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**Sunday 7 May 2023 to Sunday 14 May 2023**

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Sunday 7 May 2023

**This is the way**

by Libby Krahling

***Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me (John 14:1).***

Read [John 14:1–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14%3A1%E2%80%9314&version=NRSVUE)

It's the Last Supper. Jesus has just made it clear that he will be put to death very soon, and the disciples won’t see him for a while. One of them will betray Jesus, and one will deny he even knows him. It’s a lot to take in.

Now Jesus tells them, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me’ (verse 1). He reassures them that while he will die, he is going before them to heaven to prepare a place for them. They might not understand what he is saying now (and they clearly don’t), but what they need to remember is that anyone who knows Jesus knows God. God will welcome them into his kingdom because they know Jesus.

The disciples struggle to understand everything Jesus is telling them. Thomas wants to know how to get to this big palace in the sky. Jesus explains that he, Jesus, is the way, the truth and the life and that anyone who wants to get to the Father needs to go through him. They still don’t get it. Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Again, Jesus explains that he is God, and he has been with them the whole time. If they know Jesus, they already know the Father.

I imagine the disciples’ heads are about to explode at this point. In verse 11, Jesus says, ‘Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves.’ In other words, if this is too much for you to comprehend right now, look at what I’ve done – all the miracles, the healings, the fulfilment of prophecies.

As people living on this side of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we might be tempted to scoff at the disciples’ lack of comprehension. We know that Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice for our sins so that the Father no longer counts our failings against us. Through faith in Christ, we have eternal life and can know God as our loving Father.

How often, though, do we live even more cluelessly than those disciples? They at least asked Jesus to explain and sought to understand his words. They may not have understood the big picture, but they did trust Jesus, even in the midst of their confusion. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death or feel lost in the desert, may we remember that we know Jesus, too. Even if we don’t understand what’s happening in our lives or our world right now, we know the most important thing – Christ Jesus and him crucified. If you are overwhelmed and struggling with doubt, fix your eyes on what Jesus has already shown you. One step after the next, keep walking the path. Through it all, Jesus will show you the way.

***Lord Jesus, forgive us when we forget who you are and trust in our own strength and reason. Help us to walk in your way, knowing your truth and bathed in your light. Amen.***

*Libby Krahling and her husband Phil are members of St Petri Lutheran Church, Nuriootpa, in South Australia. They have two adult sons. Libby runs the Worship Planning Page, organises the Daily Devotions, and this year is currently working on the Worship and Devotional Life in Lutheran Schools and Early Childhood Services project for Lutheran Education Australia. In her spare time, Libby loves to cook, read and paint.*

Monday 8 May 2023

**Transforming faith**

by Libby Krahling

***By faith Moses … considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward (Hebrews 11:24a,26).***

Read [Hebrews 11:23–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+11%3A23%E2%80%9331&version=NRSVUE)

Moses’s life is often seen as an archetype for Jesus – born in humble circumstances, under threat of death from birth, walking with the abused and persecuted, holding fast to God and rejecting comfort, wealth, acceptance and worldly power. Willing to face judgement and suffer the anger of ruling authorities because he had a greater purpose.

But Jesus isn’t just a new Moses – he is the fulfilment of all the prophecies, the Messiah, God in human form. Where Moses’ faithfulness in keeping the Passover saved the children of Israel, and then brought them out of slavery, Jesus brought about a whole new covenant between God and his people. Jesus suffered, died, was buried, and then resurrected on the third day so that we can all be called the children of God. Through the sprinkling of his blood, we are rescued from death and are no longer slaves to sin.

While we may not be called to live a life as high-profile as that of Moses, we can be challenged and encouraged by his faith. The same faith which God worked in Moses, he works in us.

Faith is powerful. Through faith, God transformed ordinary people into mighty heroes, people we can emulate. It isn’t that Moses or any of the other people mentioned in Hebrews 11 made the miracles and mighty deeds happen – but that their faith allowed God to use them for his purposes. God delivered the Israelites from their suffering in Egypt. God parted the Red Sea. God brought down the walls of Jericho. God gave an isolated and ostracised woman in a hostile city the courage to stand up for what was right – and saved her from death.

***Mighty God, grant us the faith that focuses on you no matter the cost. Transform us by your love and mercy, and use us to achieve your purposes, so that you may be glorified in all creation. Amen.***

Tuesday 9 May 2023

**Focused faith**

by Libby Krahling

***Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:1b-2a).***

Read [Hebrews 11:32–12:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+11%3A32+%E2%80%93+12%3A2&version=NRSVUE)

When I was a little girl, I loved hearing about David fighting Goliath, Daniel in the lion’s den and so many others. I was convinced that I could do those cool things too if I had their faith.

Getting a bit older, I began to realise that there weren’t too many lions in country NSW, and I was unlikely to slay a giant with a slingshot and five smooth stones. If I did, I would certainly be arrested for murder …

As a teenager, it occurred to me that many of these heroes of the faith came to the kinds of sticky ends listed in today’s text. While being sawn in two and being stoned to death seemed unlikely, as an adolescent I was intensely aware of the possibility of being derided and tormented for my faith.

As an adult, I learned more about what flawed human beings these heroes were. Looking around me, I realised that many people I looked up to as a child were also fallible. Looking in the mirror, I realised that I was just as fallible and weak.

Now in middle age, I feel rather inadequate and boring in comparison with these great ‘heroes of the faith’. Pressing deadlines at work, doing my taxes and figuring out whether my data has been hacked don’t exactly seem on par with fighting Philistines.

As Hebrews 11 closes, we have a run of judges, prophets and ordinary people of faith who aren’t even named, who were able to achieve great things and suffer incredible ordeals, all because of their faith in God.

The point of recounting the lives of those saints isn’t to make us feel bad by comparison.

As inspiring as all these past examples of faith are, the greatest encouragement we have is what is still to come – the perfection which Christ will bring us in the resurrection.

The key element that binds all those stories together is who they had faith in – our mighty Lord Jesus, the perfecter of our faith. That little girl from country NSW *did* have the same faith as David, because she had faith in Christ, who will lead her, not to conquer Philistines, but death itself, and with David and all the saints, she will receive the crown of eternal life.

***Lord Jesus, help us to remember when times are tough that you are good and that you have overcome sin, death and the devil for each one of us. When we struggle with all kinds of trials and tribulations, keep our eyes fixed on you. Amen***

Wednesday 10 May 2023

**Disciplined faith**

by Libby Krahling

***My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when you are punished by him (Hebrews 12:5b)***

Read [Hebrews 12:3–11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+12%3A3%E2%80%9311&version=NRSVUE)

In this passage, we learn about God’s discipline. The word 'discipline' comes from the Latin word for learning and instruction. Disciples are students. To be Jesus’ disciple means to learn from him.

Hebrews points out that parents teach their children by punishing them when they misbehave. That doesn’t mean abuse, that means showing children that poor choices have consequences. We live in a fallen world, where we live with the consequences of sin – Adam and Eve’s and our own. As a result, we will face times of suffering and struggle. Some we bring on ourselves by our own choices, some are thrust upon us from the choices of others or the broken environment in which we live. And some, we suffer at the hands of the evil one, so that, like Job, our faith may prove genuine when tested.

The point of this is not that God wants us to be miserable or have a terrible life. It is that he wants us to learn – to trust him and follow him, no matter what is happening around us. To love each other even when that feels very difficult and our fallen humanity rebels against it. Through discipline, the Holy Spirit works within us to produce his fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, forgiveness and – yes, even self-control!

Jesus lived as a human being. Even though he did not sin, he still suffered harsh trials, temptations and great ‘hostility against himself from sinners’. Even knowing what was coming, Jesus exercised the self-control that comes from faith to walk the way of the cross, submitting himself to the Father’s will. Christ shared the burden of our discipline, and through him, we are made true children of God.

Jesus’ example encourages us not to lose heart but to persevere when facing opposition or difficulty. Times of difficulty aren’t signs that God doesn’t love us – they are opportunities to practice the discipline of perseverance, trusting in God even when we struggle.

***Loving God, thank you for sending Jesus to walk among us, so that from his example we can learn to trust you in the darkness. Help us submit to your discipline, sure in the knowledge of your love. Amen***

Thursday 11 May 2023

**Selfless faith**

by Libby Krahling

***Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed (Hebrews 12:12,13).***

Read [Hebrews 12:12–29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+12%3A12%E2%80%9329&version=NRSVUE)

I remember watching the London marathon a while ago. A runner was within sight of the finish line but completely exhausted. His legs were giving out on him, his hands were dangling and it seemed like he would collapse at any moment. He was the definition of ‘drooping hands’ and ‘weak knees’. Another athlete saw his distress, and stopped and helped the exhausted man to the finish line. It was a truly inspiring moment of compassion.

Through this week’s readings, we have been encouraged to ‘run with perseverance the race that is set before us’ (Hebrews 12:1b), despite the trials we will face along the way.

The encouragement in today’s focus text to ‘therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint’ adds to the imagery of the athlete in an endurance race. On our run to the finish, we want to avoid obstacles in our path, prevent injury to others or ourselves, and not get lost along the way.

Lane ropes help swimmers stay in their lanes, and roads are cleared for marathon runners so that they don’t stumble or go off course. God’s law is there to guide us and protect us from what is dangerous. It helps us to stay on track, and to honour God by following his commands. We do this not in fear and trembling, afraid of the certain death we deserve as sinners entering the presence of God, but with joy and thanksgiving because we know we will be welcomed home, thanks to Jesus’ work on the cross.

The way we run our race affects the people we encounter, so we are encouraged in this passage to live lives that draw people to God rather than letting bitterness and division create stumbling blocks. Sometimes we are the ones with drooping hands and weak knees, needing encouragement and support to complete the race. Sometimes we are called to be the supporter.

***Compassionate Christ, you have had mercy on us. Help us to stay true to your path, and to support others when they stumble on the way. Amen.***

Friday 12 May 2023

**Sacrificial faith**

by Libby Krahling

***Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:16).***

Read [Hebrews 13:1–16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+13%3A1%E2%80%9316&version=NRSVUE)

Hebrews reminds us that life is like a race.

We have the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ cheering us on from the sidelines, with the Holy Spirit as our coach. Submitting to the Father’s discipline is like training for the race; the more we endure, the more we are strengthened and prepared for greater challenges. We can focus on the ‘finish line’, our eyes fixed on Christ, because we are assured of God’s grace.

As a natural outpouring of Christ-like faith, in this passage we are exhorted to live Godly lives, in which we emulate Jesus’ sacrificial love for us in the way we deal with the world around us. Echoing Jesus’ words in Matthew 25, we are to show hospitality to the stranger and care for those in prison, sacrificing our comfort and possessions for the welfare of others. We should live in accordance with the commandments, keeping our marriage vows and being content with the blessings we have received from God, rather than coveting new partners or more money and possessions. Our sacrifice is letting go of our wants and desires and trusting that God has given us everything we need.

Sometimes, we might be tempted to fill our emptiness with ‘strange teachings’. Hebrews reminds us again to look to the example of faithful people before us, both the heroes of old and those who taught us the faith. Looking at their lives, we can remind ourselves again that ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’. Good models of faith show us that true faith fixes its eyes on Jesus, trusts that God will provide and is able to withstand all kinds of trials for the ‘greater reward’.

When we consider everything that God has done for us, it is almost overwhelming. He gave his only Son to die for us. He sees all our dirt, all our shame, and still loves us, and calls us to join him in his banqueting hall. What can we do in response?

‘Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.’

***Loving Lord, we thank and praise you for your constant love and presence in our lives. Help us to love each other as you have loved us, ready to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.***

Saturday 13 May 2023

**I will tell what he has done for me**

by Libby Krahling

***Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me (Psalm 66: 16).***

Read [Psalm 66:8–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+66%3A8%E2%80%9320&version=NRSVUE)

This psalm crowns the week’s readings. As we’ve walked through Hebrews 11–13, we’ve heard the stories of faithful believers who God saved, loved and redeemed. We’ve heard about the many saints who’ve suffered great ordeals and even lost their lives for their faith. We have been reminded that all of the amazing things these people did were accomplished by a mighty God working through their faith.

We too have this same faith, originating from and perfected by Christ Jesus. Our faith is an echo of his love and sacrifice on the cross for our sakes. Through God’s loving discipline, we can grow in our faith. Through his sacrificial love, our futures are assured and we are free to love and care for others, so that they too might know God’s grace and mercy. What can we offer to the Lord for all his goodness to us? We can lift up our sacrifice of thanksgiving in the presence of all people!

That’s exactly the pattern we see in today’s psalm.

Having come through times of trial and suffering, the psalmist praises God for hearing his prayers and rescuing Israel. God has kept his promises and delivered them from hardship. The writer sees the challenges as tests from God, but recognises that God has ultimately delivered the people into a ‘spacious place’.

In return, the psalmist offers sacrifices to thank God for everything he has done. As well as literal sacrifices, the writer offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and calls on everyone around him to come and hear, and he will tell them what God has done for him.

It sounds like a good plan to me.

***Heavenly Father, you have rescued us and redeemed us. You have delivered us from evil, and forgiven us our sins too many times to count. We praise you for your goodness and love. Give us the words to share your goodness with the people we meet. Amen.***

Sunday 14 May 2023

**An active love for our Lord**

by Craig Heidenreich

***If you love me, keep my commands (John 14:15).***

Read [John 14:15–21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14%3A15-21&version=NRSVUE)

One thing that stands out to me as I read John 14 is the number of times Jesus links our love for him to our willingness to obey his commands.

This suggests to me that Jesus wants an active relationship with us, and that we are not to just passively receive.

Jesus is describing a love that goes beyond sentiment alone, a love that cares deeply about what he wants, and obeys him.

Thankfully, Jesus knows how weak we are and promises in verse 16 of our passage to help us by sending the Holy Spirit.

Under the influence of the Spirit, we don’t just ‘do things for’ Jesus – but we abide together.

So, what are these commands of Jesus to us?

We can read about his commands in Scripture. There are plenty of ‘words in red’ that give some clues as to how we are to obey Jesus. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus sums up all of the commandments as loving God and loving our neighbour.

I’d like to suggest that obeying Jesus goes deeper than just obeying principles, and that there are times when he gives me a personal command, that is specific to me.

As we love Jesus, the Holy Spirit reveals his will to us, and then he helps us live it out.

Listening to Jesus and obeying him becomes a daily ‘dance of love’. I’m just amazed that the Lord wants to be our dance partner.

***Thank you, Lord, that you love us and that you promise to show yourself to us. You give great purpose to our lives by including us in your work here on earth. Help us to obey your prompting and join in your great plan to reach the world.***

*Craig really enjoys making friends with people from other countries and trying to learn a few words of greeting in their languages. He says it’s fun to see the joy on a person’s face when they hear their mother tongue. When he has some spare time, he's happy renovating the home he and his wife recently purchased in Kapunda, South Australia.*