

# *In the Land of Beginning Again*

*Short stories of  
the Millennium*

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## CONTENTS

1	Thy Dead shall live	3
2	Resurrection by Judgment	8
3	The Eyes of the Blind	11
4	The Rule of the Shepherding Rod	15
5	Thy Children shall come again	19

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# 1. Thy Dead shall Live

“I have finished Sheila’s awakening robe!”

Absorbed in his painting, he did not reply immediately. As his brush completed the last few deft strokes his eyes left the canvas and looked out across the trim lawn with its borders of gay flowers. His lips framed a question.

“How shall we explain her mother’s absence to her?”

His companion had risen and was draping the beautifully embroidered blue robe over her deck chair. It lay there, shimmering in the afternoon sun as though waiting for its destined wearer to slip straight into it.

“I do not know, John. This is a new experience for us, to await the awakening of one whose mother has gone to be with the Lord in the heavens. We ourselves have not been back long enough to know just how her mother will commune with her. But I am sure of one thing.”

She picked up a basket of coloured silks and turned to go into the house. “It is written ‘He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thin.’ Sheila’s happiness will not be complete if she fails to be re-united with her mother. Others whose loved ones have been translated to reign with the Lord Jesus tell us they have talked with them although we have not been able to understand their explanations. Perhaps when Sheila awakens we shall see for ourselves and understand what we now see only as through a glass, darkly. She was twenty-five when she died, John, thin, and wasted by disease. Now she will take up life where she left it, healthy in body and mind, ready to hear the message of the Gospel and make her decision for Jesus.”

John followed his sister in the house, carrying his easel and canvas. Two kittens gambled happily on the lawn. Inside, the two knelt in prayer. The man’s deep voice came faintly through the open windows.

“O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, look down from thy habitation on high and behold the preparation we have made for one whose friendship was dear to us in days gone by. We believe and art sure that thou canst bring her back, that the young life so soon cut short in all the bloom of youth can be revived and rejoice in this thy wonderful earth, and that with gladness she will come into harmony with the laws of thy righteous kingdom. Bring her back to us, that we may tend her as one of thy little ones, we beseech Thee, in the holy Name of our Master and our King, Jesus.”

Two voices united in a softly reverent “Amen”.

The kittens had ceased their play and were lying still, as though waiting. The hum of bees and insects took on a lower note, waned and died away altogether. The singing of the birds in the trees faded into quietness. A strange peace seemed to have closed in upon that sheltered garden. The sun slid behind a fleecy cloud, a solitary cricket chirped once, and then all was still...

A soft whisper in the tree-tops...a gentle breeze sweeping down, stirring the quiet air, billowing through that blue robe lying in the deck chair, giving it almost the appearance of reality, a graceful reality that moved slightly, rhythmically, as though breathing... the sun shone out warmly and birds and insects burst out together in triumphant chorus...

The girl in the deck chair lay, dreamy eyes half open, puzzled wonderment slowly dawning as she sought to take in the details of the scene before her. She turned her head slightly and followed the course of a butterfly over the flower tops. Her gaze fell upon one slender hand and she raised it hesitatingly, almost as though she expected the movement to be accompanied by pain. The blue sleeve slid back, revealing a delicately moulded arm without flaw or blemish. A little frown of perplexity puckered her forehead and she closed her eyes as memory began to return.

The thin, wasted arm; the white bedclothes, the grave-faced doctor just over there; the tearful face of her mother; the fast-gathering greyness coming down before her eyes and blotting out everything from sight; the slow fading of sound into silence, and now this! She opened her eyes and looked at the golden mass of mimosa blooming where a doctor had been standing only a moment ago.

Realization came, swift and sudden. “Oh mother, you were right, after all. This is the Kingdom you used to tell me about, and I have been dead and have come back. Mother, where are you?” Her arms were outstretched, beseeching.

A soft voice spoke behind her.

“I am here, Sheila.”

There was something in the timbre of that voiced which checked the girl’s first impulse to turn round toward the speaker. “It is true then? I have come back, fit and well, and never to suffer again?”

“Never again, my child. The tears are all over now.”

“And you? Did you attain...your hope, mother?”

“Yes, dear. It was hard to let you go, but I knew my Lord had you in his safe keeping. And in his own due time He took me also, and brought me into the glorious assembly of the Church of the First-born in Heaven.”

“It sounds like old times to hear you talk like that.” The girl’s eyes were shining. “I want to turn round and see if you are really there, and yet I feel quite content to lay here and listen to your voice. I don’t understand it at all; it is all wonderful to me.”

“You will come to understand, Sheila. We shall be able to meet and talk with each other often, although the old relationship has passed away. We have each entered into a greater family, I in heaven and you on earth, and in those families we shall find new companionships and friendships, and spheres of service for the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. And you will learn in time to talk with me even when we are not together, for distance will no longer be a barrier to our communion with each other.”

Sheila’s eyes were serious. “Your life will be spent in the heavens, and mine on the earth, and yet I can always have you to myself when I want you?”

“That is so, dear.”

She sighed happily “Then there is nothing more I want. I shall try and remember everything you ever told me about the Kingdom and give my life to serve the Lord Jesus and do my best to progress along the – what do you call it? – the Highway of Holiness, just as fast as every I can.”

The soft voice seemed to be coming from a great distance now. “Remember the words we used to read together, Sheila. ‘The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.’ You are one of those ransomed, and life, rich, glorious, never-ending life lies before you. Your old childhood’s friends, John and Mary, are in the house. Go to them and they will tell you much more about this wonderful world into which you have come. I go now – but I shall come again and come to you often.”

Sheila stood up and looked around, quivering with eagerness. A puzzled look came into her eyes, and then a dawning understanding. For a long minute she stood, and then, “Come soon, my dear,” she breathed softly.

Thoughtfully she turned again and went into the house

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## 2. Resurrection by Judgment (John 5:20)

He came striding along the road, a fine figure of a man, vigorous and healthy, but with eyes betraying a haunting sadness. The other, seated by a wayside pool embowered in brilliant flowers, held up his hand in that gesture of greeting and invitation so familiar in this strange new world. The newcomer halted, hesitated and came across, voicing an easy greeting as he sat down on the grassy bank.

For a moment neither spoke. A lark soared up into the azure sky, the throbbing sweetness of its song holding the two listeners enthralled. The fields and trees shimmered in the heat of an afternoon sun, and all creation seemed at peace.

“You are on a mission?” queried the one by the pool.

“A mission which spurs me ever onward without rest” returned the other, “and until it is accomplished, I may not know happiness.”

“It needs the help of a friend, perhaps?” ventured his questioner, but the traveler shook his head.

“My sorrow is of my own making. I once defied the powers of Heaven and thought to outwit God. Now the hand of God is outstretched to me in blessing but I cannot enjoy his munificence until I have made amends for the evil which I have done.”

“I have read in the sayings of Jesus that there are those who in this day come forth to a resurrection by judgments” observed Gerhard, his eyes on two goldfish disporting themselves in the pool.

The newcomer nodded. “Those words are true. There was a time when a man of God, crying his message to a heedless people, declared, ‘Every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.’ ‘What a man soweth’ said Paul, ‘that shall he also reap.’ I knew of those Divine laws, but in my folly believed that I, a king could flout them with impunity.

“You were a king then?” returned the other with interest. His companion did not answer at once. A party of children racing along the road in joyous abandon, perceived him as he sat, and in a minute had surrounded him with every evidence of recognition and affection. “Elder Brother, elder brother” they cried. “Here is Michael. Tell him the story of Jesus.” Michael came forward shyly – a chubby golden curled toddler of three. He looked up into the friendly face above him and climbed confidently upon his knee. A strong arm held him safely but the man’s eyes were misty with tears.

“Yes, I was a king,” he said at last, almost reluctantly. His eyes looked away across the quiet countryside as though they saw other and far different scenes. His thoughts came back to the present and he turned to Gerhard. “You are a resident here? You have offered the help of a friend. Perhaps you can indeed assist me.”

“That I will gladly do” came the ready answer.

“I seek a woman named Miriam, who in the Days that Were lived in the land of Judea. Her home was in the village of El-Ramallah near the royal city of Bethlehem. I am told she lives in this district and I must have converse with her.”

“Then I can help you; for Miriam of El-Ramallah lives yonder on the slopes of the hill.” Gerhard pointed, and following his outstretched arm, the other perceived a cluster of red-roofed cottages surrounded by trees. “You see the house beside the rhododendrons? Miriam lives there, praying daily for the raising to life of her first born child, slain by Herod, the King of Judea, in the days when Jesus was born.”

“Then I must haste there to-day” said the stranger, rising to his feet and gently putting Michael upon the ground, “for my prayers must be joined with hers for the restoration of that life which was so ruthlessly cut off by my fear and cruelty.”

“Then,” said Gerhard quickly, “You are....”

“My name is Herod. I was King of Judea in the Days that Were. To-day I serve the Lord Christ whom I sought so blindly to destroy. But I have learned that ‘by mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.’ There are words which ring in my ears day and night, written in letters of fire before my eyes, ‘In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.’ Until I have sought out every mother whom I made desolate – until I have prayed with her and witnessed her joy as her loved one is restored to her arms, I many not rest. Then, and then only, shall I be free from that age-lasting reproach spoken of by the prophet Daniel when he told of this blessed day.”

With the shouting children running at his side and baby Michael nestled comfortably in the crook of his arm, Herod, slayer of the Innocents, strode up the hill to the place where a woman of faith waited for her heart’s petition to be fulfilled in glorious reality.

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### 3. The Eyes of the Blind

He watched the girl making her way towards him across the grass. Her slender figure outlined against the greensward made a pretty enough picture as with lithe steps she came quickly up to him. The radiance of youth gave a touch of eagerness to a countenance aflame with missionary zeal as she approached.

“Well, Arthur, have you made up your mind yet?”

“I have not, Sindra.”

The girl sat down on the low wall beside him, stretching out one hand to coax an inquisitive sparrow towards her. “Is the evidence still insufficient, then?”

The man leaned forward, hands together between his knees. “I don’t know” he said slowly. “I don’t want to be unreasonable, but...”

“But you are sure there’s a rational explanation of it all somewhere, if you can only have time to find it,” replied Sindra, a mischievous smile lightening the gravity of her face.

Her companion flushed. “Now you’re teasing again. Well, yes, there must be a rational explanation. Things like this just don’t happen, that’s all – it’s absurd, incredible.”

“But this one *has* happened,” returned the girl gently.

Arthur looked out over the cliffs to the distant sea. “I know just what you are going to say. That I look thirty and feel it, sound in wind and limb and fitter than I ever remember feeling before – and yet I know that I am sixty years of age and not long ago fighting for my breath with two nurses and a doctor doing their best for me. You are going to tell me again that I didn’t fall asleep at all, but that I died and was buried and have been raised from the dead, and I tell you it’s incredible. I won’t believe it.”

“How do you account for your being here, then?” His hands moved restlessly. “I don’t know. I remember the room beginning to go dark and the doctor’s voice coming, as from a great distance. ‘He’s going,’ and then everything seemed to swim before my eyes and things just faded out. When I opened my eyes again I was lying on the grass fully dressed and you were holding my hand.” His eyes held a far-away look. “Just like *she* did on the day ---“

She laughed lightly. “Perhaps your mother told me.”

“You’re a queer girl, Sindra. I can’t make you out at all. I’ll wager you are not more than nineteen and you talk sometimes as if you’ve lived for years and years. How could you have known my mother? She died when I was sixteen.” He was suddenly silent.

“Tell me about her,” said the girl softly.

“There isn’t much to tell. We were the best of pals – more like brother and sister. They brought her home one day from the river. She had tried to save a child from the water. The child was saved, but my mother was dead when they got her out.” He paused for a moment. “I was sixteen and about to become a Sunday School teacher. That night something died in me. It was all so cruel, so senseless. If God exists, He would not have allowed it. I became a rationalist, and for forty years preached rationalism until my illness.”

“And now?”

“I shall go on preaching it, I suppose.”

“Why ‘I suppose’?”

“The people here don’t seem as if they are likely subjects somehow. They are so *sure*.”

“Sure of what?”

“That God IS – and that they are living under a new and righteous system of government.”

“Well, it *is* new, and it *is* righteous, isn’t it?”

“I grant you that. Everything seems different somehow – and everyone seems happy, except –” He dropped his face into his hands.

“Poor laddie.”

He looked up instantly.

“Sindra, you said that in exactly the way my mother used to say it when I was in trouble as a little chap. The same tone of voice, the same tricks of speech – yes, and the same fixed faith in your God. What does it mean? Who are you? I can’t understand...”

Blue eyes looked into his own. A cool hand was laid on his. Incredulity and amazement fought for mastery on his face as realization came to him. The words fell from his lips slowly, haltingly, as though he feared to speak them. “Sindra – *you* are my mother. Younger than I have ever known you. Living, and I saw you dead. Talking to me here, and yet I saw them filling in ... Then God be merciful to me a sinner.”

He broke down, shoulders heaving. Strong young arms encircled him and an endearing voice he had thought was forever stilled spoke words of comfort in his ears. A woman’s heart gave thanks to Heaven for answered prayer and the surrender of one more life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The evening mists began to gather. Youthful voices carried on the breeze to the two seated on the cliff top.

*“Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,*

*The voice of Jesus sounds o’er land and sea,*

*And laden souls by thousands come for healing,*

*Great Shepherd, turning eager steps to Thee.*

*Angles of Jesus! Angels of Light!*

*Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.”*

Hand-in-hand, they wandered together down the pathway into the village.

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## 4. The Rule of the Shepherding Rod

The dark man – the well-built one – leaned back on the grassy bank, hands behind head, and smiled sardonically.

“Say what you like, Caspar, I do not believe a word of all this talk about a new order in which Christ is king and men are being progressively converted to him and leading good and honest lives.”

The other, seated near by, looked up, hands between knees.

“How do you account for your being here, then – and the obvious fact that there is a different order of society with the old lawlessness gone – and no one is dying any more?”

Ferdinand looked at the peaceful scene before him through narrowed eyelids, lips curled contemptuously.

“I do not have to. Here I am, in full strength of mind and body, in a world with no police and no prisons, where the majority of people are peaceable and non-resistant, and I can go my own way as I please. I still don’t have to work for my living, any more than we did in the old days. Anything I want I can take, and no one seems to resist. Granted that all I have had so far is food and clothing, but I have my eye now on something bigger.” His gaze turned speculatively to a house standing in a trim garden at the bend of the lane.

Caspar looked thoughtful.

“I don’t see how you can maintain that attitude. You know as well as I do that we crashed in that car with the police chasing us and the next moment found ourselves in this new world which is being universally proclaimed and generally accepted as under the rule of Christ, in whom neither you nor I ever believed, and that all forms of wrong and injustice are to be gradually eliminated. You know the mood of the day; ‘What a man soweth, that shall he also reap’, that retribution for wrong-doing will certainly come. How do you expect to get away with it?”

Ferdinand shifted his position and looked across.

“For an expert crook such as you were once, I am surprised that you should ask such a question. I greatly fear me that your decision to work for – shall we say – an honest living, and your claimed acceptance of whom you call the Lord Jesus Christ, has led to some deterioration of your one-time very keen intellect. Of course I shall get away with it. You see that house at the corner? I want that for myself. I shall go down there and order the owner out. If he refuses, I shall throw him out. If he comes back, I shall break a few of his bones and drop him in a nearby field. And so far as I can see no one will do a thing about it.”

He stood up, flexing his muscles. “Are you coming with me?”

“No. I have already told you I have finished with the old life. There is something in this new world that I want, and I am not going to get it by going your way.”

“Suit yourself.” Ferdinand moved off, traversing the hundred yards or so to the corner with lithe and springy steps. He stood, surveying the cottage with an appraising eye, and as he did so became conscious of someone standing beside him.

“So you have come after all, Caspar” he said without moving his head. There was no reply.

Mildly irritated, he turned. A stranger stood beside him, a stranger who had not been there a moment previously. The face was pleasant, but it was the eyes that caught and held Ferdinand’s attention. Friendly, but piercing, extending what appeared to him to be a challenge. He gazed, held and fascinated by those eyes. The stranger did not speak. Ferdinand felt that somehow he must say something.



“I am going to take that house from its owner for myself” he said. He looked back towards the cottage as he spoke. He felt rather foolish in saying it. He wanted desperately to resolve this situation by walking straight into the cottage and carrying out his plan, but somehow he could not do it with this silent stranger standing beside him.

He turned round again. “And neither you nor anyone else are going to stop me” he announced aggressively. The calm eyes remained fixed on him still, even more friendly, even greater challenge. It struck Ferdinand most oddly that everyone in this strange new world wanted to be friendly, a quality he himself had always despised, and he became suddenly conscious of an entirely new feeling – shame.

The stranger had turned as if to walk away. The slightest inclination of his head invited the other to accompany him. Ferdinand hesitated, and to his own surprise fell in step beside him.

“Tell me, who are you?” he heard himself asking. Receiving no answer, he looked again. The eyes were warm, compassionate, he thought, and instantly felt a thrill run through his being. “Compassionate!... I never knew the meaning of that word before” he thought confusedly. Words came, unbidden, to his lips, words that appalled him even as they were uttered. “Why am I so different from everyone else here? Will you tell me that?”

A slight, warm pressure on his wrist and the stranger was gone. Ferdinand looked round; there was no one in sight.

Farther up the road, Caspar was still sitting where he had left him.

Ferdinand came up to him and sat down quietly. For a moment he said nothing, and the “Caspar, I want you to tell me exactly what made you give your life to Christ. To use your own expression, what made you believe in him?”

There was a short silence. Caspar looked up at his friend. “It was like this...”

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## 5. Thy Children shall Come again (Jeremiah 31:17)

“That’s a big one!”

The great wave tipped gently over, rolled forward, a smooth cascade of shining green water, and raced foaming up to the feet of the two small boys. They jumped back instinctively.

“Wish Bob was here with us” said the elder one, rubbing his hands down his dripping swimming suit.

“D’you think he’s come back yet, Peter?” asked the other, hopping about for sheer exuberance in the brisk wind.

“I asked teacher and he didn’t know. But he said he would sure come bank sooner or later. *Everybody’s* coming back. ‘All that are in their graves’ Jesus said.

“He was drowned same time as us and he ought to come back same time as us” asserted the other.

“Maybe, but he hadn’t got a father or mother to ask God to send him back like we had. He was an orphan, no brothers or sisters or anything.”

“Then how will he get back?”

Two youthful minds grappled with the problem, serious faces looking out to sea as though seeking inspiration.

“I don’t suppose he’s got anyone to remember him now he’s dead” hazarded Peter doubtfully.

“Except us”.

“That’s right”.

“But we’re only kids, Peter. What can we do?”

“Teacher says that God will always listen to anyone who prays to him. In lessons yesterday we learned about the time when Jesus said ‘Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heave’”.

“This *is* the Kingdom of Heaven where we’re living, isn’t it, Peter?”

The elder boy’s eyes roamed over the great playground behind the sandy beach, filled with children. The sound of their shouting rose high now and then above the splashing of the waves.

“Sure it is, Fred. This is the Kingdom of God on earth. Teacher calls it the Millennial Age”.

“Perhaps God is waiting for *us* to pray for Bob to come back”, suggested the other. “After all, he’s got no one else to do it, except us”.

“Except us”. The elder lad was thinking hard. “We’ll do it, Fred. God brought us back, and if He thinks we’re worth bringing back He must think Bob is, as well”.

Two small heads were bent reverently and a faltering voice sounded faintly against the noise of the sea.

“Please God, bring Bob back to us. He was a good pal and didn’t get into mischief over much and he would so enjoy this new earth you’ve made for us. We promise to look after him and tell him all the things he ought to do. For Jesus’ sake. Amen”.

Two boyish hearts sought relief from the emotion of the moment.

“Race you to that rock out in the water!”

“Right, Fred. I’ll give you ten yards start”.

The younger, about to plunge into the sea, checked himself suddenly.

“I say, Peter”.

“What?”

“Shouldn’t we do something to show we believe God will answer our prayer and send Bob back?”

“What shall we do?”

The younger lad pondered. “Suppose we take my other swim suit with us, just to have it ready for Bob, then God will know we really believe he’s coming back?”

“That’ll do. Bring it along”.

Fred ran up the beach, and returned knotting the swimsuit loosely around his left arm. The two lads ran into the water and were soon swimming side by side toward their goal. The wind blew keenly but in their robust health they felt no discomfort, and forged their way easily through the waves.

“There’s a big swell coming, Fred. Look at the gulls settling on it!”

The insistent screech of the seabirds was dying down. From a long line riding the oncoming swell they were forming a great circle on the surface of the water, rising and dipping easily as the heaving billows passed under them. The two boys were now within that circle, and it seemed as if the gaze of all the birds was fixed upon them. The big swell was very near.

“Let’s dive right under it, Fred”.

“Right”.

They went down as the great mound of water passed over them. There was a violent tug on Fred’s left arm; he grappled strongly to retain his hold of the spare swim-suit, which was slipping from his grasp. He turned towards the surface. The gulls rose into the heavens with a great flapping of wings.

Three heads appeared upon the surface of the water.

“Thought I was a goner that time, lads” came Bob’s familiar voice. “Swallowed nearly all the ocean, I should think”. He glanced at the athletic forms of his two companions, ploughing through the water, one on each side. “What’s the matter with you fellows? You look different somehow.”.

They had reached the rock and were drawing themselves on to its shelving sides. “You tell him, Peter” urged the smaller lad.

Peter fumbled for words, the while Bob looked around him with a puzzled air.

“This is a funny go. My swim suit was blue just now. Now it’s red. And that cliff over there wasn’t there. And the beach wasn’t like that with all that sand – and we were caught in the current and the boatman was shouting – and he’s gone now... What’s happened, kids?”. He began to look alarmed.

For the second time that morning Peter prayed, silently, for heavenly counsel, and inspiration came. “D’you remember Kingsley’s story of the water babies, about the little chimney sweep boy who went into the river and drowned and went right down to the bottom and found himself in a new kind of world where he was all clean and white and everything was good?”

“That’s kid’s stuff, Peter. What’s that got to do with it?”

“Well”: Peter was choosing his words carefully. “That’s what’s happened to us. We got really drowned when the tide caught us, and we’ve come out into a new world.”

“You mean I’ve been dead and come alive again, like they used to tell us in Sunday school?”

“Yes”. Three youthful faces took on an expression of awe as they considered the immensity of this tremendous thing.

“And what happens to us now?”

“We shall grow up and learn to serve Jesus and live the way He wants us to.”

“I never much liked learning about Jesus”.

“You will now. We go to a super school where we learn about Jesus and the good things He is doing for us. When Jesus was on earth He used to gather the children round him and talk to them.”

“They never told me that at Sunday school”.

“Well, He did. We learn all about that at our school”.

“I think I’d like to learn about that kind of Jesus. I think I shall like this new kind of world. Would they take me in your school, d’you think?”

“Come and see”, said Peter.

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*This is the kind of incident that will be common in the Millennial Age. Christians who have love and served the Lord Jesus in full consecration of life to his service will experience the change to heavenly conditions of which St. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15, and so “reign with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20.4). All others of humanity will enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom on earth during which the Father makes his final plea for repentance and allegiance. It is to that new world the dead will return, in the resurrection, restored to conscious life by the power of God, in the new bodies He gives to them “AS IT HATH PLEASED HIM.”*

See Psalm 145.16, Matt. 25:40, Isaiah 33.24, Revelation 21.4, Hebrews 12.22-23, 1 Corinthians 15.50-53, Psalm 87.5-6, 1 Corinthians 15.38-40, Isaiah 35.8-10