

Poetry by Wilfredo Weigandt
with Reflections from Langham Preaching



PRAYER

in the time of a pandemic

Foreword by Igor Améstegui

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Poems by Wilfredo Weigandt,
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Reflections by members of the
Langham Preaching Global Leadership Team



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Foreword

We will remember 2020 as one of the most painful and saddest years of our generation. None of us imagined on the 1st January what awaited us in the year ahead. The Covid-19 pandemic paralysed our world. We all had to suspend many important travel, event and meeting plans. It was a severe setback to the economy of our countries, and we will need several years to recover. But the most serious was the number of sick and dead. During the first three months of the pandemic, we had more than 100 evangelical pastors die in Bolivia. A very close and dear friend passed away after being hospitalised for several weeks and being unable to see his relatives.

On the other hand, emotional ill health affected millions. And to all of this, we must add the alarming increase in the statistics of family violence. For many women and children, being locked up at home during quarantine was real torture.

What sustained us in the face of so much tragedy? How did we, the servants of God who are part of Langham Preaching International leadership, react? We did it in the best way we know, through the Word and prayer. The Word of God gave us the lenses through which to read our reality. Prayer allowed us to express our lament, anguish and at the same time, raise a cry for hope and restoration.

The book you are holding in your hands consists of six biblical reflections and twenty-five poetic prayers. Firstly, you will find three reflections, secondly the poems and finally, three further reflections. We think that the reflections wrap the content of the poems like an excellent wrapping paper. Our Global Leadership Team wrote the biblical reflections and published them weekly alongside our prayer newsletter. The poems, that make us think about the Psalms of Lament, were written by Wilfredo Weigandt, our regional coordinator for the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay). One lesson we learned during this time was to face pain by acknowledging it, accepting it, and bringing it to God in prayer. It's the opposite of a superficial and escapist spirituality that tends to deny problems. Wilfredo wrote these

prayers gradually, in the face of the Latin American and world context of chaos and deep suffering. Following the example of the Psalms of Disorientation, these poems give voice to our deepest feelings, to our bewilderment and pain in the face of a chaotic world. At the same time, they are prayers that show serious and profound meditation on the Word of God.

So, you have in your hands a book that combines biblical reflection and prayer in response to the context and reality of our suffering world. We learned from John Stott, the founder of our ministry, that we must have both ears wide open and attentive to the two worlds in which we move, the biblical world and the contemporary world.

This book is a collective effort. It is not written by a single person locked in a library, but by a team that has its feet firmly established in continents as diverse as Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania, North America and South America.

So, now that you know the background that gave rise to this book, I invite you to find your favorite place to read and ask God to minister to your life through this reading. We hope that after this period of disorientation, there will come a new orientation in which together we can sing: “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy” (Psalm 30:11).

Igor Améstegui
Director, Latin America

Shadows

In **Shadows**, Ruth Slater, our Associate Programme Director, describes some ways we use this image, before taking us back to the picture of rest and refuge it conveys in the Psalms:

As a child, I remember using the shadows created by my hands to form different animal shapes on a wall. As an adult, when I stand on top of a mountain, I marvel at the difference the shadow of a cloud makes to the view of a mountainside. Depending on the speed of the wind, the movement of the shadows changes the view of the landscape. Shadows can also bring a darkness and a coolness, as the warmth of the sun disappears behind the clouds.

In our lives there can be shadows that bring a darkness into and over us. They can change the landscape and vibrancy of our lives. As we face the shadow of the coronavirus, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by its many personal, regional, national and global implications. It brings a darkness to our landscape. Our personal lives change, our work routines change, and our connections with church, family and friends change. It is a huge shadow.

But in the Bible a new meaning is added to shadows. I was reminded of it recently as Psalm 91 was read to us as part of our online church service.

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:1–2).

There are other references like this one: *I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed* (Psalm 57:1). *Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings* (Psalm 17:8). *Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings* (Psalm 63:7).

Rather than shadows being only about a heaviness and a darkness, the shadow of the *Almighty* is a place of refuge and safety – and a place of music, as we sing! We are given the promise of resting in the shadow of the Almighty. This is the kind of shadow from which we do not want

to move away because this shadow means so much more. It points to our home, our shelter with the Most High.

We are living in uncertain times, full of changed realities and challenging experiences. But we who dwell in God's shelter can rest in his shadow. We can trust in our refuge and fortress. It is not always easy, but as we trust, we must also take our responsibilities seriously, for the benefit of our communities, our societies and our world. Let's take one day at a time together, bringing the shadows of our anxieties and concerns into the shelter and shadow of the One who is in control and in whom we can most assuredly trust.

Journey to Healing

In **A Journey of Healing**, Dwi Maria Handayani, our Director in Asia & the South Pacific, reminded us, back in March 2020, of the benefits that can accompany these difficult days:

We live in a difficult time, with Covid-19 causing so many deaths and creating so much chaos. While this is a time of grieving, it can also be a time of healing.

Physical Healing: The pandemic forces those of us with workaholic tendencies to rest. It is not easy to rest. While working as slaves in Egypt, the Israelites worked to death. After the Exodus God introduced the “sabbath” as a time of rest and physical recovery from a heavy workload. Sabbath is a gift from God, so that we can rest and restore our body from exhaustion. Behind this pandemic we can see the heart of God, the one who loves us, who understands our physical needs, and who gives us time to rest.

Mental Healing: In a fast-paced era where there is no time to stop and reflect, people are stressed because they have no opportunity to rest their minds. As a result, their emotional and mental well-being are disturbed. In Creation, day after day, God provides a pattern for pausing, stopping and reflecting. At the end of each day he stops, looks back at what he has done and reflects on how “everything was good.” Let’s allow this pandemic to help us stop, not just to recover physically, but also to process everything we have experienced in heart and mind as well.

Relational Healing: Covid-19 is pushing us home to be with family. In the world today, many people lack time with family. Children are busy at school. Parents are busy at work. This is a time to restore family relationships. This is also at the heart of the sabbath. God gave the Israelites time to gather with their families and to worship together. This time can be seen as a grace given from God, a time to restore

relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters and spread, from there, throughout communities.

Social Healing: Our societies are divided. We have this tendency to be selfish, racist and discriminatory in so many ways. This pandemic forces us to recognize that we are all the same. We are equal. No one is immune to this virus. This is a time for Christians to show some social responsibility. Let's support our governments' programmes for social distancing and self-isolation, not because of fear or lack of faith, but because of our commitment to our fellow human beings.

Spiritual Healing: Covid-19 forces us to seek God and this can be a healing journey for our dry spirituality. Sabbath is a time of rest, to gather with family, to worship – and a time to develop our relationship with God. In this increasingly progressive world, we can be easily compelled to forget God because everything is available for us. We shift our gaze to worldly power, wealth, reputation, and achievement. This pandemic shows us that we are limited and helpless. This is the time for us to return to God.

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise. (Jeremiah 17:14 ESV)

Living and Breathing

In **Living and Breathing**, Jennifer Cuthbertson, our Coordinator for Facilitator Development, takes us from ventilators and pain to the hope and purpose found in Ezekiel 37.

Twice over the years I have kept vigil at my husband's bedside as he struggled to breathe and then, finally, lost his breath. A ventilator provided his oxygen-starved body with air but could not recreate the ability to breathe. Would he ever breathe on his own again? Only God knew.

One of the deadliest effects of Covid-19 is the inability to breathe. Ventilators push air into lungs in an attempt to keep people alive – a very painful procedure when lungs are compromised by disease. Ventilators, however, reside almost entirely in the world of the privileged. How many people around the world will die because they can't breathe before this current pandemic comes to an end? Only God knows.

In our US context and many other places around the world, untold numbers of protest signs bear the last words of George Floyd: "I can't breathe." These three words encapsulate far more significance than simply the body's autonomic breathing function. Will the oppressed, disenfranchised, discriminated against and invisible poor of this world ever possess the liberty and security to breathe unencumbered in their own land? Will modern-day slaves ever again breathe emancipation instead of exploitation? Will the estimated 27 million refugees of our world ever breathe acceptance rather than ostracism? Only God knows.

In Ezekiel 37:1–3, the hand of God steered Ezekiel around a valley filled with bones compelling him to look at and see how many, very dry bones were there and how broadly they had been distributed. Then God asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Will they breathe again?) Ezekiel answered, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know." (You know what I'm thinking. Is this a trick question? These are just disconnected bones – not even bodies! Are you serious, Lord?)

The dry bones represented God's people – a desperate people whose hope was gone – a people cut off (v 11). God had a word for this hopeless, cut off people who lived in the graves of exile: breathe. Ezekiel was to deliver that word from the Sovereign Lord: I will be your ventilator and “make breath enter you” (v 5). “I will put breath in you, and you will come to life” (v 6).

Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army. (vv 9–10)

Life! Life is God's business therefore it is our business. We too are commanded to speak breath to those who cannot breathe. How then will we speak? How will we breathe for them? How will we ventilate them until they can breathe on their own?

MAY 23

See You

Forgive my out of place boldness,
Lord of History,
but I long to see you more clearly in this crisis . . .
Is that possible?
It's tempting to imagine you on TV,
telling us – the whole world –
what to do.
How about appearing to humanity?
Appearing to us, your church?
In case you're here on this earth,
or inside us,
and it's just me unable to see you,
will you open my eyes?
My faith – my lack of faith –
needs to see you in this pandemic,
Lord of History!

MAY 24

From the Other Side

One more request oh, Lord of History.
If, you allow us the grace
of finding a Covid-19 vaccine,
could you ensure its discovery by scientists
in neglected countries?
Don't let the powermongers find it, Lord.
I beseech you!
Concede it to my hungry Latin America,
or forgotten Africa, or the vulnerable parts of Asia.
Allow its discovery by nations bent on sharing it
with the joy and generosity your Kingdom unleashes!
As long ago, incarnate yourself yet again
among the marginalized, among the poor
and the unembellished who yearn
among the forgotten, for a more humane world.
May your saving power emerge
once more from the side
of the world's lowly and despised!
Oh, how I need to see your justice in this pandemic,
Lord of History!

MAY 25

Open Door

Yet again the economy threatens
to make us a sombre nation.

I *do* know . . . how well I know, we are the ones
who choose our rulers and our destiny.

Thus, it is not ours to ask
What happened? Oh dear God?

Yet, only because your mercy
dawns new every morning,

opening the door to uncommonly rich dialogue –
do I ask for a way out of our debt and its fatal consequences,
for the miracle of possibilities bestowing dignity,
without undue suffering for the defenceless,
without inflating the pandemic with more deaths,
with the opening of Argentine eyes

to see You,

and honour You –

the Only Worthy

Lord of History!

See fit, as You have before,

to open this door

for us . . .

MAY 28

The Spirit who Comes

Even during lockdown at home
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.
Even when we're afraid as the virus closes in,
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.
Although we feel abandoned (like the disciples in Acts 1),
the Holy Spirit comes, continually (like to the disciples in Acts 2).
Although the loneliness is painful,
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.
Although the family budget just isn't enough,
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.
Although our Community of Faith is not allowed to gather,
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.
Although we're isolated and depressed,
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.
Even though tensions strain relations confined in small spaces,
the Holy Spirit comes, continually.

Even on those days,
the Spirit is the One who always comes
to aid us and accompany us,
reassure us and console us,
embracing, renewing, a kiss for each cheek.
The Spirit is the One who always comes,
Even through waves of pandemic.

JUNE 4

Midday Sun

Is it too much to ask, Lord of History,
that you hold and bless the hands of bakers,
valiant nurses,

and moms who deal with pain?

Is it too much to ask, Lord of History,
that we watch over your street vendors,
the unemployed

and peons of this work-a-day world?

Is it too much to ask, Lord of History,
that you multiply the savings and smiles
of generous business owners
and dismiss the greedy empty-handed?

Who is like You, Lord of History?

Father-Mother to widows and girls!

Who is like You, Lord of History?

You are – even in pandemic darkness – bright midday Sun!

JUNE 8

Now

The hour has come, our Lord, this is the day.
Longing for your grace, and your justice:
let the scaffolding of death collapse!
May the strongest bow their knees,
may all who twist the law encounter You,
may your voice appear in every church,
and your church appear on every corner
and the sidewalks of greed be broken.

The hour has come, our Lord, this is the day
for you to unite my Argentina.
No more rifts, no more venom or brawls,
The hour has come for hands more humble!
time for solidarity that embraces!
time for your people to side with the poor,
be a light for the rich, the vulnerable, the hurting.
The time is now, our Lord, this very day.
We ardently desire to embody your marvels!

JUNE 12

Let your Sun of Justice Rise!

Abba Father! Let your sun of justice rise!

We see it now:

our man-made moons offer nothing . . .

humanisms void of tender warmth and life,
presumptuous cosmetics in decline.

There is only cold,

and a taste like cruel death looming.

Don't leave us, Lord, in this absence,

don't deprive us of your voice – it lets us see!

A wave of pandemic bears down on us,

don't leave us at the mercy of

apathy-ridden corrupt rulers,

the dregs

machines of murderous malice.

Give us this day your tender breathe,

Abba Father! May your sun of justice shine!

JUNE 21

Touch

Think about
the vital breath essential
to those teetering on the edge of the abyss.
Keep on calling out to her,
touching him with a warm hand.

Remembering how Jesus
rescues us daily
from lives without meaning.
May this be the opportune time
for the healing of wounds.

JULY 1

God of the Nations

Dilemmas,
and tensions, as
pandemic demands increase,
gasps
gushing.
My friends probe:
So? What do your faith
in God and your convictions look like now?
Still think you can trust
the God you love?
All Job seems to stab me,
its silences
corrode me.
Disturbing reflections,
hope in tatters.
What does he have to say to the whole world now,
your God of the nations?
Can you still trust him for
protection and favors?
Here I am, oh immeasurable Lord,
trapped between my own voices.
Your universe is bleeding
smothered in its wounds!
God who I love,
God my shelter,
rock,
fountain,
peace
and help.
God for whom I wait, with thousand-fold certainty,
for a gesture,
faith,
consolation
gifts.
God of the world and of History,
Gift us with your songs!

JULY 5

Empathy

Before speaking
we must suffer.

Before sharing
we must hunger.

Before orienting
we must agonize.

Before resolving
we must do lament.

Before advising
we must enter the shadows.

Before leading
we must be broken.

Before consoling
we must go into the desert.

Connection first comes – contact with the other –
in empathy.

We must give ear, sense, observe, be silent, revere.
Those with such empathy
incarnate with ease,
perfect gestures of love.

JULY 8

A Dream

In my dream, He asked, me:

- What do you want your people to know about me?
 - I have no idea what to tell them! - I replied. You seem so silent in this pandemic and my people are not very open to hearing you!
- Then I heard Him say
- Go and tell them this on my behalf:

*I am Jesus,
God's voice that no temporal circumstance can mute.
I am Jesus,
Creator of this vivacious universe you've abused
and warped.
I am Jesus,
Heir of all earth's pre-existing beauty.
I am Jesus,
luminous Glory of God who cannot be darkened.
I am Jesus,
irreducible Substance erupting into humanity's tiny history.
I am Jesus,
sustained Power in the face of crumbling global gods.
I am Jesus,
Forgiveness that frees and reconciles creature with Creator.
I am Jesus,
Governing Majesty above all pseudo-powers.
I am Jesus, superior to the most glorious angels imaginable.
Go and say to them, from me:
I am Jesus,
Alive in this pandemic,
Centre of History, Salvation for the whole of creation.*

And then I woke up . . . writing
and I believed Him.

JULY 25

I See

I see . . . a mother place the tiny white coffin of her dead child, one of Cochabamba's Covid-19 victims, in the ground near her home.

I see . . . a bedraggled worker stop short at the sight of a malnourished adult dying on a garbage heap in Somalia.

I see . . . an Israeli soldier point his gun at an unarmed Palestinian peasant forced to abandon his house and his land.

I see . . . a world-renowned Cuban doctor, part of a block-long line-up seeking the two pounds of chicken allotted to his family, in the sadly hot sun.

I see . . . a nurse at a hospital entrance in Sierra Leone, denying admission to the next Covid-19 patient because there are only eleven ventilators in her country.

I see . . . the ruined face of a teenage girl in Cordoba, raped by ten men in this my Argentina, mutilated by the murder of so many women.

I see . . . a father bearing his mother – dying of Covid – on his shoulders, along the edge of a freeway as he leaves Mumbai behind.

I see . . . a lost Syrian family at the mercy of the waves in their precarious craft, battling to cross the Mediterranean and land on the shores of Greece.

I see . . . a mother dragging her feet with each step while three children cry out in hunger, tugging at her skirt in the vast Algerian desert.

I see . . . thousands of mass graves of the Covid-19 dead, gashing the greenery of the Amazon jungle near Manaus.

I see . . . a wave of wild, frenzied flood waters engulf homes in Romania and families onshore submerged in the anguish of losing everything they had.

I see . . . eleven victims attacked and murdered for their faith in God in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I see . . . a lone child crying beside a well with no water, as crows in Haiti circle above his head in the midst of this pandemic.

Must I see more, my God?
Do I have to see more?
How long will this go on?

How long must I plead, “Your Kingdom come, Lord!” like
you taught me to pray – before I lose this sense that you are
deaf to my pleas and don’t even see me?

Look upon us, Lord! Death closes in on every side
like angry ocean waves,
like a tombstone sealing off our breath,
suffocating our peoples.

Look at us, Lord! Be present in our times of lament
and silence!

Look at us, oh Lord! May your eyes impact us with your grace
and mercy!

Look upon us, Lord and renew life once more in this your universe!
Look upon us Lord! And we will find peace!

AUGUST 12

Bread

I asked the Lord – in my own way – :

“What should I do

with your plantation now?

Look at our world in pandemic!

We need nurses,

builders,

volunteers,

comedians,

female engineers.

We lack so much science,

so many advisors,

cleaners,

growers,

launderers.

We don't have enough entrepreneurs,

care-givers,

people in the arts,

humanitarians,

cooks.

But more than anything, we lack

women who make bread.

Oh my Lord!

How much we need

men who make bread.

Look upon my desolation now!
All I have is
this Bible
my prayers
and a clear calling.
Who wants – in pandemic –
to hear
sermons,
or probe
divine promises?”

Voice came.
His grace moved closer,
tender,
speaking into my blindness:
“Be faithful to your calling . . .
My Word infuses life into dry bones,
deathly solitudes
and arid desolations.
Be firm in your calling,
for I am both bread and baker,
I am breath
exhaling new life.
I am both bread and bakeress
in pandemic . . .
more than ever!”

AUGUST 18

Crisis

Impotence imposes
its rigour on my
thin faith . . .
silence turns into winter
muting my hope.
Your visitation!
Our Lord!
Your visit so long overdue!
Your visit! My longing
and plea each morning.

Turned to vapor, is my dream
for an early end:
this crisis
uncoiling,
corrodes
inhabits.
The bacteria game
of virus
and mystery,
like an open wound,
refusing to heal,
ever-festering.
Your visitation!
Our Lord!
Your shatter-proof presence!
Your visit!
Healing
embracing
delivering.

We wait
amidst our pleas
for elusive certainties.
We hope
our deeds
turn to love, making us human.
Hoping
for your *kingdom come* . . .
Let this weed die!

AUGUST 20

Grace Whisperer

Bit by bit
silence eats away our hope,
action by action,
no longer enough, stupendous acts fall short.

Lament, finds no place in consolation,
when cries trigger our nostalgia.

Song after song,
pain, blinded, inflates its guts.
Hand to hand,
hunger gains the upper hand in combat.

Grave-clothes block the way,
we are but dust, wayward dust, bereft of tomorrows.

We wait, we hope – preaching your Word –
longing
to hear the whisper
of your grace.
We wait and hope – embracing soul to soul –
desiring
to hear the whisper
of your grace.
We wait – repeat our supplications –
yearning
to hear the whisper
of your grace.
We wait – in this summer of pandemic –
hungering
for the
whisper of your grace.

We wait – as it was, in the Beginning–
and dream of
hearing the whisper
of your grace,
healing wind over chaos,
disbanding darkness,
voice in action harmonizes all
abysms,
victory opening life's very arteries,
cosmic calm renewing hope.

How we long
to hear
the whisper of your grace . . .

Seeing More than Pandemic

I.

No other image appears: only
pandemic, grief, aloneness and misery.
It seems there is no other topic: only
infection, lament, isolation and loss.
It seems there is no other door: only
speculation, failure, and the silence of science.
It seems there is no other story: only
stagnation, bankruptcy, slow death.
No other sight,
no other reading: only
pandemic,
and more pandemic.

II.

Let us look to Him. Jesus:
He who has begun to open
the way for liberation to come.

Let us look to Him. Jesus:
who shows by his resurrection
death's impotence in the face of life eternal.

Let us look to Him. Jesus:
who faithfully testifies of
the power of God that never weakens.

Let us look to Him. Jesus:
who presides over kingdoms
and governs all kings.

Let us look to Him. Jesus:
who loves us, forgives us,
and, to communion with God, restores us.

Let us look to Him. Jesus:
who invites us to co-govern
as service to God and all the Earth.

Let us look to Him! Jesus:
Worthy of all glory and power
for all time and eternity! So be it!

Let us look to Him! Jesus:
Coming in the clouds!
Behold Him, – immobile – you debilitated pandemic! So be it!

III.

Let us look to Him. He is God:
the One who is
and is to come and who always was.

Let us look to Him. He is God:
Almighty
Alpha and Omega.

IV.

Let us behold Him. The Spirit:
fullness of all existence
who fulfills all, imbues all, suffices all.

V.

Blessed are those
who perceive and read
from this perspective
the infection
which almost blinds us.

Invisible

I.

We are taken captive by the invisible
ethereal virus,
volatile,
winged,
a veritable happening,
fatal,
bordering on abstract,
cutting right through us.
A grievous time,
wretched stumbling-block,
onslaught ignored, we stagger towards hunger,
with dark deceit,
and macabre sleepiness.
Invisible, this pandemic,
so real the grief,
hidden mystery destroying the human.

II.

Yet another happening takes us captive . . .
Invisible, God makes a visit.
Voice of re-encounter asks:

“My creature, my daughter,
 why such rejection?
I am here in the world
though you believe the contrary.
I inhabited Jesus,
concrete mortal, real human being,
fullness of life
my very legacy.
I made myself invisible, inserted into your space
speaking your language,
I came so close.”

“Why so remote?
 Why steps
adding distance, causing harm?
Though you see me not,
present I Am:
Not ceasing to act . . . loving my people!
I am the suffering One
here alongside
 resisting, opening miracle’s doors.”

“I Am The Invisible, yes.
 I Am
 Definitive
 behind the scenes!”

Name

She lives so far from here,
– a follower of The Master.
How she loves the Lord's Voice,
loves those
who preach it.

Her heart moved by suffering
goes beyond emotion to
open a space of love,
illuminating
our lives.

Her gift she shares –
so much more than the money!
Whispered devotion,
becoming seed,
taking root.

A source of provision,
a consoling embrace,
a song sung in Asia
resounding in
América-Latina.

Like Jesus, she
touches the one who needs . . .
is touching our Covid widows,
our pastors,
healing the wounds.

Anonymous yet so real,
mercy encircling.
Her name eludes me.
Yet no . . . for me
her name is
Grace.

In recognition of Lim Yue-Li.

Pandemic and Panjesus

I.

Behold the PANDEMIC:
(from *pan*=all, *demos*=people)
that which touches
“all human beings everywhere.”

Behold PANJESUS:
(from *pan*=all, *Jesus*=saviour)
the one who saves
“the totality of creation.”

II.

Behold PANJESUS.

Who permits the existence
of all well-loved beings.
His very breath blows dunes,
plays – happily – with deer,
opens sea spaces, lilies, wind,
laughs among the moons.

Behold PANJESUS.

Whose influence creates light and
releases the blossoming
of mustards and peppers,
while dancing with storms
he speaks to fire and summer
and paints – with blue – the firmament.

Behold PANJESUS.

He releases the beauty
of powerful beings,
principalities and powers,
invisible multitudes
celebrating along with Him
his victorious rule.

Behold PANJESUS, opposite of

PANDEMIC:

It infects,	He blesses,
it kills,	He sustains,
it suffocates,	He infuses breathe,
it squeezes,	He frees,
it takes,	He shares,
it blinds,	He recreates.

Behold PANJESUS.

Mediator of heaven and earth,
redeemer of all existence.

SEPTEMBER 10

A Prayer

Give us this day
dear God,
a rumour
that feels like June,
like rain, a downpour!
washing away the evil
of this cruel uncertain year
and let us give kisses once more.

Give us this day
dear God,
a heartbeat
more than a throb:
a love to lightens loads,
a sigh so transparent
it awakens abysses,
connecting us to him who is Truth.

Give us this day
dear God,
a whisper that arouses,
pushes forward,
placing us face to face
– with those who need you most –
to offer your basin
spilling over with
new wine.

Give us this day
dear God,
what's impossible right now.
Stillness, sustenance, health, compassion,
light, generosity –
gifts from your treasure-house.
We promise not to hide them,
but share them,
til they become *Word*,
Your grace permitting . . .
this hell will perish!

God's Own Sighs

I can understand – albeit stunned –
why you aren't hearing my stubborn cry.
You have your reasons,
valid reluctance:
all those times I let you down!
I can understand – head bowed –
your turning deaf ears to your beloved people.
Reasons, you have,
for sure:
all those times we turned our backs on you!

I can understand – dismayed –
why you turn aside my heartfelt pleas.
You have your reasons:
I am only
a faltering complainer.
I can understand – bewildered –
why you ignore your gathered people.
Reasons you have:
our lack
of vision and sincere petitions,

Therefore . . .
My God,
I implore you:
Pay heed to your own Voice,
to the ever-living Spirit!
Listen to the hoarse sighing,
inner wails
surging from the depths
of your Triune being.
Hear the unfathomable lament
of the One who aids our plea!

Spirit, radiant, helper,
perfect word for your ear.
And so . . .
I beseech you,
My God,
Hear the Spirit, I plead!
Listen to the sighs from your very heart!
Your earth bleeds martyrs!

SEPTEMBER 16

Our Lukes

The *Luke* of the Gospel was known as
the “beloved doctor.”

What might he have done
to earn such a name?
Come alongside an Apostle
in prison, maybe,
offer fervent prayer,
or an ointment,
perhaps
wise prescriptions.

We too have our Lukes:
lab technicians,
doctors,
orderlies,
nurses.
Known as Claudia,
Lorna,
Hugo,
Maria,
Robert,
they give their very breath for us
with each look, treatment,
and swab applied.

Thousands . . .
So many have died!
Offering their life
their passion,
care reflecting the Lord's
own calming touch.
They tire,
struggle,
and fall,
bury their colleagues,
face agony head on . . .
Day after day,
persevering.

Be Doctor to them, Lord!
Let them absorb our gratitude!
Let your power revitalize them!
Cause our *Lukes* to flourish!

SEPTEMBER 20

Beautiful

Savor the
taste of each detail.
A loving kiss,
a floating sun,
soft guitar melodies,
steam rising from a coffee mug
and butter
melting on toast.

A profound gaze,
hugs from daughter and son,
a long-lost memory,
a book waiting to be read,
and all my senses
inspired.

Because life itself,
life is also beautiful.
A gift
sent by the God
of Springtime.

Triumph

The *Beginning* will triumph
Divine *Breath* will triumph
The *Virtuous One* will triumph
His *Restlessness* will triumph

over your present,
over your suffocation,
over your misery,
over your immobility.

The *Source* will triumph,
The *Everlasting* will triumph
His *Certainty* will triumph
He who is *Life* will triumph

over your cistern,
over your wish,
over your image,
over your desert.

The *Origin* of all will triumph
The *Lord* will triumph
The *Creator* will triumph
God's *New Day* will triumph

over your terror,
over your cruelty,
over the created,
over your twilight.

Victory will come to Him
who triumphed over chaos.
Triumph belongs to
future Hope –
and to the Hope
of old.

And so, pandemic,
whose time honours only
daggar and death,
your time is short,
heinous,
sterile,
inert.

OCTOBER 14

The Good Shepherd

They did it long ago,
men painted you
with a good shepherd's face
and a lamb in your arms.
While Rome extinguished
their lives and families,
they applied more color
sketched your profile.

They did it long ago,
women buried their sisters
in dark catacombs.
But out of their grief
they saw the horizon,
from their desert and anguish,
saw the same image:
the flock's "good shepherd."

They did it long ago,
died in the arenas,
enduring *that* Roman
playtime pandemic.
They too painted you,
on walls, on ceilings,
between the tombs of their dead
mixing colors of care.

Our time of pandemic
evokes a scene:
we well recognize one
– *thief, hired-hand* –
intruder, stealing the harvest,
murdering life,
destroying creation . . .
a malice machine.

So, today, in response,
we take up our brushes,
stretch canvass and frame,
dust off oil paints,
set up the easel,
make ready the palette.
Together your sons and your daughters,
shape his portrait anew.

Each brushstroke, brings
to light your gaze,
the warm touch of your hand,
our space on your lap.
You, pastor of yesteryear,
appear on our canvass.
You are life – in abundance,
safeguard and nurture.

“The good shepherd” we paint,
colors in play:
strident yellow,
green, orange, lilac,
Van Gogh blue and gold.
Your voice comes as before:
“You are my little flock.
Fear not. I am present with you.”

Covid Universals

In **Covid Universals**, Mark Meynell, our Director in Europe & the Caribbean, reflects on the biblical use of the word “all” as it binds humanity together, before leading us to Jesus:

So, what has changed? All over the world commentators are predicting that once Covid-19 is over, life will never be the same again. It's hard to disagree. This has been a devastating and disorienting time, for ALL of us. Covid-19 does not discriminate. It is knitting us ALL together.

Whenever astronauts go into orbit for the first time, they experience the so-called “overview effect.” Seeing the whole of planet Earth at a glance transforms them. Life's fragility on this “pale blue dot” becomes obvious. National boundaries become irrelevant. Is something similar happening as a result of Covid-19? We are ALL in the same boat.

But still, I keep asking. What's changed? This is where the Bible's “overview effect” is so crucial. Look at some of the things it says about “ALL people”:

(a) *ALL people are like grass, and ALL their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field* (Isa 40:6). Covid-19 reminds us that we are vulnerable and fragile, as we have always been.

(b) *[The Lord] gives showers of rain to ALL people, and plants of the field to everyone* (Zech 10:1). Theologians speak of God's generosity to the whole world as “common” grace.

(c) We should not be idle. He involves his people in being agents of that grace. *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to ALL people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers* (Gal 6:10).

(d) When you search for what is common to all people in the Bible, we find the majority of texts refer to humanity's potential relationship to God. This is his “special” grace, expressed in the covenant with Abraham – but also in the prophets, like Isaiah: *On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for ALL peoples, a banquet of aged wine* (Isa 25:6).

(e) The implications of all this are infinite. But, at the very least, it means we have a job to do: *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among ALL peoples* (1 Chr 16:24).

But above all, the Bible's "overview effect" takes us to God's universal plan: the greatest universal, Jesus himself. This must be one of the Bible's most thrilling passages of all, as it refers to the man who got his feet muddy on the banks of the Jordan River:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over ALL creation. For in him ALL things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; ALL things have been created through him and for him. He is before ALL things, and in him ALL things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have ALL his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself ALL things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col 1:15–20)

So, there is nothing – I repeat, nothing – that is out of his hands or beyond him. NOTHING. He is Lord of all, Lord of Lords. So I ask again. What's changed? Well . . . In the grand scheme of things? Nothing!

What-If

In **What-If**, Femi Adeleye, our Director in Africa, shows us that there is a place we can take our uncertainties and anxieties during Covid-19:

The *What-Ifs of Covid-19*: What if the Covid-19 lockdowns and quarantines continue indefinitely? What if governments that provide food/supplies to vulnerable people can no longer do so? What if businesses do not recover? What if we can no longer return to the habit of handshakes and hugs? What if the conspiracy theories are right? What if they do not succeed in developing a vaccine? What if the vaccine is the hidden way to receive the mark of the beast? What if churches can no longer meet as they used to do? These “what ifs” persist because no one is certain about when normalcy will return. The most popular scripture in the past few months for many parts of Africa is Psalm 91:1 (ESV): *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty*. We all want to be under the shadow of God almighty.

The Ifs of the Gospel: Our Easter celebrations remind us to bring all the *What-Ifs of Covid-19* under the shadow of the *Ifs of the Gospel*, as found in 1 Cor 15:12–19. The “ifs” in this passage are greater than any Covid-19 “what if?” **If** *in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied* (15:19). The writer’s response to this big If is: *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have died* (15:20). This is the highest declaration of Christian hope. The fact that Easter arrived near the beginning of this season of Covid-19 is not an accident. This reminds us to bring all our “What Ifs?” under the shadow of our declaration that “Christ is Risen”! Our response to Covid-19 uncertainties becomes an affirmation that because Christ is risen our hope is in him in this life and in the life beyond. We are not to be pitied more than others.

The Renewed What-Ifs: Our hope in the Risen Christ gives us courage to replace the Covid-19 “What Ifs?” with some renewed “What Ifs.” What if this time in history has been pre-ordained by God as a divine pause from the pursuits of life? What if it is a divinely appointed sabbath for all of God’s creation to reflect on the maker of heaven and earth? What if it is a time for personal repentance and a renewal of our relationship with God? What if it is a time for family members to get to know one another more and to be reconciled? What if it is time for the people of God to bind the broken hearted and comfort those that mourn? What if the shutdowns and the slowdowns are an opportunity for the people of God to be renewed, restored and recharged for the task of world evangelization? What if it is a reminder of the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ? How true it is that all who dwell in the shelter of the Risen Christ will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

Quiet Initiatives

In **Quiet Initiatives**, Paul Windsor, our Programme Director, finds something surprising in Ecclesiastes which encourages us to be faithful with the small things:

I have returned to Ecclesiastes 11:1–6 (ESV) so many times in my life. This pandemic has brought me back to it again, looking for a word of encouragement for each one of us in the work we do together under God’s hand. It helps if we observe three different features in this passage:

(a) A repeating phrase: *you do not know* (2, 5a, 5b, 6). This passage is about uncertainty, starting with not knowing “what disaster may happen on earth.” Isn’t that true?!

(b) A series of commands, in a book in which such commands are (almost) totally absent until now: *cast* (1) . . . *give* (2) . . . *sow* (6). This passage is about initiative. This seems strange to us because when there is uncertainty, we don’t tend to take initiative. We tend to step back, rather than to step forward. And yet here are commands urging initiative, generosity and service.

(c) A little connective word: *for* (1, 2, 6). This is where the passage becomes so surprising. If you follow the logic of the writer carefully, he seems to be saying that it is because things are uncertain that we should take initiative. It is the opposite of how we are often trained to think. Don’t step back, step forward.

How is this possible?

Maybe it has something to do with the way Ecclesiastes is a bit like a Mathematics’ textbook. It is full of questions, but the answers can be found in the back. And at the back of this book, Ecclesiastes 12 is about God, the one who is “beyond the sun” – about remembering him (12:1) and about fearing and obeying him (12:13). Maybe Ecclesiastes 11 is about God as well? How can this initiative make sense in a time of uncertainty? Maybe it is related to *you do not know the work of God who makes everything* (11:5b). Maybe trusting God, especially when we don’t understand what he is doing, sits alongside remembering and fearing and obeying as one of the answers in the back of the book?

Why is this important to remember during a time of paralyzing fear and anxiety in the midst of a global pandemic? Should it push us to do more and to be more at a time when we are wearied and discouraged by weeks of lockdown? No. Nothing is further from the truth. Ecclesiastes 11 encourages us with the news that whatever it is that we are able to do and to be, however fragile and feeble we may feel – even the smallest of efforts is used by a God who keeps working. A kind word. A generous act. A quiet initiative. A small service. A thankful response. This is how to live in uncertain times. And as we do our small activity, as we be our little person, we do know that God is doing his activity and being his person through us, in his time and in his way, for the sake of others.



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- nurturing national movements for biblical preaching
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