we conduct ourselves. We should be responsible citizens and should follow the government guidelines, if only to save others. But if the virus should strike us and take us, we know that to be absent from the body is to be present with our Risen Lord and Saviour. Hallelujah!

But let us change tack, just for a moment, before we get too caught up with the virus at this stage! Do you like being given or getting **new** things? We all do, I guess, don't we? New clothes, a new car, a new house, a new mobile phone, and even a new hip... (the list is endless!). But new things don't always come about easily. Do they? You'll remember the last time you moved house, you were probably worn out by the whole experience! And yet when you moved in and all the decoration and rearrangements were complete, you no doubt had a big smile on your face. Your new house was here at last! You see, new things that matter and are precious rarely come without sacrifice and sometimes suffering, as the previous example proves. And this is also true with our salvation. God's forgiveness, freedom, favour and fulness do not come to us in some easy-come-easy-go fashion. We have Easter because we also have Good Friday, the day of crucifixion, the day when Jesus gave his life that we might live, and live eternally. His death was a sacrificial death; an offering for sin. But we will never fully grasp what Jesus suffered on our account. I can never read his cry of utter dereliction from the cross, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' without gasping for breath, so to speak; without my eyes welling up! No wonder the

hymn writer could pen the words, 'Calvary, O Calvary, mercy's vast unfathomed sea; love, eternal love to me: Saviour, we adore Thee!'

Yes, Resurrection is all about newness through the sufferings of Christ: new life, a new birth, a new beginning, a new spirit, a new heart and mind, a new way of feeling and thinking, a new hope. The Gospel is indeed good news of great new things. The Psalmist says: '*He ...brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a **new song** in my mouth – Praise to our God.*' As people of the Resurrection, we are a new creation in Christ through his Spirit. This Resurrection Day is also our Redemption Day! Therefore, we are in a fantastic position to rejoice this morning, with unspeakable joy, at what being born again into the heavenly kingdom of God can mean. Yes, the weariness of the years may be catching up with our bodies, but our spirits continue to be renewed in Christ, and one day, our bodies, too, will be redeemed and will share in the fulness of Jesus' bodily resurrection. In Paul's great chapter on the resurrection of Christ in his first letter to the Corinthians, he ends his treatise on a note of praise and celebration: '*O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*' My fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, what a prospect is ours? What joy? What elation? How can we be downcast this morning? No wonder Paul could say, '*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*' There is in the message of Christ a freshness, a vitality, an inexpressible joy, and an 'overflowing cup'.

Thousands of years before the coming of Christ, the Patriarch Job could affirm, '*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*' (Job 19.25- 27). What is amazing about these words is that they were penned before the writer knew about the cross-work of Christ. Therefore, what a privileged position we are in, compared with the Old Testament saints, for we live in the NEW Testament age, in the dispensation of grace and fulfilment. The Apostle John tells his fellow saints: '*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!...Beloved, now we are children of God;... it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*' Our future prospects in Christ are truly incredible, way beyond our imagination, and they are all rooted in the Resurrection.

So, today, let us raise a toast to our Ebenezer, our Rock, our 'Stone of Help', not only because, in the words of Samuel the prophet, '*Hitherto has the Lord helped us*', but also because the Risen Lord continues to walk with us and talk with us along life's narrow way. However, let us not be like the two followers who walked with the risen Jesus along the Emmaus road but failed to recognise who their companion was, even though they were amazed at his understanding of the events involving this Nazarene, until he later that day broke bread with them. Then, we are told, their eyes were opened and suddenly they realised and for the first time appreciated his identity, admitting: 'Did not our heart burn

within us while he talked with us on the road, and while he opened the Scriptures to us? May our spiritual experience throughout this Eastertime draw us closer to the Risen Christ, so that we may become more fully acquainted with our Lord and Saviour and not be astonished or ashamed when we see him face to face one day. Had those two followers recognised Jesus for who he really was, what a difference there would have been to the many hours of fellowship they had together while walking the road to Emmaus. So, too, let us enter into a more fulsome dialogue with the Risen Christ, through his living Word and Spirit, with our spiritual eyes undimmed and untarnished, for his name's sake. What blessings will be ours as result! What bliss!

Yes, we are certainly living in challenging times. My generation has never known anything like it! We are in lockdown at the present time and for quite a few more weeks, if not months, and no doubt many in our society are finding this a dreadful experience, not least because it is placing great strain on their families and relationships. Yet as Christians we can use this period of furlough to deepen our relationship with our Risen Lord, so that we come out of it stronger, spiritually speaking, than we were before. Normally, we may struggle to find space for extended personal Quiet Time, but now we have the opportunity to advance our walk with our Saviour God through personal devotion and prayerful Bible study. Easter has started today and will continue until Pentecost on Sunday, the 31st of May, by which time we should begin to see, if we are not by then already seeing, God willing, the end of this crisis. Let us enter these seven weeks with a spiritual energy that can only be derived from the Spirit of the Risen Christ. If we do this, then in the future we will look back on these months as a time of renewal, when our knowledge and love of the Lord grew deeper and stronger. So, in the words of Paul, may 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' shine in our hearts and minds, so that in faith we may see Christ more clearly and love him more dearly in all that we seek to do with our lives. In other words, let us look *'unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith'*, because we can't achieve success in the Christian life, and bring glory to God, under our own steam. If we try to live a DIY Christian life, we will soon become *'weary and discouraged'* in our souls. We have to live for the Lord in and through his Spirit – the Spirit of the Risen Christ. Amen.

Final Hymn: *Thine Be the Glory*

Chorus:

Thine be the glory,
Risen, conqu'ring Son;
Endless is the victory,
Thou o'er death hast won;

Angels in bright raiment
Rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave clothes
Where thy body lay.

Chorus

Lo! Jesus meets us,
Risen from the tomb;
Lovingly he greets us,
Scatters fear and gloom
Let the church with gladness,
Hymns of triumph sing;
For her Lord now liveth,
Death hath lost its sting.

Chorus

No more we doubt thee,
Glorious Prince of life;
Life is naught without thee;
Aid us in our strife;

Make us more than conquerors,
Through thy deathless love:
Bring us safe through Jordan
To thy home above.

Chorus

Closing Prayer and the Grace

O Lord, the resurrection of your Son has given us new life and renewed hope. Help us, we pray, to live as new people who long to be more Christ-like and who desire to share with others through the gospel the glories of this newness in Christ. Grant us wisdom to know what we must do, the will to want to do it, the courage to pursue it, the perseverance to continue to do it, and the strength to complete it. This we ask for your Name's sake and for the extension of your kingdom in our communities. Amen.

And now **The Grace** (close your eyes and imagine you are in the chapel seeing all those well-known faces, and as you say it, do a multi degree turn as you would do, asking the triune God to bless all those present in your mind's eye, as a sign of our love and concern for them at this difficult time):

'May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all and forever more. Amen.'

PS: the solution to the Memory Text puzzle is as follows: 'Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" ' (John Chapter 11: 25). Don't forget it!