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**Sunday 9 January 2022 to Sunday 16 January 2022**

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Sunday 9 January 2022

# Are those words for me?

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come … He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16).**

Read Luke 3:15–17,21,22

If you have been baptised as an infant, chances are you weren’t aware of what was said when this amazing offer of God’s grace was given to you. Ever since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s power has been gifted to those who have had the life-giving waters of baptism applied to them. The miracle of the occasion is such that we will never fully understand what God has just given to another of his children.

Martin Luther in the Small Catechism, Part 1, says:

Baptism is not just water used on its own. It is water used together with God’s word, in the way God has commanded. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19 NIV).

It’s hard to take in the enormity of those words spoken by John the Baptist in his reference to Jesus, the ‘one who is more powerful than I … He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire’. Yes, those words are for us as they refer to the refining fire of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. Dwell on those words for a moment and let the devotion title question ‘Are those words for me?’ stir your heart. Whoever has been baptised has the most powerful force in the universe living within. Keep exploring what that might mean every day of your life as you ask the Holy Spirit to go to work in you.

What does the fire of the Holy Spirit need to ‘burn off’ from your life through repentance to enable you to grow deeper in your relationship with Jesus?

**Come Holy Spirit, come and pour yourself anew into my life so that I may be drawn closer to Jesus. Refine my heart and lead me to repentance. Give me a renewed willingness to work in God’s kingdom. Amen.**

Monday 10 January 2022

# My servant will bring justice

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1).**

Read Isaiah 42:1–9

Around 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah shared God’s plan of salvation for his people. Isaiah 42:1–9 is the first of four ‘servant songs’ that tell what the promised Messiah would do for God’s people and the world.

When my children were born, I had no idea what they would be doing as adults. As parents, we can only encourage them to learn at school to go on and develop some interests later in life. Only God would tell his chosen nation Israel, and through Isaiah, the world what his chosen Servant (Jesus, the Messiah) would do centuries later.

What I like about God’s part in fulfilling these words is how active he was in various ways. ‘My chosen one in whom I delight.’ God will, and does, delight in those who seek to do his will and partner with him in his mission here on earth.

God also ‘put [his] Spirit on him’ to ensure he wasn’t alone. Did you notice that? Don’t gloss over what God did for his Servant. Don’t speed-read this devotion until you have pondered longer over what he gave you through the waters of your baptism, ‘put his Spirit on you’. While Jesus the Messiah had the ultimate task of bringing God’s justice, righteousness and salvation into our world for us, God gave him all he needed. God will also give you all you need to be his servant too.

God empowered his Servant to ‘bring justice to the nations’. Justice was served when Jesus went to the cross on our behalf, taking the punishment for our sins upon himself. Jesus did what we could never have possibly done ourselves.

Reflect on being called God’s servant. What would you like the Holy Spirit to provide for you, like he provided for Jesus?

**Thank you, Heavenly Father, for giving the world your Son Jesus as the most amazing servant. Fill me anew with your Holy Spirit so that I can serve you and my community better. Amen.**

Tuesday 11 January 2022

# Who’s up for a change of scenery?

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land (Ezekiel 36:24).**

Read Ezekiel 36:24–28

I couldn’t help but think of the current COVID times when so many people would like someone (anyone) to gather them up and get them back to their homeland. We’ve all heard stories of people being separated from families, friends and places that mean so much to them.

It begs the question when reading this promise to the Jews in exile after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC: why did God let all this bad stuff happen if, in the end, he also had the power and passion to restore them? The answer isn’t that hard to find as we learn about the reasons for the destruction of the Jewish nation. Sin, in a word. Not just personal but collective sin as a nation. Worship of other gods, oppression of the poor and widows, corruption, fallen priests and wicked leadership. Wow, that’s some list.

Despite any of our personal or collective failures, we all need something to look forward to. And God is just the one to provide us with hope for a better future. He promises restoration, forgiveness and peace in our lives through his Son, Jesus the King of kings and Lord of lords. We also need to remember not to get too comfortable in this world because it’s only our temporary dwelling place. ‘For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands’ (2 Corinthians 5:1).

The greatest change of scenery we’ll ever have is when John’s vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven (Revelation 21:1–4) becomes the eternal reality.

Some changes of scenery really are worth waiting for!

Think about a place you might rather be now and the people you’d like around you. How does that compare with what God’s offering us?

**Almighty God, you have promised us so much through your Son, Jesus. Give my heart and mind a wonderful sense of peace and expectation of what our heavenly home will be like in your presence. Amen.**

Wednesday 12 January 2022

# Pray for another Pentecost miracle

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).**

Read Acts 2:36–42

The Holy Spirit is truly an underrated person of the Triune God. So much depends on what the Spirit does in the world as the word of God is shared, as people hear the good news of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. People are saved because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

While it might be many months away from celebrating Pentecost in our church calendar, don’t you just love the miracle of 3000 people being baptised and becoming children of God that day?

With the exhortation to ‘Repent and be baptised’, Peter also shared a promise from God, ‘You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’. Christmas has come and gone for another year. Where did the gift of the Holy Spirit get given? Was it on your prayer list for God to give the Gift to a close family member or friend? Did you pray for the Holy Spirit to be unleashed in your office, home or social network?

Maybe the miracle of that first Pentecost needs to be a very personal affair first. ‘God, have your way with me, leading me to repentance and a deeper faith in Jesus as Lord, Saviour and friend.’ The common thread through this week’s readings is that God promises the Holy Spirit would be present and evident in some way for his people to experience. Always with the express desire and outcome – a deeper relationship with a God of love who we find in the person of Jesus. Ahh – the miracle of saving faith!

Who could you identify as someone to pray for, asking the Holy Spirit to stir their heart to embrace Jesus as their Saviour?

**Ever-present Spirit of God, you are all-powerful and yet so gentle as to be sensitive to where people are at in life. I ask you to continue working in my life and also use me to help you bring [insert a family or friend’s name here] closer to Jesus through my words and actions. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.**

Thursday 13 January 2022

# Dead or alive – or maybe comatose?

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).**

Read Romans 6:3–11

Comatose comes from the Greek kōma, ‘deep sleep’. When you're in a deep sleep, your body is still, and you don't respond to things around you. Being comatose means being in that sleepy, unresponsive state and being unable to get out of it.

What causes this? A coma is a state of prolonged unconsciousness that can be caused by a variety of problems — traumatic head injury, stroke, brain tumour, drug or alcohol intoxication, or even an underlying illness, such as diabetes or an infection. A coma is a medical emergency. Swift action is needed to preserve life and brain function.

These explanations suffice to say that humans can be alive and yet ‘dead’ to other stimuli with no external awareness. That’s me at times. Maybe even you at times.

Our sinful nature (the original sinful state we’re born into) means we are spiritually dead. The world we live in certainly doesn’t help as it encourages us to come ‘alive’ with specific products, lifestyle choices and certainly a broad selection of religions and philosophies.

Through these, the world around us can make us numb – even comatose – to the real effects of our sin, depravity, ungodliness, apathy and self-centredness. The reality is that we are naturally dead in our sin. We are a ‘spiritual emergency’, waiting for God’s intervention so that we become alive again.

Thank God for Jesus! Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit!

May we never stop thanking God for adopting us into his family through the waters of baptism and enabling us to come alive as the Holy Spirit empowers us. Isn’t it great to know that God wants everyone to become truly alive in his Son Jesus? In John 10:10, Jesus says he has come that we might have life to the full. I want that. I hope and pray you do, too.

Reflect on some of the ways you have become numb to the effects of the world on your life.

**Ever-living God, by the power of your word and Holy Spirit, increase in me an awareness of the effects of the world in my life. Forgive my apathy to recognise what these do to my thoughts, words and actions. Help me to become more alive in Christ each day. Amen.**

Friday 14 January 2022

# Did Helen Keller really exist?

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar (1 John 5:10a).**

Read 1 John 5:6–12

I stumbled across an internet article from Inside Hook dated 6 January 2021 that stated:

This baffling bit of Gen Z culture comes to us courtesy of screenwriter Daniel Kunka, who took to Twitter last night to share the surreal discovery he happened upon after his teen nieces and nephews informed him that Helen Keller, the famed deaf and blind subject of The Miracle Worker, was a fraud who didn’t exist.

It went on to explore the basis of the theory and how it was being circulated and noted that millions of people agreed with the article. These days, the article and response are hardly surprising.

The original social media post was in 2020 by student and writer Isabella Lahoue. Kunka suggests Gen Z’s Helen Keller scepticism may stem from a broader generational tendency to challenge the media and other sources of authority in a quest for unfiltered truth. He concluded, ‘In this age of disinformation and disillusionment, the only thing we can know for certain is that “We’re all just one TikTok away from being erased from an entire generation”’.

If this is how current generations treat facts supported by live video footage, photo evidence, and people still living who saw her in person and read so much of her literature, is it any wonder that God’s word needs the work of the Holy Spirit to enable people to believe in Jesus? After all, he did live, die and come alive again 2000 years ago.

Of course, unbelief is nothing new. Disregarding credible truth and discrediting eyewitnesses has been inherent throughout history. The truth is what our legal system was set up to establish through the courts using witnesses. Establishing the truth in people’s hearts is the key role of the Holy Spirit as ‘Advocate’ or ‘Counsellor’, who enables us to believe what God wants us to about Jesus as his Son, our Lord and Saviour. We all need the Holy Spirit to believe.

Consider how social media and ‘fake news’ have eroded your confidence in believing what is true.

**All-powerful God, help me believe what the Scriptures reveal as your saving truth about Jesus. Pour out your Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to lift the veil of deception that causes doubt and unbelief. Amen.**

Saturday 15 January 2022

# Enough love to fill the universe

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens … How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! (Psalm 36:5a,7a)**

Read Psalm 36:5–10

There are some things money can’t buy. God’s love is the ultimate. Because ‘God is love’ (1 John 4), and he fills the universe, then it stands to reason that there’s enough love to fill the universe. God has so much love to give that even if every person ever born absorbed enough love to saturation point within them, there would still be so much love left over for others to do the same. God’s love is free. God’s love is endless.

How different our world would be if it were ruled not by sin and its effects but by love.

All this got me thinking about a movie to explore this concept of humans absorbing love from a dispenser and then going around and sharing it. Imagine oozing love to the point of leaving a trail of love everywhere. Surely, whoever would do that would get millions of followers and be the constant number one account on every social media platform worldwide. The advertising companies would be lining up to ensure they offer that person their best deal. TV, radio stations and online networks would report on everything the person did each day so that people could see where ‘love comes to life’. That person would be rich and the most widely known figure in history.

Hang on a minute. The reality is, of course, that a movie like that has already been lived out in real life. God’s love has come to Earth in a person. We’ve just finished packing away the Christmas tree and gifts from our annual season that celebrates God’s love coming as a baby. Perfect love lying in a manger, growing up and then distributing love to the whole world throughout his life. Jesus is God’s love incarnate and now lives within each of his children, including you. May God’s love flow through you always.

Consider the ways that you can ‘ooze’ God’s love to make a difference so that others are drawn to Jesus too.

**God of love, thank you for your Son Jesus as the perfect expression of your love in the world. Help me share this from the bottomless ‘Spring of Life’ – Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Sunday 16 January 2022

# Cup full and overflowing

by Norma Koehne

**What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he reveals his glory; and his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).**

Read John 2:1–11

What is revealed about Jesus in this his first miracle? First of all, it reveals him as truly human. Here, he is seen as a man enjoying the wedding of a friend or relative, at home with everyone. These were probably people he had known and worked with, played with and shared in their everyday life.

But he is also different, as his mother realises as she tells him that the greatest embarrassment has occurred, ‘They have no more wine’. What did she expect him to do – go to the corner shop? Even though Jesus almost rebukes her, she tells the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’, and they follow what must have seemed rather bizarre instructions, filling 6 stone jars with water, 120 gallons in total. That would have taken some time. Then they take the water turned into wine to the master of ceremonies, and it turns out to be the best wine ever. A miracle to help and save his friends and their family from shame. Jesus shows he is truly God, a saving God.

Most importantly, it is revealed that Jesus, as truly God, gives the best to us and in abundance. Christians are not cup-half-full or half-empty people but are blessed people whose cup is always full and overflowing (Psalm 23:5b). We are triply blessed. We have a loving Father who showers us with his love. We have Jesus, our brother, who gives us his hard-won forgiveness and clothes us with his righteousness. We have the Holy Spirit, our friend and guide, walking beside us every day to strengthen and protect us. Praise God for his abundant goodness!

**Loving Saviour, my brother and Lord, thank you that through your saving death, I have life in all its fullness as you shower me with an abundance of blessings. Amen.**