

*Note: Following the terrorist attack in Manchester, our worship service is dedicated to praying for our nation. Below is a short reflection shared by our Minister at this service.*

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Six days ago, the unthinkable and the unexpected happened. It is not enough to think or say, *What can we expect when violence is endemic to our world; after all, violence and death existed since the first family, when Cain killed Abel, bludgeoned him to death in a field.*

In the Psalms, one thread of thought runs through loud and clear which is, **EVERY life is precious to God and greatly valued by Him.** It does not matter who you are, or what you have experienced, or how you might have been treated, your life is precious to God; your life matters to God, your life is in God's hands, who is the ultimate authority.

The Psalmist sings, *When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you set in place, who are mere mortals that you should think about them, even that you should care for them?*

The Psalmist goes on to respond to his own question, *You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler (responsible to look after) over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet - all the sheep and oxen, as well as the animals in the wild, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea that pass through the currents of the seas<sup>1</sup>.*

Each one of us, in this room, in this city, in this nation, across the whole world, each one of us, is precious to God. Again, the Psalmist sings, *It was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8

*you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are too wondrous, and I know this very well. My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began. God, how precious your thoughts are to me; how vast their sum is! If I counted them, they would outnumber the grains of sand; when I wake up, I am still with you.*<sup>2</sup>

In the context of this relationship between God and ourselves, one word brings together the emotions and sentiments of our celebration today, of Jesus' ascension to heaven, and the events of Monday night in Manchester: **SEPARATION.**

Six days ago, on Monday night, 22 families were not prepared for a sudden separation from the one they loved, one they cared for, the one who was taken away from them, so very suddenly.

Each life is precious to God, and each of the 22 who died are precious in the sight of God; we don't know their relationship with God, but each one is, nevertheless, precious in the eyes of God.

One young girl, when interviewed on the night, made a significant statement. She said, *If Ariana (Grande) had not returned to the stage to sing an encore, there would have many more people in the foyer when the bomb went off.* The human carnage could have been significantly worse. As difficult as it may be to grasp and appreciate, in the midst of tragedy and wanton destruction, God is always in total control.

Two thousand and some years go, Jesus' disciples were separated from the One they had learned to love and respect, whose authority they learned to

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:13-14

obey, and whose mission they were drawn into, to which they had committed themselves. A few weeks ago, we noted how Jesus prepared them for this time of separation.

22 families in Manchester miss a much loved member of their family. Many who have a relationship with the Living God, will harbour the thought, *How much longer Lord? How much longer will we have to wait until evil is finally crushed?*

The Apostle Peter, impetuous, hasty and often relentless in his enthusiasm, said this, *This one thing you must not forget, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. God isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent*<sup>3</sup>.

Think of it, the only reason God might *seem* (to us) to be delaying His return, to put an end to evil once-and-for-all-time, is because He wants that none should perish in the coming destruction which will destroy evil, but for all to come into the knowledge, that they can be saved for eternity with God.

“As you have seen the Christ ascend to heaven, exactly so you shall see Him return!”

**AMEN! Come Lord Jesus!**

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 3:8-9 NLT