

**reimagine**  
Leading the church out of lockdown



# **restore**

---

**Sermon Outlines**

*“Christ is the Lord of a history that moves. He not only holds the beginning and the end in his hands, but he is in history with us, walking ahead of us to where we are going.”*

*Thomas Merton*

*“Beware of harkening back to what you once were, when God wants you to be something that you have never been.”*

*Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest*

# **restore**

---

Restore is a stand-alone resource to use as a sermon / small group series to enable church members to engage with these times.

Restore picks up the five themes within Reimagine and develops them around Psalm 23. Here we find the promise of the Shepherd's process of restoring and renewing, calling and leading and releasing his people into the life that he has for them. Each of them has an action or teaching of Jesus to teach / study in greater depth as we come to him, our Good Shepherd, and seek to follow him into the future.

We are suggesting that you could use them after Pentecost and Thy Kingdom Come to lead people from the end of May through to the end of June when lockdown restrictions are due to end.

The five themes and Bible passages for them are:

# 1 Reflect

*"The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing"*

Mark 1:15. Repent for the Kingdom of God is near

# 2 Refresh

*"He leads me beside still waters he restores my soul"*

John 7:37-40. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink

# 3 Rejoice

*"You set a table before me in the midst of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows"*

John 2:1-12. Water into wine

# 4 Remember

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil"*

John 11:17-37. I am the resurrection and the life.

# 5 Recover

*"He guides me along the right paths"*

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden

*Small group resources are available separately*

# Sermon 1: It's Time to Reflect

*"The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing"*

## Introduction

Introduce the theme and explain that we can imagine the 23rd Psalm being the product of David's reflections. His experience of God's goodness and provision and guidance connects with his memory of being a shepherd and it produces this rich reflection of God as a shepherd to his people.

Taking time to reflect on our experiences of the last year at this point is so important at this time. Use an illustration to show that in the light of a major event our perspective changes:

### **Edgar Mitchell**

was a United States Navy officer and aviator, test pilot, and NASA astronaut. As the Lunar Module Pilot of Apollo 14, he spent nine hours working on the lunar surface and was the sixth person to walk on the Moon.

Commenting on seeing earth from space he said: "You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it."

## Alfred Nobel

In April of 1888 Alfred Nobel's brother died and a newspaper mistakenly reported that Alfred had died. More than that, the paper ripped Alfred's reputation to shreds. "The Merchant of Death is Dead!" the newspaper declared, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday."

According to these biographies, Alfred Nobel was so distraught by this that he was determined to change his reputation. He decided to will most of his vast fortune, more than £200million in today's money, to creating the Nobel Prizes that, "conferred the greatest benefit to humankind". The prizes were to be in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Literature, and "to the person who has done the most or best to advance fellowship among nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and the establishment and promotion of peace congress". And that is how we know his name today.

**Tell a personal story of how God revealed something or changed how you thought about something and how this brought transformation.**

We are living through a global pandemic which has left no-one's life untouched.

- What new perspective has it given you?
- What lessons can we learn?
- What is God opening your eyes to in your life, and in our church's life?
- What is your testimony of God's goodness?

## Scripture: Mark 1:14-15

Jesus arrived in the midst of God's people who were oppressed and compromised by the Roman rule of Jerusalem, failing to care for the poor and marginalised, and fighting among themselves. Nothing of any note spiritually had happened for over 400 years. And as well as proclaiming freedom and blessing from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue, he went around declaring "Repent for the kingdom of God is near."

Repentance is an action and it is not meant to be about feeling shame or feeling bad. It is instead about thinking differently and therefore acting differently. Metanoia is not about just changing your mind quickly without reflection. Metanoia is about making a deeper and more mature decision to stop, to examine one's choice of direction, recognize the need for change and turn around, to face a new direction. And new directions are full of potential, loaded with new possibilities. And new possibilities bring new beginnings.

## Application

The stress test of the pandemic has revealed challenging insights about our discipleship and the life of our Christian communities. Where did you pass the test and there are things to celebrate? Where will you need courage to reflect on the experience and conclude, this needs to change?

Tell stories of your community / your church in lockdown that are instructive of what God might be revealing about where he is speaking to you about things to 'repent of' / take a fresh look at and where he is bringing good news.

Connect the passage with your context by asking 'what would it mean for God to bring his kingdom into our context and speak his good news to us today?'

Reflect that this might mean that the church has to change and what that could be? What does this mean for us personally?

Teach about the posture of humility and surrender that will serve us in this season as it enables us to be open to what God might call us to.

## Response

Could you invite people to choose to turn around and follow Jesus for the first time – especially if you are broadcasting online.

Encourage a response of repentance and belief- leaving behind and taking up what God calls us to, of coming back to God, surrendering to him and opening life to whatever he might say to us.

## Worship

- Lead a time of repentance and belief: what will people leave behind and what will they take up?
- Ask them to bring a note or stone to the cross representing what they are leaving behind
- Give them something – a cardboard cross for them to take and carry in the week ahead to represent what they are committing to.
- Say the creed as an act of faith and trust.
- Sing hymns / songs of surrender: Take My Life and Let It Be, I surrender All.

# Sermon 2:

# Refresh

*“He leads me beside still waters  
he restores my soul”*

## Introduction

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.”

Here David expresses how a shepherd knows the needs of his flock and takes them to green pastures and a safe place to rest and drink and how God knows our needs and wants to do this in our lives.

- Ask people if they have ever been really thirsty – we feel that it happens very rarely in our cold northern climate. But to prevent dehydration, you need to get plenty of water from drink and food every day. Health experts commonly recommend eight 8-ounce glasses, which equals about 2 litres, or half a gallon a day. Who manages to do that? And the result is that we turn to food to meet our thirst. The danger after a pandemic and lockdown is that unless we come to God with our thirst we will seek to meet it in other things.
- They have said that the pandemic has been a marathon and definitely not a sprint. Some people have said it is more like a triathlon with three lockdown phases and the last one has been the hardest due to the psychological challenges, as is often the case in a marathon or triathlon.

After a long distance race experts say rehydration is vital and recommend that for every kilogram of bodyweight you lose, you need to drink one-and-a-half litres of fluid. Try to drink around 500ml in the first 30 minutes after your run and keep sipping every five to 10 minutes until you have reached your target.

- Get some interaction going over a game of this or that: Pepsi or Coca-Cola, apple juice or orange juice, lager or real ale, red or white wine, etc. Ask which drinks actually refresh and which can make you thirstier? Some aspects of life like wealth, entertainment, popularity or success promise refreshment but like seawater the more we drink from them the thirstier we become. And when they are taken from us as they have been we discover that they have not delivered what they promised.

## *Scripture: John 7:37-40*

The context of this passage was the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. This was the annual celebration of the time when Israel wandered in the wilderness. One of the things that they commemorated and celebrated was the water that God gave from the rock in the wilderness. And each day the priests would pour out water before the altar to remember that gift of water. It was in this context that Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me." John explains that Jesus was talking about drinking and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Address two key themes from this:

**1** What is this spiritual thirst?

**2** How do we satisfy this thirst by drinking from Jesus?

# Application

Spiritual thirst?

This is the desire that comes from being created for relationship with God and the need to share in relationship with other people and the world around us with God. This is the God shaped hole.

*"Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."*

**Augustine of Hippo, Confessions**

Jesus is teaching us in this statement that this need for him is expressed in the same way we need water – it is expressed as a desire, a thirst, a hunger. But the danger is that we do the same as we do where we meet our thirst for water with food or snacks (see illustration above). We fill our lives with other things that fail to satisfy.

Where might people have become thirsty for God during lockdown? Lack of in person worship, contact with other people, being able to follow God's call (things have felt on hold) or be able to build or achieve things with God. Our relationship with God has easily become flat and passive instead of alive.

*"If you aren't hungry for God, you are full of yourself. That's why God cannot fill you with His Spirit. But if you will empty yourself, if you will die to self, you'll be a different person."*

**Mark Batterson, All In: You Are One Decision Away From a Totally Different Life**

## How to 'drink' from Jesus?

In Ephesians 5:18-20 Paul contrasts getting drunk on wine with being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not an optional extra, it is an imperative for each Christian to avoid the temporary high and emotional release and relief of drinking too much alcohol but instead to keep on being filled with the Spirit (it is in the present continuous form of the verb). And he goes on to say how important sung worship and prayer is for Christians. That we actually speak to one another not just God in this moment. This is what has been taken from us during the lockdown and this will be a key part of being filled with the Spirit and being refreshed. See the J K Smith quote below:

*“Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabilitates our loves. Worship isn’t just something we do; it is where God does something to us. Worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts. You can’t think your way into new hungers.”*

**James K.A. Smith, You Are What You Love:  
The Spiritual Power of Habit**

## Response

Encourage people to seek spiritual refreshment from Jesus.

Ask people to reflect on their pattern of prayer and worship. Within your tradition call people to prioritise an expression of this in their lives personally and corporately. Perhaps encourage a fast from things that people otherwise might seek comfort and refreshment in: social media, television watching, snack foods, alcohol. Encourage the use of resources that will allow them to drink deeply from him – resources that help personal Scripture reading and prayer, worship music, etc.

Corporately what might this call to spiritual refreshment mean: a time for corporate prayer; half-nights of prayer and worship. Prayer stations / labyrinths set up in the church. A period of 24-7 Prayer. A week of daily eucharist and eucharistic adoration. Daily video or live scripture reflections for the whole church online.

## **Worship**

Opportunity for praying for people to be filled with the Holy Spirit in some way that fits with your tradition following the sermon is the natural response- e.g. laying on of hands, anointing with oil at the communion rail.

You could set up cups with water for people to come to the front of church and take and drink as a symbol of them seeking Jesus and his spiritual renewal.

Songs / hymns: O Thou Who Camest from Above, Breathe on me Breath of God, Holy Spirit You Are Welcome Here, More Love More Power.



# Sermon 3:

# Rejoice

*“You set a table before me in the midst  
of my enemies, you anoint my head  
with oil and my cup overflows”*

## *Introduction*

This verse feels like a good description of planning parties and celebrations as we come to the end of the Covid pandemic in our country – a table in the midst of a threat.

A meal nourishes and sustains and we have needed God’s sustenance and the moving picture of this part of Psalm 23 is that Almighty God takes the position of a servant and prepares a meal and a table to sit and eat and enjoy his anointing and overflowing presence that we celebrated last week.

So I wonder how God has done that in the past year?

But more than that a table and a meal is all about friendship, community, family. The pandemic has revealed how important this is to us as human beings and how much we have been deprived of it and yet how we have also connected more deeply with people in our community, our neighbours, those on the frontline who have been serving us.

Food was a big issue in lockdown: free school meals and the inspiration Marcus Rashford was to ensuring every child had a nutritious meals. How people cared for people who were experiencing financial difficulties with meal deliveries and food banks. Food is a necessity and God cares for the poor. How might this theme connect with your context?

Engage people in thinking; what was the food you missed most in the first lockdown when no takeaway food was available? What was / will be the first way they will use their freedoms to celebrate the end of all the lockdown restrictions?

## *Scripture: John 2:1-12*

Wedding festivities generally lasted for 7 days and to run out of wine on third day would have been a matter of shame for the host family in a tight-knit community. Jesus' mother wants to save their friends from this shame.

Cana is an insignificant town in Galilee and at a time when Jesus has begun his public ministry he chooses to attend a family social occasion in a small town. This is saying something important about the incarnation – God is affirming the value of community, of marking significant personal events in community, of celebrating together.

This is the place where Jesus performs his first and second miracles in John's Gospel. This is the first of seven signs that John records in his gospel and he records that the result is that it revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him (v11). And it all happens in insignificant Cana at a wedding feast. What does that say to us about how God might want to be at work in our community and in the times and places we gather to celebrate as we have the opportunity?

# Application

Areas to explore from this theme:

## **Its time to party!**

The change of season in nature gives us hope – the move from the darkness and barrens of Winter to the abundance of Spring and Summer. “Spring is nature's way of saying 'Let's party!'” (Robin Williams). The release from lockdown is like a change of season and its time to rejoice and celebrate.

## **It's time to get together.**

The opportunity of the end of lockdown is an opportunity to build community and address the issues that lockdown revealed of loneliness and isolation and our need of one another.

The fact that our country has a government minister for loneliness says it all.

“The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.”

**A Simple Path: Mother Teresa**

Juan Carlos Ortiz was pastor of a church in Buenos Aires, Argentina. One Sunday, as he stood up to preach, he felt the Lord convict him simply to tell them “Love one another”. And so he stood up and simply said these words, “Love one another.” Then he sat down – he felt a conviction from God to say nothing else. The congregation sat there, waiting for something more. So Ortiz stood again and said, “Love one another.” Now the congregation began to stir nervously. When was the pastor going to begin to preach? After some time Ortiz stood up a third time and said, “Love one another.” He sat down again. A gentleman in the third row of the congregation leaned over to the man next to him and said, “I think the pastor wants us to love one another.” He then asked, “Is there anything I can do for you?” His neighbour admitted that he was a bit concerned about paying his bills that month so the first man opened his wallet and said, “Let me help you.” Soon, all across the sanctuary, people began talking and engaging in conversations with their neighbours. There was laughter and crying and praying. For the next few months, Ortiz preached on the theme, “Love one another.” He asked his people to continue to practice it among themselves. He asked them to make a firm commitment to treat one another kindly and well. Then he asked his people to begin to practice love with the neighbourhood surrounding the church, intentionally living out acts of love with those outside the church.

The ordinariness of Cana and a couple getting married shows how God cares for every single one of our lives. Celebrate that.

How can we be used by God to bring blessing to those around us, to create a place of community and hospitality?

John says that this miracle revealed Jesus glory. Take some time to focus people upon Jesus the true joy giver and the only one who can save us not just from shame at a party, but from sin and death by his blood shed on the cross that the wine reminds us on. Jesus invites everyone to the table of Holy Communion to feed on him.

# Response

As this sits within the wider series and we have had opportunity for personal spiritual response try and make this response practical and about loving others and sharing life with them.

Ask if anyone is in need of support and friendship – encourage them to reach out.

Ask people to consider who they could invite for a meal and seek to bless.

Share any plans the church has to create opportunities for celebrations or ways to enable the community around you to come together.

## Worship

Don't miss the connection of this story with Holy Communion. As you do this perhaps emphasise 'The Peace' as part of the process of coming to the table with others.

Have a time of intercession for the needs of the lonely and around you in your local community.



# Sermon 4:

# Remember

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me your rod and staff comfort me”*

## Introduction

Reflect on our experience of loss during the lockdown – lost freedoms, lost special moments, loss of relationship, death of loved ones, loss of finance / job.

Read out this verse from Psalm 23:

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me, you rod and staff comfort me”*

It is said that as a shepherd walked through the narrow gorges of mountain regions in Israel he would tap the rocks with his staff to help his sheep know that he is just ahead and which way to go. David remembers the staff of a shepherd by which he would lift a sheep out of a ticket or his rod which he would throw or use to fight off wild animals and he applies this memory to the image of God as our shepherd, that he fights for us and is able to rescue us. Traditionally Christians have interpreted the rod and staff as the word and Spirit, the means by which God makes his presence known and speaks to us and sets us free.

## *Scripture: John 11:17-37*

Jesus could not have arrived in time to prevent Lazarus' death. He delays only two days before going to Bethany (v. 6), but by the time he arrives in Bethany Lazarus has been dead four days (v. 39). Had Jesus departed immediately—two days earlier—Lazarus would have been dead two days before Jesus' arrival in Bethany.

Jewish people believed that the soul remains in the vicinity of the body for three days, hoping to rejoin the body. On the fourth day, the soul finally faces reality and departs. The fact that Lazarus has been in the tomb four days means that there can be no possibility of his soul rejoining his body. Four days is shorthand for "hopeless."

Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus is the last 'sign' recorded in John's Gospel and is a picture of the resurrection he will one day perform for everyone who believes in him. It records him engaging with death and grief and his first engagement is personal, he weeps. He experiences grief. And then he brings hope and resurrection.

## *Application*

We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). This is a time where we need both.

There is a story of a mother who sends her daughter to the shop for the first time to buy milk. Her daughter takes a long time to return and the mother is beside herself with worry. When the little girl returns the mother asks her why it took so long. The girl says "Oh I met Jane and she had broken her doll and so I stopped to help her fix it". The mother asked how she could help her fix her doll. The girl replied "I really couldn't, but I sat down with her and helped her cry".

But because of Jesus' presence, in the midst of grief he brings resurrection. The interaction with Mary and Martha is helpful in giving an example of how faith and grief and doubt intermingle within us. Give people permission to acknowledge their struggles in believing in Jesus victory and goodness in the midst of suffering.

The Psalms give us permission to lament (Psalms 12, 14, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, and 126) within a community of faith. People need this permission at this time and our churches are called to be places that 'hold' people as they experience grief and loss. As Pete Grieg writes in *God on Mute*: "When we are hurting and the pain seems senseless, we may find it hard to think clearly or pray diligently. But we can still trust, resting quietly in the Father's love for us ... receiving the kindness of people as gifts from God".

Jesus commands Lazarus to come out and raises him to life – this was a physical reality demonstrating Jesus power and authority and divinity, but it is also a symbol of the resurrection he promises us and that he achieved himself.

What difference has the promise of resurrection and eternal life made to people's approach to the prevalence of death in the pandemic?

In the midst of grief we have the good news of the resurrection. We will be celebrating the end of this lockdown. In a nod to Greek history, the first marathon commemorated the run of the soldier Pheidippides from a battlefield near the town of Marathon, Greece, to Athens in 490 B.C. According to legend, Pheidippides ran the approximately 25 miles to announce the defeat of the Persians to some anxious Athenians.

At the end of our marathon how can we be those who offer the good news that Jesus has defeated death to people living with no eternal hope at such a hard time.

# Response

Who is God calling people to comfort and support at this time?

Hold some silence and encourage them to remember that they have been baptised into Christ – his death was so that they need not fear death and his resurrection promises their resurrection.

Encourage people to respond in thanksgiving.

## **Worship**

Have a time of intercession for those who have experienced loss.

Hymns / songs: Faithful one. The Lord's My Shepherd (various versions),  
Be Still for the Presence of the Lord.

# Sermon 5:

# Recover

*"He guides me along the right paths"*

## Introduction

God's road to recovery involves trusting and following him. Jesus as our good shepherd knows the paths of this world that lead to healing and freedom, that take us to good pastures and still waters. As the tide of the pandemic goes out we will reflect of where it has left us and what it has left behind in our lives. For many of us this will be in a place that we wouldn't have chosen and in which we recognise the brokenness in our lives. The question is what or who we will put our trust in to lead us forward? And as a church community how can we be God's hands of compassion to care for people.

"The Gate of the Year" is the popular name given to a poem written by Minnie Louise Haskins in 1908 and privately published in 1912, was part of a collection titled The Desert. It caught the public attention when King George VI quoted it in his 1939 Christmas broadcast as our nation entered the second world war.

*And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way." So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.*

## *Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30*

These are among the most beloved and quoted verses in the Bible, because all of us feel burdened and in need of rest. In their original context, these verses spoke specifically to those burdened by the Jewish law. Religious professionals prided themselves on their observance of the law, and burdened ordinary people with unbearable rules and requirements. Jesus said “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me” (v. 29).

Rabbis often likened the law to a yoke. Here Jesus uses it to offer an alternative picture of the yoke across his shoulders as well as ours in which he leads our lives but also shares our burdens. His yoke is ‘chrestos’ (the Greek word meaning manageable or easy).

Then he describes his heart towards us - “for I am gentle and lowly in heart” and “you will find rest for your souls”.

## *Application*

“Come to me” Jesus solution is himself – this is a call to trust ourselves to him and stop trying to fix ourselves – liberating and refreshing. Unique to anyone else in human history, Jesus simply offers himself as the universal solution to all that burdens us. Describe what it means to come to Christ for the first time and to keep doing this in our lives.

A certain London banker was exploring faith and wondering if he would become a Christian. As he came to the point of praying he decided to give God a 20% share in his life. He felt God speak to him and say “I want 100%”. He tried to negotiate and offered a controlling influence of 51% to him. But he kept sensing God saying ‘I want all of you’. In the end he gave his whole life to Christ.

In coming to Christ we give our whole self to him and he gives himself to us (it’s easy to see who gets the better deal!). And how do we keep offering ourselves to Christ – particularly overtime the wearying nature of life can create a sense of distance or loss of relationship with God?

Who qualifies? The good news is that everyone who is weary and burdened – all of us. Our need and our weakness qualifies us for God’s grace. Speak into Jesus’ desire to comfort and heal and minister to us.

The Divine Exchange: we give up the yoke of burdens we have been carrying and take on the yoke God uses to guide us, and share our burdens. God is in the exchange business; on the cross Jesus takes the burden of our sins upon himself and replaces it with his righteousness. But it involves giving up and taking on and that involves trust.

Rest for our souls – not a surface quick fix but the restoration of our deepest sense of self as we find peace with God and receive his peace.

## Response

Invite people to give their whole self to Christ for the first time or in an act of recommitment.

Invite those who are weary and burdened to bring their burdens to the foot of the cross – the place of divine exchange.

Speak about our call to carry one another's burdens – who is it that God is calling you to help recover from the effects of the pandemic?

What is that you as a church are feeling called to do in this area?

## **Worship**

Songs: When I survey the wondrous Cross. At the foot of the Cross. Take My Life.

Use a cross as a focal point to come and lay burdens down.

Offer prayer for healing in the way that is appropriate for your tradition.



