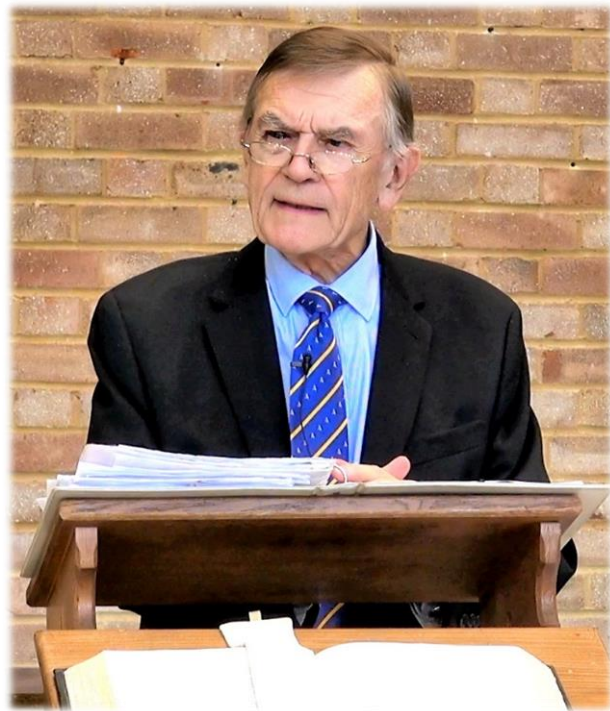


Morning Service Sunday 22nd March – led by Tony Alderman



Good to have Tony back with us after a 'hiatus' of 15 months. He praised Affinity Water for providing us with a 'fountain of youth' – we were all looking so young and fresh! – something that unfortunately had not reached as far as Barnet, he observed. He was wearing the tie he had worn on 22 December 2024: had he ever taken it off I wondered?

It had been a challenging week for Tony, and his 'chat' opened on a sombre note, much of it focused on death – reflections matching the solemnity of Lent.

Tony reflected on the week's events that had affected him and his family. He'd been deeply saddened to read about the death of David Aplin's granddaughter Amelia. The news had struck a chord with him, reminding him of the fragility of life, especially among the young. Tony's 12-year-old grandson now lived with them because his father (their son-in-law) had also died suddenly at the age of 23 – the cause believed to be Sudden Arrhythmia Death

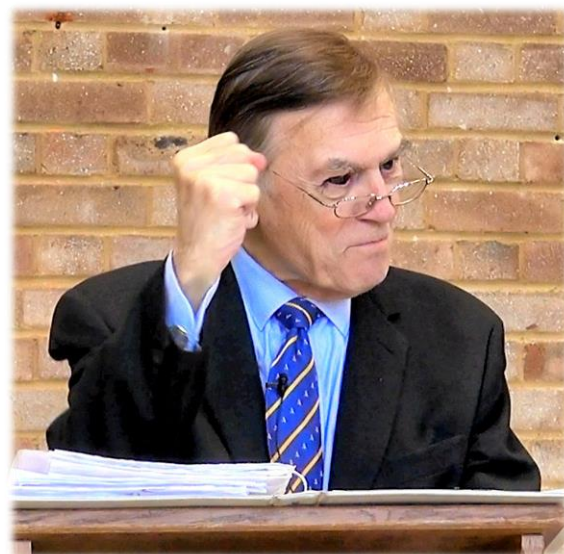
Syndrome. There was a charity called CRY, which offered support and information to families who had suffered a loss to SADS. CRY was campaigning for every newborn child to have their heart monitored. Had James' condition been detected, he could have been fitted with a pacemaker and would likely still be alive today. It was possible that this could have made a difference for Amelia as well. Tony encouraged us all to press those in government to introduce screening that could save twelve young lives each year.

At around the same time another of Tony's grandchildren, Ava, a 14-year-old, had been attacked at the bus stop outside her school by a 17-year-old girl, and her phone had been stolen. She'd survived the attack, but since then, her mother had had to stay with her most nights and now escorted her to the school gates where she was met by the head of year. The girl responsible for the attack had been charged with robbery but had used Ava's phone telephone family members, threatening to murder Ava.

Tony also reflected on passing of Jean Morse, it being the first anniversary of her funeral. They had shared a mutual friend, Stella Palmer, whose husband had sadly died of liver cancer just weeks after his diagnosis. It had now been nearly five years since Tony had been diagnosed with liver cancer, which brought additional poignancy to his reflections. He'd also lost a friend of 76 years, Brian, in this same week.

There had been good news as well. He'd been very pleased to read that a number of church adherents had chosen to become church members. And going back to Jean Morse, he'd sat next to Jean at our 90th anniversary dinner, with Jean on his right, Margaret Barton to his left, and Maureen opposite. What a great evening for a chap. The wife had been away, and he'd had all these young ladies to talk to. That was something to remember!

The Story of Lazarus: Grief and Hope - Four days after their brother Lazarus had died, Jesus had arrived to visit Mary and Martha. In the midst of their sorrow, Jesus had comforted them, declaring, "I am the resurrection and the life," and assured them that Lazarus would rise again. Moved by the grief of those around him, Jesus had wept for Lazarus. Then, standing before the tomb, he'd called Lazarus forth and Lazarus had been restored to life - a miracle that brought hope amid the solemnity of Lent, with the shadow of the cross looming nearby. The week's readings had been full of hope and the promise of new life, yet the Gospel reminded us not to rush towards joy without first



dwelling in grief. We were urged to awaken, but had first to enter the darkness, acknowledging loss and sorrow before moving forward.

When Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, he assured us that it was okay to grieve. More than that, grieving was vital, and our familiar rituals were part of this process. In the Gospel, Lazarus had been given new life, Martha and Mary gained new understanding, and many witnesses had gained new belief. It was the life-giving power of God's breath and spirit, bringing not just new life, but also purpose and responsibility.

The Power of Gratitude and Renewal - On 17/03/2012, Fabrice Muamba had been playing for Bolton Wanderers in an FA Cup match at Tottenham Hotspur. Partway through the first half, he'd collapsed, and his heart had stopped beating. In the crowd that day there had been a cardiac consultant who recognised that a man was dying on the pitch and immediately used his expertise to help rescue Fabrice. Not only had he pulled through, he'd gone on to live a full life.

In his book, "I'm Still Standing", Fabrice started with a simple expression of gratitude: "Thank you." Two small words that made all the difference, though they could never do justice to the many people who had ensured he was still alive and well today. He thanked God for granting him health, happiness, and family, as well as for ensuring he received the specialist care he'd needed to save his life.

In Jesus's dialogue with Martha, resurrection was portrayed as both an experience for the present and a hope for the future. For those who believed in Jesus, there was a daily dying and rising to be done—dying to sin and rising to holiness. This was symbolised in baptism and echoed in the themes of Lent. There was also the glorious hope of the day when, even as our bodies failed, we should never die. This hope was heralded on Easter Day. Might God awaken us to the wonder of resurrection, both in the here and now, and in the day to come. We were encouraged: stay awake, stay alert, and stay hopeful!



And there was a smile of appreciation from Faye, who was with us for the first time today as Stephen finished the closing music. She loves singing, so our choir lives in hope!