

Our Friend
the
Son of God

Lent 2015



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Foreword

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: that is the name of the God whom Christians worship and only from whom all salvation comes.

The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union* declares it. It holds the two ancient creeds about God, the Apostles' and the Nicene, as '*authoritative statements*' that '*declare and guard the right understanding of that faith.*'

Salvation is of Jesus Christ '*who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into life what otherwise could not exist.*' This salvation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit foment life.

To have this salvation, the *Basis of Union* '*lays upon members*' the '*serious duty of reading the scriptures.*' Salvation is known through the Word of God in Scripture. In reading scripture we are *guided* by God's Word that we may be *obedient* to him. In reading scripture we are *nourished and regulated* so that opening our minds and lives with the expectation of hearing his word, we have joy in our soul and find light to our path. Jesus, Son of God, is our friend indeed.

Lent, preceding Easter, is a season of repentance and reflection. Here we study the coming of God in the man Jesus: the crucifixion reveals what salvation has come and the Easter resurrection gives hope eternal within us.

Learning from the Reformed tradition of private scripture reading in the morning and scripture together in family prayer in the evening, and learning from Wesley's encouragement to read his notes on the scripture, this booklet presents daily devotionals. Members from congregations across Australia offer their reflections on selected passages followed by prayer. In reading scripture with our hearts open to *obedience* to Christ we draw near to him in prayer. Salvation is ours, now and always.

In addition, four weekends include theological reflections from the Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki of Mooloolaba Uniting Church.

Here is theology where it ought to be - in the middle of devotions - and doing what it ought to do - give answer to the faith and hope that is within us.

Wednesday 18th February

Lent is a Journey

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said. Mark 1:17

Here’s a thought to ponder as we begin our journey through the season of Lent:

“Speaking to the issue of thinking that we are the centre of reality and that only that which we can measure, analyse etc, is all that there is: “Must we be so geocentric in our thinking? Can we not see that it is only from our point of view that this life looks like the whole? Could we not for a moment forget to be ‘sensible’ and ‘scientific’ and believe that our dreams, our longings, our intuitions, which can never be satisfied in this life, are not vapours of wishful thinking, but quietly insistent reminders of our true destiny?” JB Phillips, DAY BY DAY

There is something deep within us that is only met in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. I am drawn to theologian Karl Barth’s language where he speaks of Jesus as the Answer who meets our questions; and further, that the Answer has already been spoken, even before we frame our questions.

The season of Lent is a journey, a journey in which we behold the Answer, God’s Answer for the world. When we behold the Answer, we no longer need to suppress our questions, rather, they can be uttered. Our questions about what happens after death are met in the resurrection of Christ.

Our questions about guilt are met in the cross.
Our questions about the meaning of life are met in this Jesus.

Begin the journey.

As I pause on the first day of this Lenten journey, may I behold afresh the Answer to even my deepest questions, longings, dreams, and intuitions. Amen



Rev. Dr. Ian Hickingbotham, North Ringwood UC, Victoria

Thursday 19th February

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended he was hungry.

Luke 4 v. 1-2



Jesus' public baptism in the Jordan River was God's *imprimatur* upon him. He was no longer just "*the son of Joseph, the son of Jacob... etc.*" The authoritative voice from heaven, declared: ***You are my Son, whom I love; with whom I am well pleased !***

But now, filled with the Holy Spirit he is led into the wilderness for 40 days of temptation (testing) by the devil. It was a time of intense spiritual warfare – a time of fasting and self-denial as he set some parameters for his earthly ministry.

As the encounter develops (v. 3–13) we see Jesus successively rejecting temptations : to indulge his physical needs – *man shall not live by bread alone*; for unlimited political power – *worship the Lord and serve him alone*; to be a popular miracle worker – *do not put the Lord your God to the test*.

Two millennia later we also face these temptations: the physical, the political and the popular. (Think about what each of these might be for your life.) Without prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit and a robust knowledge of the Scriptures we are vulnerable.

The season of Lent is a period when we are mindful of the temptations of Jesus: we can be certain that we too will face periods of testing. We should put on the whole armour of God so that we can do battle and share in Christ's victory!

It is 8 am on Ash Wednesday at a busy New York subway station. The lift doors open and the crowds gush forth – shop assistants, executives, factory workers, men and women, black, Hispanic and white. An elderly priest with the sign of the cross on his forehead stands to one side in a little alcove, holding a small bowl of ashes. As a suppliant approaches, he makes the sign of the cross on their fore-head and intones the eternal words, "*Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the Gospel !*"

Lord, we too are led out into the wilderness of the world. Grant us the grace, through Christ our Lord to overcome. AMEN.

C. Malcolm Macmillan, Whittlesea UC, Victoria

Friday 20th February

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread”. And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” Luke 4:3

“If you are the Son of God”. The devil taunted in verse 3. One thing Jesus didn’t have was an identity crisis, so I’m not sure that this taunt even rated on the temptation scale for Jesus.



However the point about the bread! Jesus had been out in the desert for 40 days being tempted by the devil, “He ate nothing all that time and was very hungry”. Jesus must have been literally getting sick and tired of it all by now! Without doing any research on the 40 days with no food factor, the “hunger” must have been close to a full

body, muscle and brain shutdown by then!

Jesus just came straight back at the devil with the scriptural truth “Man shall not live by bread alone”.

There is a common saying amongst the current generation “I’m here for a good time not a long time”. It’s basically an excuse to be reckless, and involves extreme behaviour without any regard for even the near future, just as long as you are having fun!

Jesus was the opposite of this! He was definitely not here for a good time!! He was 100% focused on his mission to save us! The temptation of the devil in the wilderness was an important part of the suffering Jesus had to go through....for us! Always “for us”.

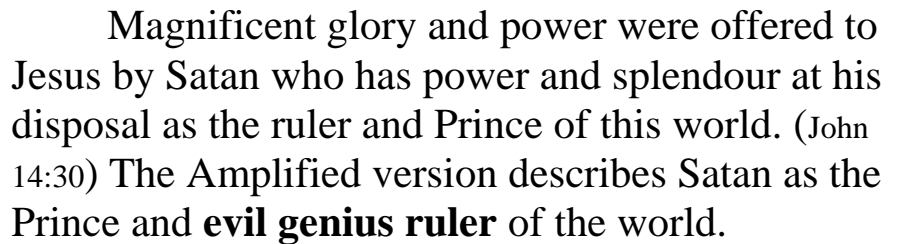
Of course Jesus “could have” turned that stone into a freshly ground wheat, hot and crusty out of the oven, awesome loaf of bread. His starving human body would have been ‘screaming’ for it!.... But he didn’t! Jesus had no intention of “cheating” in His mission to save us. He had to endure his “fully human” existence, a willing participant in this Spiritual War! All for us!

“Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit”, but that wasn’t cheating! The same Holy Spirit that Jesus sent to us! Also part of his Grand Plan!

Wow! What a Saviour!

Karen Heinrich, Coonalpyn Uniting Church South Australia

“And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time... And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” **Luke 4: 5, 8**



temptation was a real offer not an imaginary fantasy. Even at the point of his arrest Jesus was aware that he could call on 10,000 angels. Being at one with and knowing the Father he could have confronted his opponent. Every day in the home, at work or wherever we are it is normal for us to face all sorts of temptations.

Prayer: *Lord, Jesus said, Satan had no power over Him, so having received him and the power that makes us children of God we boldly claim the victory of the cross over all that Satan throws at us. Amen.*

Rev Ted Curnow, Langwarrin, Victoria

Theological Reflection

The Way of the Cross

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”
(Luke 23: 34).*

We have here made visible to the eyes of faith a special insight - revelation, into the very life and being of our Triune God. Jesus, the Son of God (the Second Person of the Trinity), intimately addresses his Father with the request, “Father, forgive them....”

The Good News of the gospel, the message of Easter, is that God the Father hears the prayers of his dear Son, despite Jesus feeling ‘forsaken’ on the cross, and forgives the sins of the world (John 3: 16). But forgiveness will not be done by ‘compassion’ alone, that is, without the cross, without the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

For God to have forgiven by ‘compassion’ alone would have meant “that sin would have been left unpunished and thus be shown to be like God – under obligation to no one”.¹

It is why immediately after Jesus was baptised, Satan, in the desert, tries hard to tempt Jesus away from this path. Each of the temptations in their own way poses for Jesus the question of the necessity of the way of the cross.

In Matthew 16: 21 Jesus reminds his disciples of this particular road that he must travel, the *Via Dolorosa*, but they wanted nothing of it. “Never, Lord! Peter said. This shall never happen to you!” Jesus

¹ Watson, G. A study in St. Anselm’s soteriology and Karl Barth’s Theological Method. Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 42 issue 04, 1989, p.493-512.

responds, like in desert, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me...” (v.23).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus feels the responsibility and the pain about to be placed upon him, hence, why he asks his Father to “take this cup away from me”. But, knowing that this was his Father’s will for the salvation of the world, Jesus in freedom and in love responds “yet, not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22: 43).

As we begin our journey in Lent, the temptation to bypass the way of cross continues to be great. It is the temptation, as Bonhoeffer puts it, to offer ‘cheap grace’. A Church that offers cheap grace, is a church that offers “a cheap cover-up for its sins, for which it shows no remorse and from which it has even less desire to be set free. Cheap grace is, thus, denial of God’s living word, denial of the incarnation of the word of God”.²

Prayer: Thank-you Father for sending us your dear Son. Thank-you Jesus for your obedience to do your Father’s will for our sakes, so that we might find life in you. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki, Mooloolaba UC, Queensland

² Bonhoeffer, D. (2003). Discipleship. (Vol. 4, p. 43). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Sunday 22nd February

He is faithful and just

“If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

It can be said that the moral-spiritual health of every person largely depends on experiencing what it means to be forgiven. The babe of Bethlehem was named Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. Our text reminds us that God is faithful and just to forgive us, but many people lack assurance because there is something within that insists that total forgiveness is just too good to be true.



Many picture God as a master accountant. When we fail God puts a mark on our page. When we confess, He rubs the record from the book. A continuing forgiveness then requires a continuing confession. The BBC film on the life of Martin Luther depicted Luther spread eagle drenched in perspiration with other priests helping him to scan his

subconscious for unconfessed sin. It was an agonising process. He was late for a meal. He failed to shut the gate. Often our acts of worship imply that forgiveness comes by instalments.

The New Testament calls people to repent and believe; nowhere does it explicitly call us to go on confessing. I suggest our text calls on us to initially own up to our sinful condition. In that act of repentance and confession we are forgiven. There is nothing cheap or superficial about this. All that is that is wrong and self-focused about our past, present and future has been judged and dealt with forever, once and for all in that unique and horrific death of Jesus. (1 Peter 2:24) This means we no longer confess to be forgiven but in order to agree that we have already been forgiven.

Set free in Christ we are compelled to sing with Wesley, *My chains fell off, my heart, was free, I rose, went forth and followed thee.*

Prayer: *Thank you Lord that in your love and justice Christ has known the darkness and judgement that my sin deserves. Thank you that he has borne my grief and carried my sorrow, destroying its power over me for ever enabling me to live in the reality of sins forgiven. Amen.*

Rev Ted Curnow, Langwarrin Victoria

Monday 23rd February

Hi Ho, Hi Ho, It's Off To Work We Go

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

We were created to work! The Creation narrative of Genesis 2 sees the man, who God created and placed in a garden, to “*work it and take care of it*” (v 15) and to enjoy the fruits of his labours (v 16). Work was meant to be a fulfilling and satisfying gift from God.

It was not long however before the joy and satisfaction of a good day's work was tarnished by human sinfulness. In Genesis 3, rebellion against God left humanity in a situation where work became a burden. The delight of working the soil became painful labour, where thorns and thistles abounded to frustrate the farmer. Work became akin to a curse. Nevertheless, there is in us a desire to do productive work! We need a solution to our “work problem”.

In the season of Lent we take time to reflect during our normal work routine on God's plan to re-create us for good work. Jesus came and lived to do the Father's work: the work of the Kingdom, the work of redemption, and the rescue of tired, sin-scarred, worn-out workers. Jesus said: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*” Matthew 11:28, 29 For Jesus, doing the Father's work was the staple of life: ‘*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*’ John 4:34

Yet even for our Lord work was painful and filled with grief. The work Jesus had to do was to drink a cup of suffering, to carry a cross. His work led him to his death. Jesus died that we might be dead to a sinfully burdened work, and made alive to a new work. God has begun a new work in us by Christ's death and resurrection: a new work of grace in the forgiveness of sins, a new heart to please God, and new works for us to do. Paul wrote: “*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” Ephesians 2:10

Work no longer need be a drudgery, a labour, and painful way to get through the week. Our work can become a means to joyfully glorify God: “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” 1 Cor. 10:31 For God, who began this work in us, will enable us to keep on working, and to complete the work He has prepared for us.

Ian Weeks Pastor of Belrose Uniting Church & Convenor of ACC NSW

Tuesday 24th February

We Behold, He Transforms Us

But we with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit.
2 Cor. 3:18

She had it all! The daughter of a prominent Adelaide doctor. In her early 40s, she was a lecturer in TAFE, married to a wealthy business tycoon, and had three lovely children, and an acre of garden. Her “cup of happiness was full”, some would say. What more could anyone want? She was brought to me by her father, following a colonoscopy for bleeding which had revealed multiple tumours of the colon, two of which were malignant. There was only one treatment appropriate – removal of the whole large bowel, and a permanent ileal stoma. She coped with the operation and the result. In due time she developed liver secondaries. The operation had apparently been too late for cure. She faced the prospect of chemotherapy, and eventual death from liver failure! Her husband left her. In the midst of her affliction, I continued to see



her and treat her – and I saw a miracle! Christ came to her, and she accepted His Lordship. (She couldn't tell me how it happened.)

She rejoiced in her new Life. She read voraciously, and “grew” rapidly! We had continuing fellowship, although the medical “therapy” stopped!

One day I noticed she was jaundiced, yet the question slipped out “How are you?”

“Wonderful”, she said, “Every day is like a new adventure!”

We kept meeting, sharing, praying, till the day she died in the hospice.

She had been totally at peace, and in great joy! I believe I had been seeing the Master Clinician transforming her into His image! I was left with a question that I will pass on to you. “Was this a tragedy or a triumph?”

Father, we think we know what is good and what is bad, but our understanding is mostly limited as is our scale of reference. We are so grateful that our lives are in your hands, to whom “good” is that which is best for us in regard to what is finally good. We thank you that your love is strong and all-encompassing, and is the only thing in which we can ultimately trust. So we trust you to do what you need to do in order to transform us into the image of the glory of Christ. Amen.

Dr. Neil McIntosh, Coromandel Valley UC, South Australia

Wednesday 25th February

The Power of One

‘The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.’
John 17: 22

In July 1991, as a new minister in my first parish, I was invited to attend the International Congress on World Evangelism, held in Brighton, England. As a youngish husband and father who’d never been overseas, and being so new to Parish ministry, it was overwhelming to receive an invitation to such an event. Then an amazing work of God through His people saw some \$9000 raised in just six weeks to fund the trip - including the sale of a wrecked car! It saw my wife Judith and me standing in Piccadilly Circus early one morning, just off the plane and tearfully saying, “God, thank You, but why have you done this?”

The theme of that Congress was taken from John 17:21-23, and the global unity of the church was the key focus – “**...that they might be one, Father, as we are one.**”

To worship and mix with 4500 delegates from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Pentecostal streams, to listen to keynote speakers from many nations, to receive Holy Communion from both black Lutheran and white Anglican bishops and to be led in times of praise using a four-language song book, (“Verse two, German!”...), was life and ministry-changing for my wife and me.

The profound influence that has remained with me for over 20 years is that the unity of and in the Spirit... the unity between God and the People of God... the bond of Grace and the Cross... and the Name of Christ touching lives with His indelible Spirit are all far more important than any theological label, any ‘branding’ or any styles or denominational organization. To truly be Christian is to be one with Christ; one with each other.

The Congress in 1991 exposed me for the first time to the global church and the Glory of God that is revealed in unity...in one-ness. It lifted my eyes above the parish... above the denomination, above the many national influences and I saw one Body... one Church; albeit just a week-long glimpse, but I saw it. The glory of God - the truth, the fact - is that the Cross makes us one church, and we should grasp that with uplifted hands and cry with the angels, ‘Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, for they are One!’”

In that unity...in that One-ness...there is Power; power that will not only revive the church but power that can and will renew the whole creation. I encourage you to look to the One who faced the Cross for us, the One who rose, that life in Him is possible.

And we will be one with Him.

Rev. Rob Tann Kangaroo Island UC, South Australia

Thursday 26th February

Glory Be!

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Cor. 3:18

The song they were singing repeated the word “glory!” over and over again. Adding to the hypnotic effect of repetition, strobe lighting swept across the swaying throng of worshippers. For some singers, the focus really was on the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and there was a real sense of his people glorying in him together. For others, the focus was on self: “this makes me feel good”; a bit like the meaning the word “glory” has for the soccer team in my home state which calls itself by this name.

Intelligent worship is often in short supply. Behind the emotion of the moment there may be no genuine intention to submit to God’s rule or reflect his love in my dealings with others. Yet true worship requires both levels of response. And this can only be so if we are properly aware of who it is we are worshipping. For that we need to be well-acquainted with what he has revealed to us through the Scriptures.

In them God’s glory is unveiled in a man, and we see Jesus launching God’s plan for a redeemed New Creation. Astoundingly, he actually intends to work through us who believe, to bring it about. If we grasp this fully, and if we humbly open ourselves to the work of God’s Spirit within us, then we will begin to reflect his glory, like a mirror reflecting the light.

We will be progressively transformed – “changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we see his face” – as Wesley’s hymn puts it. The odd thing is, my neighbours will be more aware that I am changing than I am, because I won’t be looking at myself; I will be giving the glory to God. They will see less of me and more of Jesus.

Prayer: *Forgive me Lord for worshipping me. Spirit of God, keep changing me from a self-seeking person to a Jesus-mirroring person, so that, in my service to others, they will progressively see more of God in his glory. Amen.*

Emeritus Professor Brian Hill, Billabong UC, Canningvale, Perth, Western Australia

Friday 27th March

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1-2



west.

The Greek verb, *metanoeo* means literally, ‘I change my mind.’ Undoubtedly, that is what is in mind in this verse, but do you know what is the usual translation of this verb? It is, ‘I repent.’ You may say, “But I repented many years ago. I don’t need to do it again.” If your life is not in tune with God’s will, then yes, you do. Moreover, one needs to view this verse in its context, which in particular means considering verse 1. “I beseech you” Paul says, “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.” This, he says, is both a reasonable act of service, and a spiritual act of worship, for the Greek can, and here does, mean both things.

But what does this mean? To me, it means, if I have to choose between what I want to do and something God may be calling me to do, then I must seriously consider my motivation. Do I want to please God? Am I willing to serve him? If I am prepared to do this, no holds barred, then the choice at the end of the day becomes clear. Not necessarily what I thought God was calling me to, but whatever he *is* calling me to do, I will put nothing of my own desires in its way. It’s that simple, yet with my selfish, sinful heart, not easy.

Prayer: *Lord, you heard what I said. My selfish, sinful heart gets in the way. Help me to nail it to the cross, and repent so that I may indeed be transformed by the renewing of my mind, and know what is you good and acceptable and perfect will.*

Barrie Robinson, Launceston, Tasmania

Romans 12:2 is one of my favourite preaching texts. To know what is the good, and acceptable and perfect will of God, surely that is something truly wonderful? This requires us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and there’s not a lot of evidence for this amongst Christians in Australia, or anywhere in the English speaking countries of the

Saturday 28th March

The Courageous Cry of Faith

*If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. Psalm 130:3-4*

It takes courage to cry for help. Courage to recognize that I can't do this alone. Courage to acknowledge vulnerability and despair. Courage to face potential ridicule from those who may mock me for being weak. Courage to face the frightening possibility that no one is there to help me.

With all these risks, the Psalmist takes the courageous step of crying out to God for help. In doing so he faces the greatest risk of all: that the holy and righteous God would turn away from an unholy and unrighteous rebel. Out of the depths of despair, the Psalmist cries (v. 1); pleading with God not only to hear his cry (v. 2), but to answer the yearnings of his heart for forgiveness and redemption (v. 8).

He recognises his sinfulness, and indeed the sinfulness of us all. After all, who could stand before God? If God chose to count our sins against us, we could not stand. The Psalmist sees God's grace and mercy in a way that is more clearly seen in the New Testament. "*But with you there is forgiveness ...*" (v. 4) He holds out the possibility that we CAN come into the presence of God, that God WILL indeed hear our cries. He trusts in God's promise not to count our sins against.

In the faithfulness of God's word the Psalmist has hope (v. 5). He holds fast to the promises of God, knowing God to be a faithful keeper of Covenants. "*Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.*" (v 7). His courageous cry is coupled with a settled conviction that God is trustworthy; that God is merciful; that God will hear his courageous cry and forgive and redeem (v 8).

During Lent we reflect on the depths of our sinful depravity, not so that we may flog ourselves in penitential grief. But that we might again cast ourselves onto the gracious and merciful nature of God, grabbing hold again of His wonderful promise of forgiveness through the death of His Son the Lord Jesus on the cross for us. We are invited to make the courageous cry of faith, and know with certainty that God is not only there, but He will hear our cry, will forgive our sins, and rescue us from the depths. With this God there is a forgiveness that we can embrace that will result in an overwhelming desire to fear-honour-worship-glorify Him.

Ian Weeks Pastor of Belrose Uniting Church, Sydney, NSW

Sunday 1st March

Keep Coming to God

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. Heb. 4:16 NAS



This is one of the great Christian promises. Humans love having special passes; gold passes, whatever, to gain discreet and privileged access into the inner sanctum of a great sporting arena or into the deluxe airport lounge or elite club.

Here is an open invitation to come into the creator's presence: he will judge those who come but he will judge with mercy. He invites us to come and to receive mercy.

That's the first thing. Once charged with heinous crimes against his majesty, now his presence is all mercy. Not only so, but we bring into his presence any and every mundane or traumatic need that threatens our peace and well-being.

Wait there's more - come boldly! Not cringingly, timidly, half expecting to get incinerated for such impertinence! Boldly. The word means with a 'moist mouth'. No dry mouth of fear or one anxious thought. The confidence a child has to leap onto the lap of its beloved father.



Oh! if only all Australians understood this. Peace would emerge and reign in our hearts. Psychiatrists would be lining up at Centrelink and Australia's budget deficit would be remedied overnight. Such social and economic benefits flowing from souls at peace with God.

And notice; needs still exist for those who walk in this child-like faith. And they always will have needs even into eternity. But we know whom to come to; the Father of everlasting justice and love.

Dear Father, I will honour the blood sacrifice of your beloved Son enabling me to come into your presence, to be known of you and to know you in answering all my needs, which you have allowed me to experience.

Rev Ian Clarkson, Hope Network, South Australia

Monday 2nd March

For God so loved the world...

that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17

Have you ever had a police officer knock on your door? Sometimes they knock on people's doors because someone inside has done something wrong. Sometimes it is to bring bad news of the death of someone dear. And yet again sometimes it's to tell people that there is danger and that evacuation is needed. In that instance they have come to help save people not to stand in judgment over anyone.

Jesus one day is coming back to this world as judge. But when he came to earth as a little baby born in Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago, he didn't come to judge us. He came to save us. Police officers are sent to people's homes by their senior officers. Jesus Christ was sent to us by His Father, the Creator of the Universe. He was sent to earth because God loves the world, and everyone in it.

In this time of Lent we are remembering Jesus' journey to the cross. God sent him to this earth to die upon a cross. This was to pay the punishment for all the wrong that is in us and for all the wrong we have done. He did this in love for all people. God gives this gift of Christ to all who would receive him, to all who would believe in His name so that they can live forever.

Before Christ's return, we are still in this time when we can receive this gift of being saved. When Jesus returns it will be too late for people to decide. The time of judgement will have come. But now is the time for us to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ with people from every nation, tribe and language. As God sent His Son, now Christ sends us. Let us share, so that all might have an opportunity to be saved eternally. How can they hear if no one tells them?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you that you love this world and every single person in it, no matter what country we are from. Thank you that you didn't give up on us when we went astray and turned away from you. You sent your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ as a gift of love, so that all who would believe in Him might have life forever. Empower us to share the good news with others so they too might be saved. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Anne Hibbard, Liverpool Uniting Church, N.S.W

Tuesday 3rd March

Your Sins Are Forgiven

“I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Luke 7:47

Simon, a religious man, invited Jesus to his house to dine. Simon was welcoming enough then, but also arrogant enough to ignore the usual courtesies not to question his guest's motives. On the other hand, a woman who “had lived a sinful life in that town” (v.37) turned up to the dinner and anointed Jesus' feet with oil. Jesus, in verse 47, forgives her. It is not easy to know whether she had found peace prior to this event or after but in contrast to Simon she was a broken woman who had lived in shame.

The conversion experiences of Timothy and of Paul are also marked by a contrast. One was nurtured to faith within the church, the other was transformed while persecuting the church. Although those who have experienced a dramatic conversion are often more conscious of what has occurred and more passionate in their love for Christ, we cannot conclude that Paul was **forgiven more** and as a result he **loved more** than Timothy did. We can conclude however that the enormity and devastation of every person's sin is seen in the darkness and tragedy of Jesus death.

Jesus was able to forgive the woman who had lived in shame by anticipating and knowing that in the cross that was before him he would pay the price. The fact is that regardless of our faith journey **we have all been forgiven much.**

The fact that we have been forgiven at such great cost leaves us with no alternative but to love and give ourselves in return.

Perhaps you are a “Church-person” and you have not been saved from a sordid past so you struggle with motivation when it comes to serving others or your love for Christ has grown thin. In the words of Isaac Watts, regardless of our background, we would all do well this Easter to again survey the wondrous cross, to pour contempt on all our pride and to see love and sorrow mingle as the Prince of Glory lays down his life for us.

Prayer: *Father thank you for the peace of sin forgiven. Thank you for taking the sin, suppressed shame and brokenness of my life. Thank you for your words, “Your sins are forgiven,” and for the peace that comes from knowing that your love reaches out to me. All honour and glory be to your precious name. Amen.*

Rev Ted Curnow, Langwarrin Victoria

Wednesday 4th March

Sorrow and Salvation

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

2 Corinthians 7:10

The difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrows	
Worldly sorrow	Godly sorrow
Feeling bad	Painful for a season
Comes with being caught	Brings repentance
Guilt	Conviction of sin
Mental distress	Confession
Attempts to cover up	Leads to Jesus and the cross
Punishment of self	Leads to salvation and peace with God
Brings death and eternal separation from God	Leaves no regret

It is a great and humbling thing to see a person brought to tears of repentance. Tears flow as they pour out their heart because their sinfulness has been exposed before the holy God. In that moment they also receive comfort from the Spirit as He reminds them of the full forgiveness that is in Christ.

There is another sort of tears which bring no such comfort. It is 'worldly sorrow', remorse and sadness often one

has been caught out. We often see this on TV as blubbering confessions are made by stars who have been found out. They are in great pain because the truth has been exposed, but this is not repentance! This is sadness because their reputation has been tarnished and the ego is smarting. This worldly sorrow brings death. There is no hope of forgiveness or joy just the hard road of trying to rebuild before the next crisis.

True repentance flows from the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings His firm and sure conviction and the person is sweetly broken as they see there is no hope for them on their own. But then the Spirit brings His firm and wonderful conviction that there is great hope through Jesus. The Spirit convicts us of our sin and then convinces us of the full forgiveness that is ours in Christ. The Holy Spirit tears us down from our deathly life and lifts us up fully alive in Christ. He lovingly applies the death and resurrection of Jesus to our very lives.

Prayer: *Father thank you for the gift of repentance and for showing us our sinfulness but not leaving us in the guilt and shame of our actions and thoughts. Thank you that you have dealt with all of our sin and shame. Father keep reminding us of all that you have done on the cross and help us to see ourselves crucified with you. That we no longer live, but you in us. Help us not to try to save ourselves through our actions but remind us of your actions.*

Rev. Derek Schiller, St. George Uniting Church, Queensland

Thursday 5th March

Humility through the Lord of all creation

‘... But I am among you as one who serves.’ Luke 22:27

What actually went before the ‘but’ in Luke 22:27? The answer will help us to focus on the importance of the words after it.

In introducing Jesus, John’s gospel says, ‘In the beginning was the Word ... through him all things were made...’ and Paul in his letter to the Colossians says of Jesus, ‘...by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth.’ Therefore to Him (the Logos, the Christ) Scripture says, “You are worthy ... to receive glory and honour ... for you created all things...” (Revelation 4:11).



There are times when it is helpful to look at the differing roles of the three persons of the Trinity and times when it is essential to focus on their unity. The time leading to the Cross requires that we see both. There are implications for us personally for, in Genesis chapter 1 God says, “Let us make man in our image (Gen 1:26). We are meant to bear God’s image; to have His holy, upright character, whether we be male or female – it makes no difference. Jesus was God’s perfect revelation of Himself and he was a ‘servant lord.’ So, the part after ‘but’ has an application to us. All things were created by him and for him (Col 1:16) so, to honour Christ we are to be servants of His creation. As well as being called to be servants of our fellow humans we are

to serve our fellow creatures too.

At this time of Lent, as we see what people ‘like us’ did to the Lord of all creation, let us look in the world around us for the relevance of the scriptures as to what it means to serve creatures and ecosystems and the entire biosphere which have a time scale of millions, if not billions of years in the making and are dear to the Lord who created them. God so loved the world (or cosmos) that he gave his one and only Son. Creatures with an evolutionary history millions of years in the making are being crowded off the Earth by the one species able to save them.

If we are ‘lords of the earth’ and if ‘the Earth is the Lord’s,’ we need to pray for the humility of Jesus to enable us to walk with Him as He faced the Cross to reconcile the world and all life in it to Himself.

Prayer: *Loving Father, help us by the power of your Holy Spirit to learn humility from Jesus; to treasure all life on Earth as worthy of respect as His creation and tender possession; to be a blessing to it and pledge to preserve it to the best of our understanding. May we thereby glorify You and enjoy You and your Creation forever, Amen.*

Nola Stewart - Castlecrag Uniting Church, N.S.W. [Nola, a former

Presbyterian deaconess, is a member of the ACC and convener of the Caring for the Creation Working Group (CCWG)]

Friday 6th March

The gospel in a grain of wheat

Jesus said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit'. John 12:24

Sowing seeds by dropping them into the soil might appear like throwing them away. But seeds are for sowing; being part of the created world they can, as Jesus said, teach us about the spiritual world and his life in it.

Three things about growing seeds:

* *Like from like* One sows wheat and wheat appears. That is the inbuilt law of creation that ensures its stability and continuity. So the eternal life that is inherent in Christ's person produces eternal life in the believer and other fruits of love, joy and peace.



* *Much from little* In the created world it is the function of the seed by its death to create many new seeds. In Christ the seed of his eternal life that was sown in his death and became apparent in his resurrection, becomes the source of life for others.

* *Life from death* The requirement for the creation of new seed is that the old seed must die. So it was with Christ; he gave up his human life that humans might be given eternal life. They in turn are encouraged to 'die' (give up their life) in the service of the world that others might accept the eternal life that Christ offers.

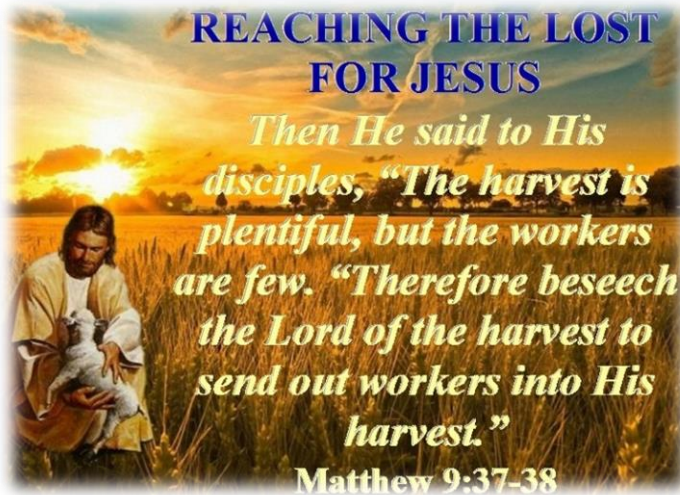
Prayer: *Lord, as you have planted the seed of eternal life in our hearts, so may it bring forth fruit to your glory .*

Ross Macmillan – Hurstbridge Uniting Church, Victoria The above idea is from a 'seed' sown at a harvest festival service 60 + years ago. I think that it could be sown again – with due acknowledgement to that unforgotten Methodist lay preacher and faithful sower.

Saturday 7th March

Ask the Lord of the Harvest

He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' Luke 10:2



Early ch.9 tells of the sending out of the 12 (apostles). Now, in preparation for a busy itinerary, Jesus sends out many more – 70 or 72. This agricultural image has generally been interpreted as the harvest field being the world and the workers' task being that of bringing souls into the Kingdom. There is much to do and few workers so they must hasten. As

well, it is their responsibility to pray for more workers.

The harvest is still plentiful and ripe and workers few! It is the task of the wider group of disciples to 'harvest' its own generation, so you and I should be involved.

A few facts to stir us to action. If the world were 100 people :

- 20 would live in a slum
- 49 would live on less than \$3 per day
- 42 would never have heard about Jesus as the Son of God.

The world population is 7.17 billion almost 3 billion people remain unreached by the Gospel. Only 3% of Christian missionaries work in regions where 97% of the 'unreached' people live. (Statistics gleaned from recent email from Interserve, UK)

5 possible responses for us: learn, pray, advocate, give, go.

We can be workers in the field close to home. War, persecution, desire for education, dreams of a better life have brought thousands of immigrants to Australia. While polities and the media argue about 'illegals', ordinary Christians are showing their faith by defending refugees and asylum-seekers, sharing the gospel, and offering housing and support services. The harvest field is ready right here: the call to us is to minister.

Prayer: *Show me, Lord, my task on your harvest field and give me the will to obey.*

Margaret Macmillan, Arthur's Creek, Victoria

Sunday 8th March

That Blessed Name

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:13

If we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

1 John 5:14

In a rare act of prescription – the Uniting Church commonly, in its ordering, prefers soft, rounding verbs to mould and shape: to encourage, to ask, to remind, to approve, never to reprove – Assembly minute 88.24.3 reads:

"That all ministers of the Word... be required to use the following words as the baptismal formula, without variation or exception: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Well may the Assembly have so required. The only documents named as 'authority' in the Basis of Union are the original ancient creeds that define whom we worship, named as Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the Apostles Creed confesses Jesus as God and the Nicene confesses Jesus full human. This name of our God shapes all else. As marshmallow, soft as it sounds, we do not worship the gracious rainbow god of red desert flowers and butterfly waterfalls!

Guided and nourished by scripture, we approach our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus: it is a promise from our saviour he will hear, and meet, our

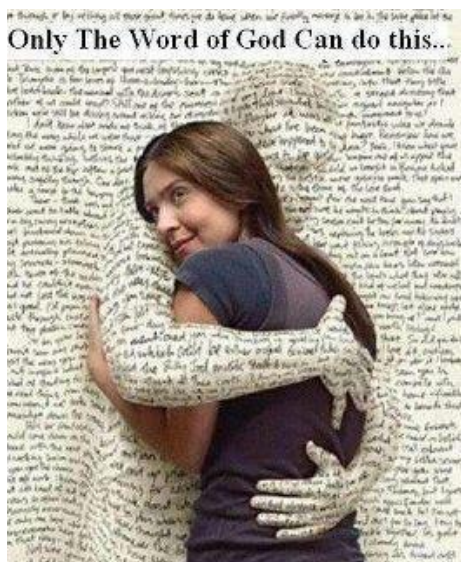
requests – he knows all that we need – to ask in his name. Just think, Jesus fully human and fully God, represents to the Father our smallest needs. Jesus is indeed our friend. And he will do it as we ask. Just think, this God who created all that is – John repeatedly says Jesus was the Word with God at creation – is intimate with us in our need: astonishing quite. And he does so that we might know that he is God – that is his glory.

We may learn at this point from the Westminster Confession's shorter catechism of 1647. What does this means for God and for us: *Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief*

end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you we may go to you in Jesus' name with the smallest concern of our heart, sure that you will answer: that our joy is in your glory. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Paul Langkamp, Mark the Evangelist, North Melbourne UC, Victoria



Monday 9th March

Wait for the LORD!

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Psalm 27:14 (NRSV)

Psalm 27 recounts in simple language the fearful experiences of life.

Perhaps you could read the whole psalm now before reading on.

Notice that the Psalm does not speak of just any God, but the One True God, the Creator and Redeemer who made himself known through self-revelation and saving action, Yahwey, 'The LORD'.

A living knowledge of the covenant faithfulness of *this* God, brings a deep security and confident hope in the midst of:

- Attack and war (2-3)
- Rejection and forsakenness by God (7-9)
- Forsakenness by mother or father (10)
- Homelessness (4-5)
- Joyless existence (6)
- Wayward living (11)

With all of these anxious experiences, one thing is able to keep from fear and death-dread; the hope of the resurrection! *I am confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!* (13) Such hope causes a person to *wait*! And so it is with the gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

In 1 Thessalonians 1 Paul recounts how when the gospel came, in spite of great persecution (6), the people received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, and "... turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, *and to wait for his Son from heaven*, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming." (9-10) (NRSV)

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD is a word of gracious invitation to rely only and always on the Lord whose Son, forsaken by all, victoriously defeated his enemies, and now speaks to us the words of eternal life. Those who hear the voice of the Son of God will have a newfound ability to wait in hope! May grace, mercy and peace be yours in his name.

Prayer: ***Our Father from before the foundation of the world, you have sent your Son to be one with us forever, that we might be one with you forever as your beloved children. We Thank you Lord Jesus that you don't evacuate the building when calamity comes our way, or when we sin and fail to live in your goodness. Fill us anew with your Holy Spirit that we might live confidently in the assurance of forgiveness, and the hope of the resurrection, and so wait patiently for the day of your appearing in glory. Our prayer is in Christ, for he is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.***

Rev. Shane Kammerman Cairns, Queensland

Tuesday 10th March

All Things Work Together for Good

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28



This verse brings such encouragement to believers and yet it can be difficult to accept. We know that God works for good in our lives but can we see this good being worked out in 'all' things? Often life can be difficult, uncomfortable and painful and it can be hard to believe that God is still working for our good in those times.

We can easily think that if life is hard then that's bad, and if life is easy then that's good. But the good that we hear of in this verse is not defined by us. God knows what is good for us and in whatever we face He is

working for our good.

He is sovereign - totally in control. God's plan for us to be His began even before we were born and He has been working to bring about this good in all things. Paul continues, *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*' (Romans 8:29-30). Far beyond our 'small' view of what's happening in our lives – God has always been at work through Jesus calling us and bringing us into the certainty we have that we are his beloved and forgiven children.

If we look at our own 'good' plans for life we will be frustrated and disappointed but as we look to God's work in us we will have deep peace and assurance.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, you know all things and especially what is good for us. Please help us to trust that you are doing what is absolutely necessary, important and even great in our lives. Help us to not see the pain without the joy of knowing you and knowing our lives are protected and secure in your hands. Father, help us not to seek to know the reasons you do things when life seems unfair and out of control, but help us to know you more and not simply what you are doing.*

Rev. Derek Schiller, St. George Uniting Church Queensland

Wednesday 11th March

It is Well With My Soul

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever Heb. 6:19-20 NAS

The large merchant ships entering the port of Alexandria gave their bow lanyards and anchor to the tender vessel which rowed ahead to the wharf where it was secured by labourers who would haul the laden vessel to safe docking for unloading. The tender vessel was called the *prodomos*, which is the very word used of Jesus here. It is translated *forerunner*.



Jesus has already gone ahead for us. He hasn't gone alone. He has taken the anchor of our souls and as our *prodomos* has tied us firmly to the wharf of our eternal home. Soon the great ship of the church will be hauled in to receive and enjoy all the inheritance of Christ. And we are on board!

Do you feel the tug on your souls, anchor, the sense that your precious life is secure? And remember the Lord has made this promise to you by swearing on his own eternal character. He wants us to be totally confident that all is well with your soul through his great Son our *Prodomos*.

Dear Lord Jesus I am so grateful that you are the churches Prodomos, my forerunner! I will not let any fears regarding my future security or health distract me. I will honour you with restful trust and live confidently serving you. I love you. Help me with this. Amen.

Rev Ian Clarkson Hope Network, South Australia

Thursday 12th March

You ask, You say?

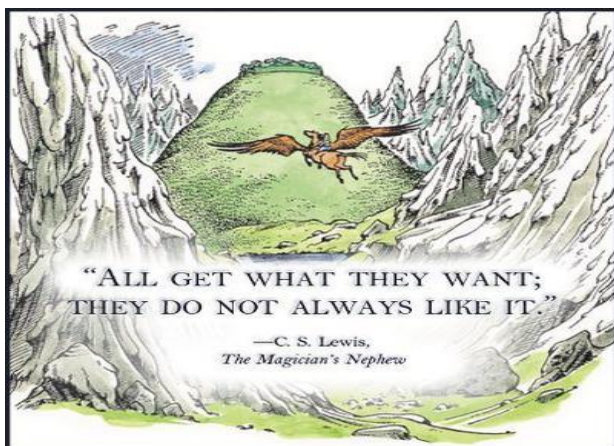
You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. James 4:2-3

James 4, the first several verses, is about getting what you need and getting what you want and getting it from God – he is all good, all powerful, and abundantly merciful and knows exactly what you desire, after all. And then not getting it: a disappointing cycle of dissatisfaction that goes to reject God and that spirals to despair.

The wanting desire isn't askew. Doesn't Psalm 37:4 say it, "...*he will give you the desires of your heart.*" The assurance of the heart's complete satisfaction is there.

The fault in James' admonition in 4:2-3 begins with the asking that is not asking. Our Heavenly Father wants us to ask. He opens the door to us to approach and present; we open our hearts and show our longings: all the loopy, unfulfilled passions. James is right about that. John says it 15:7 "...*ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*" It sounds like a blank cheque for satisfaction: the only matter is to do the prayer: daily, several times to bring to him our smallest hurts and poisonous wants, and see what happens.

James goes back another step. The asking is not satisfied because the asking is wrong, not the prayer itself, but the passion that motivates. The passions don't have to be for success or flesh. Even necessities of life can be focussing passions. Jesus, Luke 12, says, "*do not seek what you are to eat or drink... your Father knows that you need them.*"



Instead, the seeking is for something else that is much higher: that is God himself. Psalm 37:4 says it this way: "*Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*" What comes first is delight in the Lord. Jesus, in John 15, puts delight in the Lord as being one with the Lord, "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*"

Quote: "There is but one good; that is God.

Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him."

C. S. Lewis "The Great Divorce" (1945)

Paul Langkamp, Mark the Evangelist UC North Melbourne, Victoria

Friday 13th March

Heavenly Father, Give to Those Who Ask

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Luke 11:13

Jesus uses the intimate relationship between a father and son to describe our relationship to the Heavenly Father. It would be unthinkable for me to give my 10 year old son a crocodile, a chain-saw or a deadly drug for his birthday. Although as parents we are frail and don't always get it right, even in our frailty we know the difference between what is good and not good for our children. If this is so, how much more will the Heavenly Father, the source, the giver of life give good gifts—the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

The first insight here is found in God's good intention for our lives to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The disciples needed to wait in Jerusalem until they received this gift. Peter was in no doubt when he called on people to repent and believe in order to be forgiven and to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)

The second thing that is obvious is that instead of being fearful or reluctant we need to go on asking for the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no one recipe or formula provided in the Acts of the Apostles to follow. The Spirit blows where He wills but we are not expected to go it alone merely committed to a religious tradition. We are to go on asking, seeking, knocking so that charged with the Holy Spirit we are able to consciously say with Paul “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”

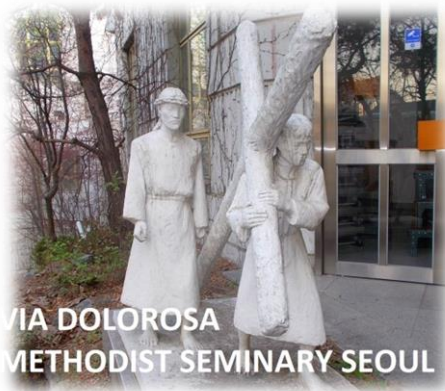
Prayer: *Lord pour out your life giving Spirit upon the Church across our nation. Shed your love abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit so that I'm equipped to live as your witness in the world. In Jesus name Amen.*

Rev Ted Curnow, Langwarrin, Victoria

Saturday 14th March

Take Up Your Cross

Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.' Luke 6:23



In many Christian churches, Lent has been thought of as the 40 days leading up to Good Friday and Easter Day. Just as the Israelites spent 40 years in the Sinai wilderness in hard conditions and Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the desert - in the time between his baptism by John and the start of his ministry, so followers are urged to have 40 days of self-denial. This has generally been conceived of as denying yourself some pleasure or indulgence (movies, chocolate....) and in the best tradition, giving the money consequently saved to a good cause.

This is not a bad thing, but here Jesus is talking not about such denial but about sacrificial commitment. He has just spoken of the cross he would carry to his crucifixion (22) and now warns his followers that they must carry their cross, too. It does not effect atonement as his cross does. It is not a literal cross as his was, but is nonetheless, real.

His disciples knew what it meant to 'take up your cross' : crucifixion was the preferred method of execution of their Roman overlords and they would have seen condemned men set off with a posse of soldiers on a one-way journey. So taking up your cross is the utmost in self-denial and for the disciple of Christ, it is done daily and until death. It means being prepared to suffer the worst that man can do, for the sake of being true to Christ. Every day God's mission takes priority over all else – even worthy things like family responsibilities (59-62), accruing a healthy super fund, fame, or... Some may say this is a 'hard word' but it does not imply that it is impossible to fulfil earthly responsibilities and to follow Christ with total commitment. It is a call to right priorities and will take a different shape for different people and at different stages of life. God honours the disciple who denies himself : loyalty to Jesus will be its own reward.

Lord, give me the will and strength to take up my cross daily and follow wherever you call me, not counting the cost but glad to serve you faithfully.

Margaret Macmillan Arthur's Creek, Victoria

Sunday 15th March

Making You What You Are

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.
Hebrews 10:14

My father collected me as an infant from the orphanage and brought me to his and his bride's home as his adopted son. He gave me his name, and as I grew into boyhood proudly introduced me to adult friends as 'my son'. Later he would leave me an inheritance.

I was his son, complete, in law and in love, for life. In my maturing he would in truth teach me his ways for his son. Though foolish and ignorant at times, I was proud to learn and to seek, to copy and to obey those dignified ways.



Our Lord Jesus, through his obedience unto the cross, has brought us complete and perfect with nothing lacking into His Father's home and kingdom: His name and his ways now written into our nature. He now takes the eternal responsibility of training us

to live and to do according to our sonly status. This is called sanctification or being taught the ways of the Father. He is doing the changes and he is working in us towards his purpose.

What do we know about holiness? Zero! Does he know what he is doing? Does he know how to transform us? Of course. Sometimes it will be a whispered instruction. Other times, fatherly discipline, gentle, perplexing even, but always according to His pre-creation glorious plan.

Holy Father, thank you for bringing me complete for all time into your family. In my shame and failure I sometimes wonder if I really am truly perfected before you. But I gladly accept your Word and will receive all circumstances as from your hand, working your holiness in my life. Amen

Rev Ian Clarkson Hope Network, South Australia

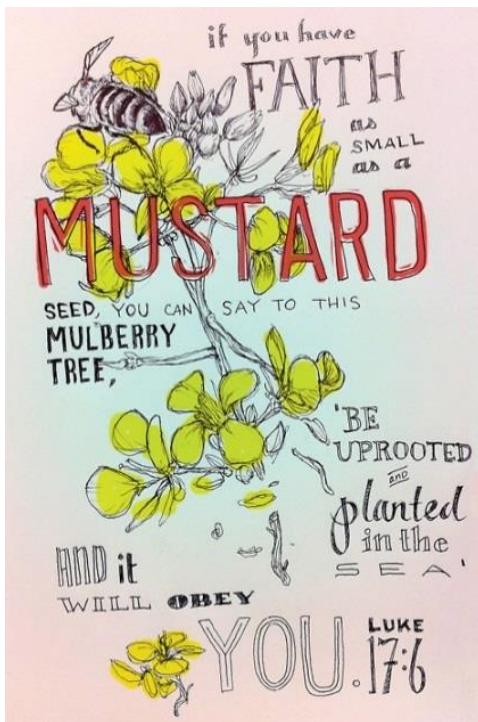
Monday 16th March

So small... So powerful

If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. Luke 17:6

Almost 30 years ago, when I was a Ministry student at the Melbourne College of Divinity and the UCA Theological Hall, a fellow student was a young woman studying for the Anglican priesthood. I recall speaking to her one day about an attractive pendant she was wearing. On a delicate silver chain around her neck hung a glass orb, clear except for a small 'something' in the middle. I asked her what the 'something' was and she said that she wore the pendant when things were a bit 'tough going'. ***"It's a mustard seed", she said, "and I wear it when I need to be reminded of how much faith I need to keep going..."***

I had never seen a mustard seed until then, but my memory of that brief discussion with a fellow student has never left me – nor has the realization of how small the seed was that Jesus spoke of... and how small, metaphorically speaking, our faith needs to be.



Luke chapters 13-17 are 'red ink' chapters in my Bible. These chapters are Luke's record of significant teaching by Jesus on discipleship and what was needed to follow Him. It is when the disciples seem a bit overwhelmed and cry out to Jesus, ***"Lord, increase our faith!"*** that Jesus replied, ***"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."***

I've had a full and enriching 25 years of ministry but I can't recall ever being called on to transplant mulberry trees! Even so, I often find that my faith seems inadequate to face life, ministry, and the many and varied issues around me. That's when a simple glass pendant often pops into mind.

Jesus was a great teacher and 'visual aids' proponent. That's why we can gain so much from a simple example. For local men working with him, men who did know how big - or small - a mustard seed was, the answer Jesus gave - a brief one verse answer - clearly said, ***"You have enough faith, just trust God's power to work through you."***

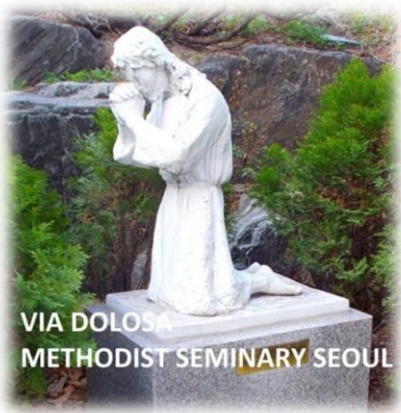
Is life getting on top of you? Are you feeling crowded or overwhelmed? Just remember that our God is bigger than our circumstances and His enabling grace will take the mustard seed of faith that we offer, and things will happen! Trees will move! Lives will be transformed. And faith will grow.

Rev. Rob Tann, Kangaroo Island Linked UCA Congregations, South Australia.

Tuesday 17th March

Jesus Weeps

When he approached Jerusalem, he saw the city and wept over it. Luke 19:41
 This day had been an astonishing event, like a miracle of revelation of the True King before all the people including His enemies. They could do nothing about it, and He refused to comply with their requests to rebuke his disciples. It had been prophesied by Zechariah as He who would be the meek One riding into the city on the foal of an ass rather than a warhorse. He would accomplish for them a triumph and a victory which they could not then have understood. All the Gospel writers have described it; it was like a temporary unveiling of his true glory. In some way it appears to have been like a “curtain-raiser”, a practice run, for the Day which is still to come, when “every eye will see him, and every knee will bow, and every tongue confess” his true Kingship. Some of the people were to weep for Him when he would be led out to be crucified. *“Weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children”*, he was to say to them. But here Jesus wept as he saw the hardship and judgment that his people were bringing upon themselves,



He knew what was coming for them and for himself. He knew his people would suffer for rejecting the great gift he was to them, and what He would accomplish for them.

But there have been and are signs that we might “see” Who he is, and receive his “inexpressible gift”. He delighted, “...for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”. And

those who now worship him there be may still shed tears, but they will be the tears of joy as they participate in His joy!

It is for this reason that Good Friday is good, as we now know as we look back at it!

Father, we see your Son, our Saviour, and his sadness at the failure of those he loved to understand what he was doing for the people he loved, and for all those who would trust in him in the coming generations. The love he showed in these tears is your own love, fully manifest in his glad obedience to your plan, so it is here that we see your true nature, as he so faithfully revealed. Thank you, for it is this “kindness that leads us to repentance.” Amen.

Neil Macintosh, Branches U C, Adelaide, South Australia

Wednesday 18th March

The Woman with the Tears

“I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Luke 7:47

I can only imagine the “life of sin” that this woman had been trapped in! I assume she was “trapped” because she seemed pretty happy to be free from it!

The bible passage doesn’t tell us “why she was crying”, but it is obvious that Jesus knew 100% the answer to that! Most likely tears of relief as she has been released from the bondage of sin! The same Jesus that had given her the courage to leave that life behind with that awesome power of forgiveness, was that same man that she knelt beside and washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

On a normal occasion I assume this woman would have avoided any eye contact or close proximity to this Pharisee called Simon who obviously recognised her as he said to himself, “That just proves Jesus is no prophet! She is a Sinner!” But her now deep faith in Jesus had enabled her to just walk into Simon’s home with her expensive jar of perfume. She poured out herself and her perfume as she released the grief of her past sinful life and embraced the fresh and pure hope for her future! There is no doubt that Jesus is now her Saviour.



As I read this passage I think of the separate poles of people in our society. Those who like to think they have got their lives all together, and therefore don’t want that to change.

On the other side there are those who are living in some type of nightmare, sexual abuse, drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, pornography addiction, homelessness, slave trade, victims of terrorism, the list goes on!

In the middle of this interaction is Jesus, who knows both sides of the story.

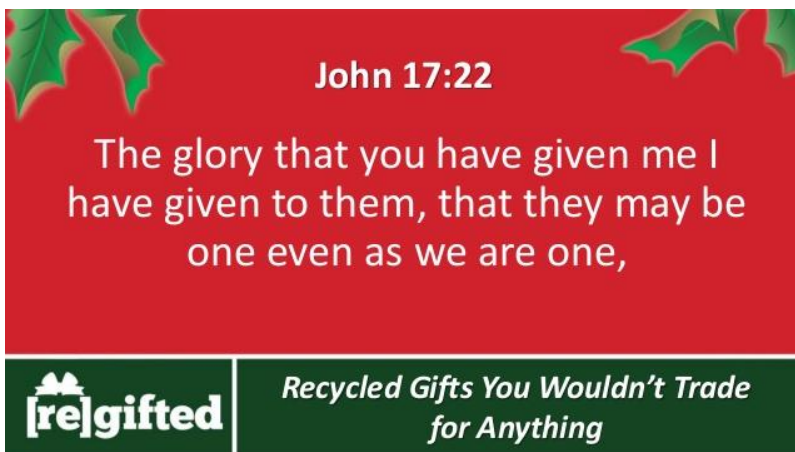
Sometimes we need to climb off our own pedestal. It’s ok if someone else is “forgiven much”, because their “sins were many”. Indeed Simon needed to stand back in awe and be humbled by the life-changing miracle of God’s forgiveness that occurred for this woman, made possible because of Jesus.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for sacrificing your own precious Son and rescuing us all from a life of Sin. Karen Heinrich, Coonalpyn Uniting Church, SA

Thursday 19th March

Glory Recycling

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.
John 17:22



As we ponder during this season of Lent what our Saviour has done for us let us remember that Jesus gave his all for us. Jesus prayed for his disciples and others that they would follow him. Jesus also prayed for us that we would not forget him. In this

world today Satan is sowing doubt into the hearts of people and it is so easy to forget Him. As we Christians remember what he has done for us we need to focus on him more and more. Unity with other Christian denominations would be a great discipline during this season. Jesus was one with His Father and let us be one with Him also working for the greater glory of His kingdom. Our witness to the reality of God's love is shown by our actions through reading His Word and knowing Him better that our confidence in Him should grow and be a light for Him. Let us not sow seeds of discontent among other Christians but build each other up.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Help us to remember to say kind words about others, to be tolerant of other Christian religions and to always exalt your Name. We pray for confidence to speak out about you and how wonderful you have been to us. We ask these things in your precious Name, Amen.

*Gillian Williams, Lake Boga Uniting Church,
Swan Hill, Victoria*

Friday 20th March

May I be excused?

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me: yet not my will, but yours, be done."
Luke 22:42

The verse prior to this says, "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed." Jesus was alone in His stress. The only comfort for Him was not from the disciples but from the Father. But later even this comfort was gone when He cried "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This may be our experience when in some dark moment we have to carry the agony alone when the help and support of others is either not there or not helpful. But unlike the loneliness Jesus had to bear the Father will never forsake us: *'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'* Heb 13:5

Apart from being alone Jesus endured agony well beyond what any man or woman has ever experienced. The anticipation of certain death is one thing but the excruciating pain of crucifixion is another. However, the deepest pain would have been the time of separation from the Father. Despite this gigantic struggle and his request to have all this taken from Him, he fully submitted to the Father's will.

We also see in this verse the total trust Jesus expressed by using the term *Abba Father*' (Mark 14:36). This is addressing his Father in a childlike way that is void of any doubts. So even though Jesus knew what was coming he trusted the Father and submitted completely to his will. Again we have Jesus showing the way for his followers.

Lastly we can learn from Jesus' inspiring courage. This is bravery that surpasses any human feat. Jesus was resolute in his purpose to primarily do the Father's will and bring salvation to a lost world.

Underpinning all this is the divine motive of love. What was the Father's will that Jesus chose to do? *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Father, I thank you for all that you have done. You gave your only Son freely for me – and I praise you for calling me, drawing me near. Out of blindness, you caused me to see.

Noel Taylor, Whittlesea Uniting Church, Victoria

Saturday 21st March

Cattle on a thousand hills - Riches more than tongue can tell

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”
Matthew 10:39

The disciples are told plainly that if they align themselves with Jesus they can expect to be maligned and to receive the same treatment as their Master (v25). Again in verse (v34) he says, “Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth, I have not come to bring peace but a sword.” In another passage he instructs Peter to put his sword away. (John 18:10) Jesus is clearly not advocating violence here. In the context of the passage Jesus is talking about being on mission. We may want to tone down the implications of the passage but with the coming of Jesus and the kingdom it is clear we are confronted with an unqualified choice. From comfortable respectability we are called to lose our lives in order to find life.

The danger lies in our deepest affections and relationships that become an end in themselves. Bearing witness to Jesus is not just a matter of living with conflict or renouncing other loyalties, it means the total surrender of our life.

The cross was not an instrument of burden or self-denial, it was an instrument of death. It's not a matter of going without chocolate over Lent. Following Christ means nothing less than renouncing control over our lives. If we think we find life by squeezing something out of it for ourselves—then we lose everything. When life is forfeited and surrendered, far from doom and gloom, in receiving Christ as Lord we inherit everything and life itself.

John W. Peterson's mid-20th Century hymn captures it well. Based on Psalm 50:10, he versed: just as the cattle on a thousand hills and riches more than tongue can tell belong to our Father, so they become ours as well. We are made rich in Christ, now and for ever:

He owns the cattle on a thousand hills,
The wealth in every mine;
He owns the rivers and the rocks and rills,
The sun and stars that shine.
Wonderful riches, more than tongue can tell -
He is my Father so they're mine as well;
He owns the cattle on a thousand hills -
I know that He will care for me.

Prayer: *Thank you Father that while we face a troubled world you have given us a life that transcends present tensions and enables us to be on mission with you. Amen.*

Rev Ted Curnow, Langwarrin Victoria

Theological Reflection

The Kingdom of God Among Us!

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mat. 27: 46).

Through these words of Jesus, we see something of the depth of his suffering; his entering into the place of total abandonment and godforsakenness. But, it is not only Jesus who suffers. His Father also suffers but in a different way. "The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of his Son".³

Here in this place of total abandonment and godforsakenness is revealed the extravagant love and grace of God. It is here that Jesus, the Son of God, resides; it is here that Jesus takes upon himself the godforsakenness of our humanity; that is, Christ makes it his own. So that, as Paul put in 2 Cor. 5: 21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God". Or, in stronger terms, as in Gal. 3: 13, Christ redeemed us.... by becoming a curse for us.... "

Simply to say, the good news of the gospel is that salvation has been accomplished 'for us', not 'by us'.

That is, the Christian message is about this "act of extravagant love of God in which God pledges God's own self on behalf of the weak

³ Moltmann, J. (1993). *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (p. 243). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

and threatened creatures. To receive this as good news is to see the Kingdom of God among us".⁴

To fail to see this truth, is to begrudge or resent our suffering (a visible sign of our 'limit'), as a curse from God. Our suffering then causes us to curse and hate God for not making us like him, i.e. not having any limits.⁵

This reality can be seen in the recent comments by Stephen Fry:⁶ "I will say bone cancer in children, what's that about? How dare you, how dare you create a world that has such misery that is not our fault. It is not right. It is utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is full of injustice and pain?"⁷

Prayer: O God our Father, we pray that through our own suffering, we may graciously accept our weaknesses as a sign of your grace to us, and, by doing so may we be a light to those who resent you for the things we cannot control. In Jesus name, Amen.

Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki, Mooloolaba UC, Queensland

⁴ Watson. G. (2000) "For He was made man that... ". Trinity Theological College, Brisbane. p. 45

⁵ See Bonhoeffer "Creation and Fall". Chapter on Sicut Deus – sin as transcending the limit.

⁶ Stephen Fry: English comedian, actor, writer, presenter and activist. Born 1957.

⁷ www.christiantoday.com/article/stephen.fry.says.god.is.capricious.mean.minded.stupid.but.lets.not.get.angry/47174.htm

Sunday 22nd March

A life walking backwards....

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ .*

You knew me before I was knit together in my mother's womb. I was planned for, purposefully created and loved so much that You would send Your only Son, Jesus to die on a cross for me! Wow, it sends shivers up and down my spine just to contemplate this in the knowledge of who I am and have been. Brought up in the knowledge of God but not in a relationship with Him. Often speaking to Him but never expecting to hear from Him. Somehow I had missed the whole point of Jesus' Resurrection!

One of the great advantages of aging is that you tend to get more time and opportunity to be still and to consider. As a human being I find it interesting that I can reflect on my past but can do nothing about it, I can only hope for a future that is unseen, however my sole opportunity to act occurs only in the here and now, the present...I choose to look at life through the lens of a biblical world view...in faith I believe that I have purpose in Jesus Christ, I am justified by Him alone and I am being matured and refined in His ways into eternity. Until my last breath I have a role to fulfil.

Dear God

As I look back on my past and I see where you have been, where you assisted, guided, protected and consoled me I give You thanks! For the times I ignored Your Word please forgive me. For the wonderful creation You have provided for me and my purpose in Your Will I will sing Your praises forever. I give You permission this day to have Your Way in my life, come Holy Spirit!

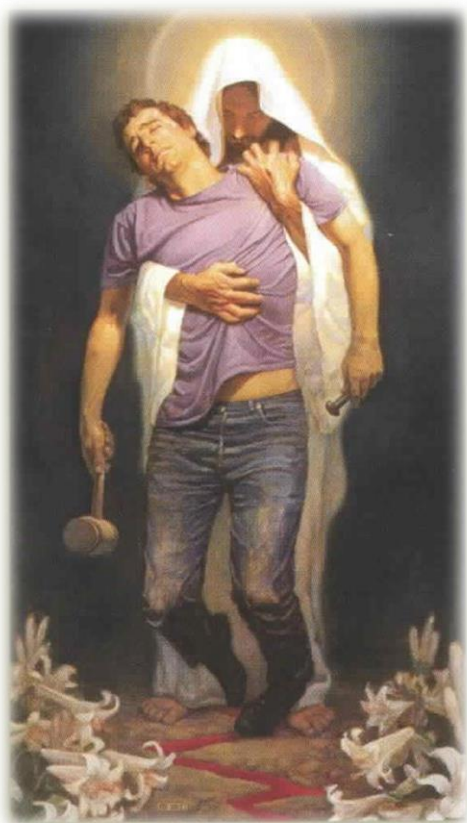
Peter Hanrahan, M.Div candidate, Lighthouse Uniting Church, Geraldton, Western Australia

Monday 23rd March

Confess Your Sin

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James 5:16



Martin Luther said, “Thank God I am a sinner, because by this I know that I need Christ!” His point is that only if we humbly accept that we are sinners will we confess our shortcomings to Christ and seek forgiveness. If we don’t think that we sin then we will not seek forgiveness and behave as if we have no need of Jesus.

Ironically, James’ letter was one that Luther hated, because of its emphasis on action. Rather than putting works before faith, James reminds us that in practice our faith must lead to action. Faith will, just has to, bear fruit. Therefore confess your sins and pray for each other.

The second part of the verse is odd. If we all recognize that we are sinners in need of forgiveness and healing then where can we find a righteous man whose prayer will be effective? Therein is the hope of the Gospel. There is always one righteous man. It is he, Jesus, who takes our imperfect prayers and makes them right and offers them to the Father and by a miraculous exchange by the Spirit returns to us all of God’s blessings.

So come with confidence and confess and pray for each other, knowing that it is Jesus who has promised to hear us and pray for us in our deepest need.

Prayer *Lord I offer to you the shards of my heart. Take the pieces of my life that I offer to you. Only in you can I find healing for dreams and hopes and loves lost. My life is yours. Enable me to live again whole and restored and eager to serve you in this world. Amen.*

Rev Dr. Rob Brennan Queensland

Tuesday, 24th March

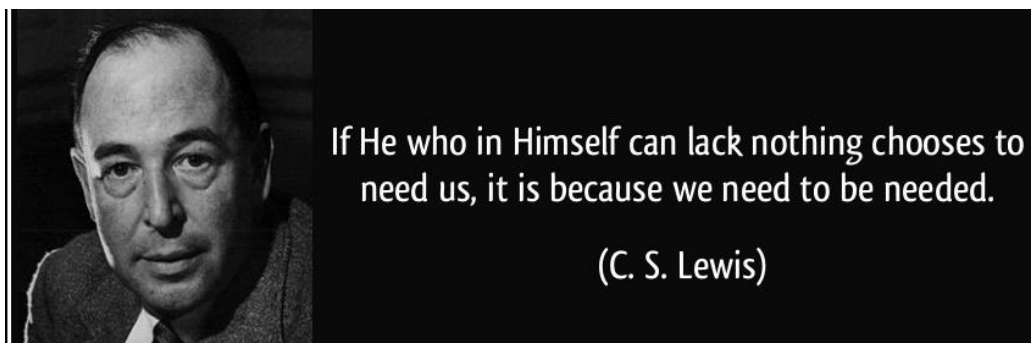
He Chooses Us

Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." Deuteronomy 9:6

We must always be conscious that the good gifts that are ours through Christ have not come to us because of our own righteousness or goodness. The reason God has poured His lavish gifts of grace upon us is because He is the God of lavish grace. We have no righteousness of our own but that which has been given to us. So God Himself makes us holy and righteous through Jesus.

So we see that it is not us who choose God, either by decision or by deserving it by our righteousness, but rather it is God who chooses us.

What peace we will have when we live in this fact. We will have an assurance which drives us past our striving for acceptance and the desire to prove ourselves to ourselves. Our righteousness comes from the Father, and He is our Father - we can be sure.



Then we can find comfort even when we fail because we know that we are a stiff-necked people. We are always prone to straying, but the fact that we remain children of God, even in our sin again glorifies God for His amazing love and mercy. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last." (John 15:16).

Prayer: ***Dear Father of lavish grace, thank you for choosing me a sinner. Help us not to fight you as we say that we are good enough for your love or deserve your love, especially as we look at those whom we see as undeserving. Father, in our own sinfulness we want to say that we don't need your actions on the cross and if we try a bit harder we will have it altogether. Father, thank you that you knew our hearts and our sinfulness from the beginning and still chose to love us. Father, help us not to fight and reject your incredible love and grace for us, but to just live and find comfort in it.***
 Rev. Derek Schiller St. George, QLD

Wednesday, 25th March

He will carry it on...

I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:5-6).



Paul prayed for the Philippians believers with joy because he knew that God was doing His good work in and through them. Often we pray for others with fear, doubt, even anxiety, because we hope that possibly God might act. What a difference it would make if we prayed with full confidence that God was already at work and that He would take this work through to completion. We could pray with confidence and this confidence would not be in our prayers. It would be in the

faithfulness and power of God. The basis for our prayers is the fact that God is always at work. Jesus said, “My Father is always working and I am working too” (John 5:17).

God is the Author and Perfector of our faith. He is the one who gives us our faith and He refines this same faith bringing it to fullness. How would we see ourselves, our families, and our churches if we kept this in mind? Jesus' work of redemption on the cross is a finished work. It has given us everything we need for life and salvation and now God is ever unpacking all His work and blessings in our lives. 1 Thessalonians 5:24 tells us, “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”

The Father loves His church; He loves His family, and He works unceasingly for their good. What joy and confidence this gives us as we pray, live and have partnership with other Christians.

Prayer: ***Dear Father - knowing that you are at work - inspire me to pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Give me a firm and lasting confidence in your faithfulness and never ending work.*** *Rev. Derek Schiller St. George, QLD*

Thursday 26th March

Renew my Heart

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:2-3

Hey that isn't me! Surely? I don't kill or covet do I? Just before you switch off, remember how Jesus redefined these commandments. To be angry with another is to kill. To desire something is as good as the act. So you might say, if the commandments are defined so tightly, then how can anyone pray with the right motives? The answer is that we cannot. That is unless Jesus helps us through the Spirit. But the good news is that is exactly what Jesus promises to do.

So we need to pray. Are our motives and words exactly what they ought to be? Well actually they are not, but don't let that stop you. Our first prayer should be as Jesus taught us "Our Father ... Your will be done on earth ..."

Note not our will or our hopes or dreams, but rather those of God. For probably all of us at some point in our lives we will need to pray this prayer for a long

I NEED
~~to make more money~~
~~to have more business~~
~~to get more followers~~
~~to be happier~~
~~to get things done~~
~~to be the best~~
~~to be perfect~~
 Jesus.

time until our will conforms to that of God's. Never mind, continue to persist, knowing that God's grace covers you in our common human frailty.

The point is that we need to pray and continue to pray whether we are in the right place the wrong place or all over the place. Prayer is to faith what breathing is to living. It should come first until we are changed.

When a big problem comes up, how do you respond? Do you long for what you selfishly want or do you confront and try and sort it out yourself or do you first pray?

Prayer: *Lord renew my heart, please help me to desire the right things for those around me and for my own life. Prompt me throughout each day to pray. Prompt me to pray first rather than try to solve or react to the problems I face. Enable me by your Spirit to make prayer first a habit and so cultivate an infectious true godliness in my life that may be a blessing to others.*

Amen.

Rev Dr. Rob Brennan, Queensland

Friday 27th March

Clash of Kingdoms

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 27:27-31

The world is full of solutions that do not work. For millennia people have turned to military might and political power to build nations and safe guard communities only to build corruption, failure and suffering. Jesus offers us the one and only way to build a community that deals with the failure of all other communities; the sinful heart of people.

In this passage we are confronted by contrasting visions of power. The might of Rome lined up in front of Jesus, a forest of armour, spears and uniforms before one single man standing quietly. The Romans sought to demonstrate their superiority and power by mocking and insulting Jesus, but we who know the end of the story understand that they demonstrate only the poverty of their vision for human society and their breathtaking ignorance of what constitutes true life giving power. The truth of this will be driven home 300 years later when the great military might of the Roman Empire will be dust and the suffering Jesus will triumph over the Romans during the time of Constantine.

This is of great hope to me as I seek to come to terms with the rise of militant Islam and the great *Caliphate* by which militant Islam is seeking violently to dominate the world. Jesus, the son of God, embodies God's desires and vision for humanity and in that vision there is no place for power politics and the misery of warfare. Sometimes it may appear to us that Jesus is no match for the crude power of guns and war but the truth is that Jesus overcame all the might of the Roman Empire and will always overcome, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*". (John 1:5 RSV)

Prayer: *Dear Jesus when our hearts ache at the terrible violence and implacable hatred we see in the world, take our hearts to your cross, where you confronted the powers of death and utterly defeated them. Let us live in the light of your faith and commit ourselves a-new every day to your kingdom vision. Amen.*

Rev Steve Everist, Pittwater Uniting Church, New South Wales

Saturday 28th March

Are You the King of the Jews?

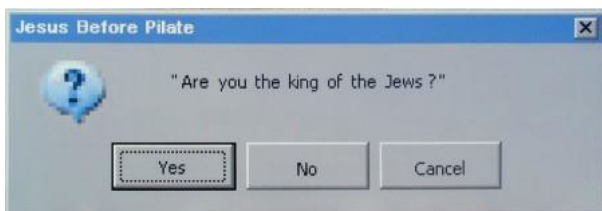
So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

Luke 23:3-4

Put yourself in Pilate's place for a moment. You have given a lot to get to the place of responsibility you are in now. Sure, there have been compromises made along the way which you wish you had not made. There have been rotten jobs that you have not wanted to do, but you did them. But here and now this just isn't right. You are about to cross a line which you know you should not cross. Your spouse has told you not to make this decision. You can see that this is a good person who has done no wrong. Your conscience and integrity, or what is left of them, scream, "Don't do it!"



You know the truth, what is right and confront the crowd and the shifty leaders you despise. However you have a choice. The choice is to do the right thing and face the consequences

or bow to the seemingly inevitable keep your job, career and avoid conflict. Sure your spouse won't talk to you for a while and you will have trouble looking yourself in the face in the mirror. But in the end it is not like you are the one being crucified is it?

There will always be temptations in our lives between doing the right things and facing consequences or opting for an "easier" path. Our choices may never be as stark as those facing Pilate, but face them we will. What will you do?

Prayer *Lord forgive me for those times I have given in to the temptation to take the easier way out, when I have not held on to truth or done the right thing. By your Spirit strengthen my heart and my courage so that I may graciously stand for you in all the areas of my life. Amen.*

Rev Dr. Rob Brennan Queensland

Sunday 29th March

BECAUSE OF WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE

Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days: ... 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'⁹ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial ... that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt.

Exodus 13:7-9

The unleavened bread, or bread made without yeast, was a sign of the haste with which God's people had to be prepared to leave their place of bondage. For the Jews, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is an annual memorial of their escape from Egyptian slavery. Moses said that it was to remind them of what the Lord did for them when they came out of Egypt.

Each father was to tell his son that it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.

Rebettzin Esther Jungreis in her book *The Committed Life* (Chapter 2: A memory that can't be erased) says that all Jewish souls that were ever to be born were at Mount Sinai when God sealed a covenant with them. This idea of a spiritual eternity in which all things and events are ever present is deeply challenging and very humbling. It allows a father to tell his son that he was there when the Lord took him out of Egypt. It creates the foundation for a personal salvation.

When Jesus died on the Cross, He died for me. The sin which he dealt with was mine. The new life He gave, He gave to me.

I do not share in some general amnesty. This is a very personal event for it is I, who is crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. I must make my personal step of faith so that the life I live in the body is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20

Lord Jesus, You died for me. You took my sin as far from me as the east is from the west. You have given me new life. These things are only because of what You have done. I commit myself afresh to You today.

Rev David de Kock, Lighthouse Uniting Church, Geraldton,
Western Australia

Monday 30th March

We all like sheep

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:5-6



Isaiah 53 looks forward to the coming of Jesus. He was the 'suffering servant' who would take His people's place in their sin. Isn't it amazing for us that He receives our transgressions, iniquities, punishment and wounds, and we receive His peace, healing and forgiveness. This is a great and undeserved exchange where He takes our unrighteousness and the punishment we deserve and we are given righteousness and peace with the Father.

Although He Himself had done no wrong He died in our place because of the wrongs we had done. *He was assigned a grave with the wicked.....though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*' (Isa 53:9).

It was God's will that Jesus - the good man - should die for us - the wicked. Think about what this means! What would we say today if an innocent man took the punishment for a violent and evil criminal; if a faultless man took the sentence of a corrupt one? "Not fair!" Oh the grace and mercy of God that we the guilty sinners are set free by the death of our Lord. We do not deserve it but because of the love of our God it is ours. All praise be to Him.

Prayer: *Father, it seems too good to believe that Jesus took our place in death and punishment. Thank you for all you've done for us and help us to simply trust in this incredible gift. We love you!*

Rev. Derek Schiller St. George, QLD

Tuesday 31st March

Suffering Like No Other

Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered Heb 5:8 NIV

We proudly declare that we 'don't suffer fools gladly'. The truth is that if Jesus didn't suffer fools you and I would not have a Saviour. The foolish Galileans tried to throw Jesus over a precipice after his first sermon. The foolish Samaritans were rude to him. The foolish rich man walked away from Him. The foolish Pharisee lawyers despised Him. Fools ignored, denied, betrayed, tortured, and despised Him. Today they still utter all manner of blasphemy and violence against Him.

But this cosmic King - what did He do? He opened not his mouth, preserved the strength of the bruised reed, calmed the heart's flickering wick and refused to call a division of angelic warriors where only one could have decimated the earth. And then in the great and final desolation of his suffering entrusted his spirit to the Father.



Jesus learned obedience. He discerned and heard his Father's voice in Scripture, in the solitary glory of night prayer-hours and the Spirit's daily communion. Maybe all children learn obedience through suffering but this is the eternal Son and this was perfect obedience. And this Son

made himself our brother who by death would bring us into his own glorious inheritance.

Holy Father, thank you for the obedience of your Son who knowing our terrible and shameful weaknesses has in loving suffering blessed us with the same acceptance that he enjoys. I shall be happy in this and let you teach me your ways.

Rev Ian Clarkson, Hope Network, South Australia

Wednesday, 1st April

The Blood of Jesus

“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.”

Exodus 12:7-8

Wherever you read in the Old Testament, you can't escape the significance of “blood” in the covenant relationship with God's people. And it's not just the OT either, it is also the NT: *“This is my blood of the New Covenant which was shed for you. Take it and drink it”* *“Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.”*

Why is this? Well scripture isn't all that clear, except for such verses as “The life is in the blood.” (explaining why the Children of Israel were never to eat meat with the blood in it.) To me, this is reminiscent of some of the 613 commandments the Jews were supposed to keep. They are called *huqqim* which we translate statutes or ordinances, but any knowledgeable Jew will tell you that they don't know why they have to keep it, God never explained. You just do. Most of us are rather squeamish when we see blood, even a little, and seeing a fair bit of it really puts the wind into our sails – why is this? Well because if we see enough of it, someone is very likely to die, and soon. Many biblical passages reflect this, including where Abel's blood is crying out from the ground for vengeance. One thing is beyond contradiction: the Lord Jesus shed his life's blood for you and for me. And I believe all the references to blood in the OT look forward to this event.

The present reference is rather different from most: there is no sacrifice, the lamb was to be *eaten* by the household, and the blood daubed on the doorposts and the lintels was a sign over the household. It was a *kippur* or covering. When the destroying angel saw the blood, he passed over that house (hence the name of the festival) and the firstborn in that household was safe. But as you read later in the *Torah*, the firstborn was holy to God, and had to be redeemed. The tribe of Levi were set aside to take the place of the firstborn, and although all Israel were to be the Lord's servants, proclaiming his saving grace, it was from the tribe of Levi that the priests were chosen.

So it is for us: we believers are covered by the blood of Jesus, but we are also sacred or dedicated to him. We are set free to serve in his Kingdom! We are, in fact, a Kingdom of Priests.

Prayer: *Almighty and loving Father, we thank you for the covering of the blood of Jesus without which we would never be safe. We also thank you for choosing us to be Priests in your Kingdom. May we serve you faithfully and truly declare your gospel truths in the world around us.* *Barrie Robinson, Launceston, Tasmania*

Thursday 2nd April

YET NOT MY WILL

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” Luke 22:42

Imagine the long moonlight shadows in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is a stone's throw from His companions. They can barely hear His whispered prayer for “the cup” of His approaching death to be taken from Him. It is a poignant moment – the fullness of the human nature with all its fear, cowardice and self-preservation is revealed. Taking the cup; suffering pain, yielding to death, is a big ask for anyone. Would you do it? Our human nature rebels against it as a matter of course.

But the emphasis of Jesus' prayer is not “take this cup from me” but, “if You are willing”. It is only the Father's will which can induce Him to submit to the horror of what lies before Him (Matthew 26:42). And because His Father's will is expressed in His love for the world (John 3:16), He will take the cup and drink its awful contents. He knows that the Father's love ultimately has a beautiful ending.

In this juxtaposition of the human and divine nature of our Lord we hear the voice of weak humanity and the determination of the divine will, and we become acutely aware of Jesus' absolute obedience to the Father. We can identify with human weakness easily enough, but will we submit to the divine will as Jesus does.

In our journey through life we are frequently confronted by “a cup,” which, though of lesser significance than the one Jesus faced, still demands a decision. Would we ask for it to be taken away, or will we submit to the Father's will and face the turmoil which comes before the glory? Yet not my will, but Thine be done.

Heavenly Father, I see in Your Son a beautiful submission to Your will. May Your Spirit so work in me that obedience to Your will is the hallmark of my life. May I see beyond the crisis of the moment into the hope of Your eternal will.

Rev David de Kock, Lighthouse Uniting Church, Geraldton, Western Australia

Theological Reflection

Re-membered

“Then he said, ‘Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom’. Jesus answered him, ‘truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise’ ” (Luke 23: 43).

The request by one of the criminals to be ‘remembered’ highlights something of our human nature, our desire to be remembered. We worry that we will die one day without a trace, without anyone remembering us, without a legacy. To be forgotten is to have lived and died in vain.

One person put it well in this way, “To remain, to be remembered is a desire common among humanity; to cease to exist, to be forgotten, a common fear. It is why grand monuments and grimy bathrooms from ancient Pompeii to modern New York are etched with our names. We are compelled to make a mark, however crude and small, that says, “I was here” because the alternative, “I am no more,” is too terrible to bear”.⁸

The criminal, in asking to be remembered, is not asking to be remembered so that his life will have significance, which is our normal way of thinking. Instead, “this criminal confidently asks to be remembered because he recognizes the One who can remember”.⁹

Every time we share in the Eucharist, we repeat Jesus’ words, “Do this in remembrance of me”. By ‘doing this’, like the criminal next to Jesus, we too humbly confess that it is only in Jesus the Christ, that

⁸ <http://deeperstory.com/we-remain-we-are-remembered/>

⁹ Hauerwas, S. (2011). *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words* (p. 42). Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

is, as the one who dies our death for our sakes, that we are remembered.

“Remembrance”, then, as Hauerwas well puts it, “is quite literally to be re-membered”. That is, to be made members of the body of Christ. “Through baptism we are given a new body... and we are thereby made capable of remembering that we live through memory.... To be with Jesus, to be claimed by Jesus to be his friend, is paradise. It is to be pulled into God’s life by the love made visible on the cross. Our salvation is no more or no less than being made part of God’s body, God’s enfleshed memory, so that the world may know that we are redeemed from our fevered and desperate desire to insure we will not be forgotten”.¹⁰

*Prayer: Father, remember me when you come into your kingdom.
Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki, Mooloolaba UC, Queensland

¹⁰ Ibid. p.43-44.

Friday 3rd April

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

"From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'—which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"
Matt 27:45-46

This is a frightening cry of Jesus on the cross. He has been forsaken/abandoned by the Father. Separation from God is the true judgement that must be brought upon sin. If Jesus were not separated from the Father, then sin would not really have been dealt with. Alienation of the human spirit from God is the result of God's wrath/anger against human sin. God's wrath is here poured out on Jesus on the cross.

The reason that Jesus is receiving this judgement (forsakenness and wrath) is not for his own sin as He had not sinned. It was because Jesus was taking onto Himself the sins of the world - our sin. He was receiving the punishment that was due to us. And so He experienced in his own body – God-forsakenness – in our place. "Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten and afflicted" (Isa 53:4).

He died as a man for all humankind. He died in his humanity, and took sinful humanity with Him into his death (and later into his resurrection – Rom 6:3-10). No one on this earth has experienced true separation from God. God's grace and

love is being poured out on this world, believers and unbelievers alike. Without this grace, there would be anarchy, violence and murder: Hell on earth. But Jesus experiences this separation, this punishment in our place, so that through faith in Him, we need not experience it as He has taken our place.

We must not play down what is happening here. Jesus is in total desolation, and complete suffering. The full fire of God's holy wrath is being dealt with in Christ's flesh. He was condemned to death. It is only

when we see this that our consciences will be at peace, for then we know that judgement is finished once and for all – and then we can be truly free in Christ.

Prayer: Father, we know what it feels like to be lonely. We thank you that Jesus has experienced this utter loneliness in our place that we never need be abandoned by you. We praise you that through Him we can be sure of your love and acceptance forever. Amen. Rev. Derek Schiller St. George, QLD



Saturday 4th April

Do not fear - fear

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body... fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell... Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not.

Luke 12:4-7

There is great, worldwide fear at present because of the persecution and murder of Christians. It is of comfort to know that Jesus promised this would happen and that it has happened across every age of the church. Jesus said that on account of him some would be put to death - but not a hair of their heads would perish! How can we die and yet not a hair be harmed? (Luke 21:16-19).

Our hope is not found in this temporary life or body but in the life and

body to come. In the new heaven and the new earth God's renewed creation will be revealed. There, those who have died in Christ will be found completely renewed with new immortal bodies. Our hope is found in the eternal plans and purposes of God for the resurrection of His children and not in safety and security in this world as we experience it.

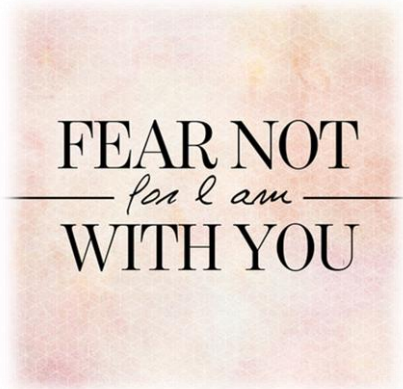
Through Jesus we have been purified and forgiven completely and we need not fear God. There is nothing between us and God as Jesus has dealt with our sin and guilt fully on the cross. Through Jesus we have been completely reconciled to the Father. Our future is sealed and secure through faith in Jesus and now we are included in His eternal life.

We need not fear God as we are His children and there is nothing that those who kill our bodies can do to change this sure fact. Just as God knows the number of hairs on our heads so and He cares for each person eternally!

We will all die in some way and at some time, but we are assured of the new creation to come because of God's firm promise in Christ.

Prayer: *Father we thank You that although we face hardships in this world, that we can be assured of our standing before You. Thank You for Jesus and the full forgiveness and certainty He has brought us for this life and the life to come. Amen.*

Rev. Derek Schiller St. George, QLD



Theological Reflection

The Cross of Christ

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

Jesus began his time on the cross praying to his Father. As he prepares to draw his last breath, he again prays to his Father. With these words, Jesus offers himself up into the hands of God, as well as simultaneously offering himself up unto death.

“Jesus is no “Christ-figure” if we mean that his death is an exemplification of how we should all die; that is, we should die with the confidence that we have nothing to fear from death. No, this is the real and specific death of Jesus, the Savior of all that has been, is, and is to come, who submits to death by our hands—“Having said this he breathed his last.” Dead. Jesus is dead.”¹¹

These words then reveal Jesus’ utter commitment to “embrace the ice-cold silence of hell”. As such, these words “are every bit as frightening as Jesus’s prior cry of abandonment. Jesus is not comforting himself; he is gesturing to the Father that he is ready to face the final work that only Jesus can do.”¹² Jesus the Son of God enters into the abyss of godforsakenness, so that He might be the head of a new humanity.

This reality is highlighted in the Orthodox resurrection icon which shows the risen Christ holding Adam and Eve by the hand, and pulling them with him out of the world of the dead. The Orthodox liturgy

¹¹ Hauerwas, S. (2011). *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words* (pp. 96–97). Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

¹² Ibid. p. 98

says, ‘Everything is now filled with light, heaven and earth and the realm of death. The whole creation rejoices in Christ’s resurrection.’¹³

It is why we therefore confess, as Para. 3 of our Basis of Union puts it, “that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity”. As a church, then, God in Christ has given to us “the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation”.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus that you are the first and the last, and the living one. You were dead, but now you are alive for ever and ever (Rev. 1: 17-18). Come, Lord Jesus, Come. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki, Mooloolaba UC, Queensland

¹³ Moltmann, J. (2004). *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope*. (M. Kohl, Trans.) (p. 149). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Sunday 5th April

Resurrection Hope

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."
1 Corinthians 15:14

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for all of our hope. If He was not raised from the dead then there is no point to life in the present. Without the hope of resurrection we might as well 'party hard' and live selfish lives at the expense of others. Paul says, "If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (1 Corinthians 15:32).

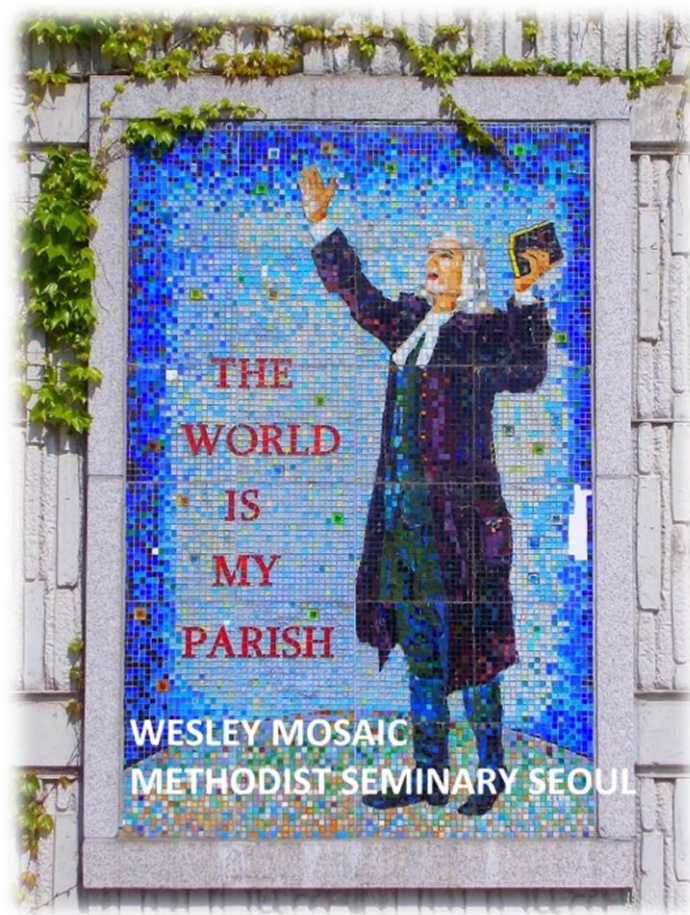
The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. His resurrection gives us hope for our resurrection. He has opened a way for humans to be set free from the dominion and power of death. Jesus is the resurrection and the life and as we abide in Him we too are set free from the fear and sting of death.

Without the resurrection of Jesus our faith is a waste of time and powerless. The resurrection shows that God was working in power through Jesus. His whole life is shown to be true and blessed by God when He was raised. Thus, in Christ's resurrection, we too are blessed and empowered.

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead". (Ephesians 1:18-20).

Prayer: *Father, thank you that you made a way out from our deserved death - that through your Son's resurrection we now have a guaranteed hope for our future. Father, open our eyes to this hope daily - this hope that empowers us and as we are surrounded by death - that our thoughts would be drawn to who you are and what you have done. And when fear overwhelms us please reassure us again that one day you personally will come back and take us to be with the Father.*

Rev. Derek Schiller St. George, QLD





The friendship of the Lord
is
for those who fear him.

Psalm 25:14