


# REVIVE!



*The Lord your God is in your midst,  
the Mighty One will save. Zephaniah 3:17*

**W**ith all that is going on in the world – the upheaval, the conflicts, the breaking down of society – do you ever feel God is distant? Maybe your personal circumstances have been difficult of late. Have you found yourself asking, 'Does He care? Is He there?'

Not long ago, we were celebrating the birth of Jesus, one of whose names is Immanuel, **God with us**. Incredibly, in the middle of straw and animal stench, as vulnerable as a human being could be, there was God taking up human flesh, allowing Himself to be prodded and gawked at by poor peasant families, marginalised shepherds and curious Eastern astrologers.

And so the Word (Jesus) dwelt among us (John 1:14) in the nitty gritty of life, in the dust, in all the pain, the joys, the struggle and loss we experience in life. Yes, the healing power of God was seen through the 'miracles, signs and wonders which God

did **among you**' (Acts 2:22). He was also crucified, with two criminals on each side, with Jesus '**in the middle**' (John 19:18), right **in the midst** of injustice, extreme torture and pain, and indeed our sin. After his resurrection, when the disciples had locked themselves in for fear, we find Jesus **among them** speaking 'Peace!' (John 20:19).

God is never far away. In fact, the message of the Bible is that **whatever we are in the midst of, God is in the midst**. Doesn't that give us great comfort and hope? John O'Donohue has said that we can suffer from a desperate hunger to be loved and we search for it in lonely places. '*Yet the whole time, this love is but a few inches away from you. It is at the edge of your soul.*' He is **in our midst**, closer than we can possibly imagine. Let us explore together in this edition of 'REVIVE!' this great reality, that **God is indeed right in our midst!**

*With love from us all at CCHC. David*

## The Power of Song



**S**ongs are powerful! They can inspire and move us to tears. Just look at the huge rugby players overcome with such emotion at the end of the Italian national anthem! How could hundreds of Ukrainian Christians sing and worship God in a Kyiv underground station on the day of the Russian invasion? Or early Christians sing Psalms on their way to a martyr's death?

It seems there is song at the heart of the universe. God spoke the world into existence with His powerful word (Genesis 1:3).

- ▶ *Job 38:7 also says at the creation of the universe, "the angels and morning stars sang and shouted for joy!"*
- ▶ *Tolkein's Lord of the Rings and C.S.Lewis' Narnia Chronicles have their world's creator singing the universe into existence!*
- ▶ *Elizabeth Landau, a NASA scientist, observes that the universe is full of music. The biggest stars emit low sounds, like tubas and double basses; the small ones high pitched sounds like flutes.*

At the heart of the universe, there is music, there is song . . . right from the heart of God Himself! Zephaniah 3:17 says *'the Lord is in your midst, mighty to save. He takes great delight over you and rejoices over you with singing.'* Can you hear the music of the universe, or hear Him singing over you, dancing even, with joy and delight, right in your midst?

## Look at the bush

**M**oses encountering God at the burning bush in Exodus 3 is one of those Bible passages that sparks, as well as pushes the boundaries of, our imagination. It was so much more than a clever conjuring trick!

The Israelites had been *suffering, oppressed as slaves, depressed and crying out* because they were trapped and powerless (see vv7,9).

Moses himself was a broken man. In his youth he was well-educated, self-assured and proud in his own abilities when he took the law and justice into his own hands, defending a fellow countryman by killing his opponent. We now find him older, in a desert, looking after sheep and utterly disbelieving that he had the ability to respond to God's call to liberate His people from Egypt. Could the situation be any worse? And where was God?

In the midst of all this, we see a flaming bush, that would not burn up (v2). In fact the word 'bush' gets mentioned five times in the Hebrew in a few short verses. Look at the bush! God sees, hears and experiences to the depths of His being what the Israelites are going through (see v7,9). He 'has come down,' (v8) and will continue to be, in their midst (v12).

God still sees, hears and knows what we are going through today. Sometimes He reveals His presence and speaks in stunning supernatural ways. Sometimes it is in ordinary ways, perhaps through His creation, a life-giving word from someone, or an unusual God-shimmering coincidence. Is there something God is saying to you today?

**"Earth's crammed with heaven,  
and every common bush afire  
with God. But only he who sees  
takes off his shoes. The rest sit  
round it and pluck blackberries."**

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

# The last word, the last laugh

**H**ow many of us switch on the news and quickly feel overwhelmed by the torrent of evil and destructiveness, of situations seemingly impossible to resolve? We turn away with a deep sense of hopelessness and despair. Maybe we are going through personal situations that seem unresolvable.

In Genesis 18, Sarah feels absolutely despairing of her situation. Humanity has well and truly fallen (Genesis 1-11), but God has revealed His plan to create a new humanity from her offspring (Genesis 12:1-3). Decades have gone by, she is infertile and now very old. Genesis 18:13 says she laughs to herself (literally in the Hebrew, she laughs 'in her midst'). From the depths of her being she feels hopeless. Her situation is utterly impossible!

But ... for God! He will have the last word, and indeed the last laugh. *'Is there anything*

*too hard for the Lord?'* (v14.) We like to have the last word, especially in arguments! We are often afflicted by 'last words' that run around our brains, spoken over us in childhood, such as, 'You are too \_\_, you are not \_\_ enough' (fill in the blanks).

God's last word over you, however, is that you are incredibly loved, inimitably special, with a unique purpose on this earth (Isaiah 43:1-6; Jeremiah 29:11). God's last word for Sarah was, *'You will have a son, and you will call him Isaac'*, the name which means laughter (Genesis 17:19, 18:14). Can you see a twinkle in God's eye?

And His last word is that He will renew the heavens and the earth. There will, one day, be no more crying or pain or mourning or death (Revelation 21:1-6). So for now, *'Trust me'*, says the Lord, *'I am at work, in your midst, in the earth and even in your very own heart!'*

## Still Point

**W**e have all known what it is like to be in a storm. Sometimes it is bracing and exhilarating. Sometimes it is scary as elemental forces rage around. Have you ever been at the still point, right in the middle of the storm?

The psalmist has famously said 'in the presence of my enemies, you prepare a table before me' (**with everything swirling around!**) And not only that, 'you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows' (Psalm 23:5).

Whatever we are in the midst of, God invites us to be still, to sit in His presence, and receive nourishing food from His hand. The famous 16<sup>th</sup> century icon by Andrei Rublev depicts a meal when Father, Son and Holy Spirit met with Abraham in Genesis 18. God welcomes you to the table. Will you come? What is He giving you to eat today?



## Stars

**W**here is God?" people ask, in a world that has decidedly turned their backs on Him. Whatever you are in the midst of, God wants you to be a sign of His presence – a shining star in a dark world. St Paul's encouragement is, 'Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world ... holding fast to the word of life' (Phillipians 2:14-16).

The acronym BELLS.\* shows us how. **B**less someone today, through a prayer, word or practical act. **E**at with someone this week, show hospitality, even with a coffee. **L**isten to the promptings of the Lord. **L**earn from Jesus. And know that you are **S**ent, anointed to shine for Him, right where you are.

\*from *Surprise the World* by Robert Frost



**I**n January, I went on a **Chaplain Accompanied Retreat**, hoping to hear from God, but not really expecting to! Having been *in the desert* for some time, I went with little hope, but 'O ye of little faith', the week far surpassed my expectations and I went home a very different person to the one who arrived feeling so low! A big thanks to my prayer guide who gave me the space and freedom to be myself and helped me to understand the ways that God speaks to me.

God was most definitely in the midst of my stay and I was reminded of the hymn, *'Jesus we enthrone you, we proclaim you our King. Standing here in the midst of us, we raise you up with our praise!'* I have experienced God in the midst so many times at CCHC over the years, so I shouldn't have been surprised that I would do so again. It is a very special place and I can't wait for my next visit!"

## From a guest at the Christmas Retreat

"I have experienced the gentle healing of God through worship, laughing, community, prayer, festive fun and food."

## From a first time guest

"I have experienced God in a way that I have never done before. God's presence is so tangible here."

**W**e give thanks for the recent 5-star award for hygiene from the Dept of Environmental Health following an unannounced inspection.



We are excited about the expansion of our Howard's Well menu, for which many favourable comments are being received.

## Please pray for:

- ▶ safe completion of the works being done for the patio and wing flats;
- ▶ good health for the staff with so many bugs around;
- ▶ wisdom and guidance for the use of the resources God has given us of late;
- ▶ **future retreats:**
  - ◆ Prayer Through Painting (Feb 23-25);
  - ◆ Individual Chaplain Accompanied Retreat (March 4-8);
  - ◆ Easter Retreat (March 28-31), and
  - ◆ Prayer Day (April 12), *'I will pour out my Spirit'*; interceding for ourselves and the world, inspired by the Book of Joel.

Whichever way we turn, O God, there is Your face,  
in the light of the moon and patterns of stars,  
in sacred mountain rifts and ancient groves,  
in mighty seas and creatures of the deep.

Whichever way we turn, O God, there is Your face,  
in the light of eyes we love,  
in the salt of tears we have tasted,  
in weathered countenances east and west,  
in the soft skin glow of the child everywhere.

Whichever way we turn, O God, there is Your face,  
there is your face among us.

John Philip Newell