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**Sunday 5 February 2023 to Sunday 12 February 2023**

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Sunday 5 February 2023

**Salt and light**

By Pastor Peter Bean

### Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Read Matthew 5:13–20

Salt has its purposes. Light has it uses. We could list them. Both need to be present in the right measure. When used positively, both enhance the world we live in.

This is my translation of the passage today:

*You are the seasoning of the world. Bring out God-pleasing flavours in all you encounter, all you do. Don’t overuse them or you’ll spoil the effect. You are the light (as I am the light). Don’t hide this light, no matter what sort it is, no matter how strong or weak. For you, it is the perfect time to shine into the lives of those you encounter. The Law? What do you think of it? Does it need to be kept religiously? Would you rather do away with it, or ignore it? Neither of these is my way. I perfect the Law and fulfil the Prophets. You can join me – by being the seasoning you are, by sharing the light you have and thus be righteous, living in me as I live in you. Then you don’t need to worry about Pharisaical stuff, but can concentrate on what is important.*

If I’ve managed to get the gist of what Jesus is saying, it is this: I have fulfilled the law. When you live in me: being salt or seasoning, providing light, you too fulfil the Law, you live as righteous people, practising grace and forgiveness. Living out mercy, justice and acceptance. We all do this differently.

It is only through grace and forgiveness that I can possibly be salt and light in the world. Only through the love of Jesus, can I work out which seasoning to be and how much of it to use; it’s only through the love of Jesus that I can work out which light I am and where and how to make it shine.

Then, even though it is a constant struggle, our righteousness will exceed that of the Pharisees; then we can know and live God’s love and encourage others to know and live in God’s love. Then we’ll bring out the God-flavours and the God-colours of this world.

**Gift Giver, help me to bring God-pleasing flavours and colours to the world. Amen.**

Peter is often out tending his garden – with 83 fruit and nut trees and extensive native bushes, he says there is a lot to do! Other times, he will be walking his dog, reading (too many books at a time), enjoying his family (15 grandchildren!), and occasionally writing – poetry, opinion pieces, devotions! He also tries to fit in a bike ride each day. To keep out of mischief, he is currently teaching himself to play the piano and is writing a paraphrase of each psalm. You can read these on his website, [*Creative Walking*](http://www.creativewalking.com.au/psalm-reflections.html).

Monday 6 February 2023

**What are you looking for?**

by Pastor Peter Bean

### When Jesus turned and saw them following him, he asked them: What are you looking for? (John 1:38a).

Read John 1:35–42

Interesting question! Interesting answer!

The two followers of John knew there was more to life. John had given that hint earlier (see John 1:19–34). So when John pointed out Jesus, they naturally went after him. But then he asked: ‘What are you looking for?’ Many people have asked that of themselves over time. The band U2 had a hit with I still haven’t found what I’m looking for. Apart from the music, perhaps it was such a big hit because people struggle to answer the question: what are you looking for? They don’t really know, so they keep searching.

These followers of John answered Jesus’ question with a question (I’m told I do that quite a bit ...). But their question avoided Jesus’ question! However, Jesus wasn’t fussed; he was happy to show them where he was staying (their question). And he met with them, and talked with them. He met them where they were (in life).

Astonishingly, from this encounter, Andrew, one of the two followers, gains life. He says to his brother, Simon (Peter): we have found the Messiah, the Christ. Then, there were two disciples!

All this, from Jesus not trying to change Andrew, or force him to answer the question, but by meeting him where he was. By allowing Andrew to find the Christ.

What are you looking for? Perhaps you know the answer, or perhaps like many, you are uncertain. Jesus simply invites you to spend time with him; to rest in his presence; to become overcome with love and grace and presence. Then Jesus can reveal himself. You can find Jesus, as Jesus reveals himself to you.

Still haven’t found what you’re looking for? Look to Jesus for the answer.

**Jesus, often we keep looking when the answer is right in front of us. Help us to pause in your presence, enjoy your company and then live with our eyes open. Amen.**

Tuesday 7 February 2023

**Come and see … hear … touch!**

by Pastor Peter Bean

### Philip answered, ‘Come and see’ (John 1:46b).

Read John 1:43–51

And then there were four! Doubled in a day. Oh, if it were so easy to make disciples today. Perhaps it is, if we simplify things. Note Philip’s invitation: come and see. No pressure on Nathanael. Simply a description of Jesus, then an invite to come and see for himself.

Philip has already caught on to what Jesus is doing. No pressure. Simple invitation. And when we think about it, isn’t that how God (not the church necessarily) works with us? A simple invitation. Come and see! Come and hear! Come and touch!

All the great gifts our amazing God presents to us come down to these simple invitations.

Come and see! The heavens and earth tell the glory of God. Is God not present in the sunrise, the sunset, the amazing views of nature and creation wherever you may be in the world? Open your eyes. See the intricacies of a spider’s web, the creative potential of a seed, the power of an ocean wave, the majesty of a mountain top, the generosity of a friend. God at work. God inviting.

Come and hear! The wind swirling in the trees. The next moment whispering through a bush. Reminding us of the Holy Spirit, blowing here and there with reckless abandon (see John 3:8). Hear the symphony of bird song in the morning; the music that pulsates with emotion (whichever form that may take for you); the laugh of a little baby; the voice of comfort. God at work. God inviting.

Come and touch … taste ... and smell! The hug of a loved one; the texture of a leaf; the soft fur of a puppy. The nutritious meal provided by loving hands; the freshness of a ripe peach; the sweet elixir of a morning coffee (or tea). The newly baked loaf of bread; the fresh air of a cool morning after a stifling day; the aroma of a rose in bloom.

God at work. God inviting.

Jesus began sharing love with simple invitations. God continues that in the world in which we live. In everyday miracles. In everyday presence. In everyday love. Come and see. Come and hear. Come and touch.

**Lord Jesus, we thank you for your presence in so many ways. Open our senses so we may respond to your invitation, and see, hear and taste love in all its forms. Amen.**

Wednesday 8 February 2023

**Unknowing knowing!**

by Pastor Peter Bean

### When all the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, 'They have no more wine' (John 2:3).

Read John 2:1-12

What did Jesus’ mother know? What didn’t she know? Perhaps she had faith in her unknowing. I imagine the maternal connection with her human/divine son gave her at least an inkling of what might be possible.

Do you have to know? Do you have to be certain? Or can you live with the unknowing of life; can you accept the doubts that are part of your faith?

US theologian and author Brian McLaren once wrote: 'Sometimes, certainty is just an excuse to stop thinking'. I doubt Mary thought too much about what she was saying to Jesus. I doubt the disciples we’ve mentioned over the previous two days thought too much about what they were doing by following Jesus. Their unknowing gave them the courage to step out in faith.

I doubt that most people who follow Jesus know with certainty what their life will involve. A fair bit of unknowing. A fair bit of uncertainty. And yet, it is probably the unknowing knowing that allows each one of us to respond to that small quiet voice, to that whisper of grace, to the 'yes' of forgiveness.

When Jesus responds to his mother with the words: ‘My time has not yet come’ (verse 4); she simply says to the servants: ‘Do whatever he tells you to do’ (verse 5). I don’t think she knew what he would do; but she was willing to trust the unknowing; she was willing to go with the uncertainty of Jesus’ actions.

And that led to generosity on Jesus’ part; that led to sharing in good times; that led, I am sure, to a growing sense of certainty in all who experienced this miracle. Sometimes, unknowing can lead to knowing!

**Lord Jesus, let your whisper of grace infiltrate all our unknowing, so we can live with hope and confidence. Amen**

Thursday 9 February 2023

**Angry – with purpose!**

by Pastor Peter Bean

### He turned over the tables and scattered the money of those who were exchanging it (John 2:15b).

Read John 2:13–22

Jesus was angry. We might struggle with that. Justify it in all sorts of ways. I get angry. You get angry. We probably struggle with that even more. And probably struggle to justify it!

But perhaps we misunderstand anger and its purpose, having been conditioned by society and having read in the media about the actions of angry people.

You see, anger is not a sin. It is an emotion like any other. It can be used for good or evil. Anger actually has a purpose. It gives us energy. It makes the adrenaline run. It allows us to take action in a dangerous situation. It challenges us to stand up to injustice, it helps us survive.

A devotion I was reading in a different context suggested we have an attitude of gratitude. What if we were grateful for our anger? Not the anger that leads to hurt, violence or destruction, but the anger that prompts us to do good, to seek out a better way, to care for those less fortunate than ourselves, and to take action in a determined and loving way.

Are we grateful that Jesus cleared out the temple and sought to restore it to its true purpose? When we get angry, can we learn first of all to be grateful and then discern what this means for us? How to act, how to respond, how to act with humility in expressing our anger?

There’s plenty in the world to get angry about! Climate inaction, treatment of refugees, evasion of taxes, exclusion of many, mistreatment of the poor. I am sure you can make your own list. When you do, how about examining whether you can be grateful for that anger; whether you can use the energy that rises for a useful purpose; whether your actions can emulate the actions of Jesus – to promote resurrection, to provide new life, a new way of living; to live under grace and forgiveness. That would be a good use of anger!

**Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of anger. When we get angry, help us to examine it in the light of your love, and to use the energy provided for the good of all and to your glory. Amen.**

Friday 10 February 2023

**The wind blows where it wills**

by Pastor Peter Bean

### The wind blows where it chooses … you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

Read John 2:23–3:15

At the time of writing, it is very windy, in fact, gusty. Has been for a few days now. I don’t really mind it, except when it is mixed in with droplets of rain, or it pushes the netting off my fruit trees! I know the wind is freshening the atmosphere, dispersing pollution, helping with pollination. I know there will be blissful days of calm to follow.

But I have no idea when that will be. Despite reading books on clouds and weather, I also have no idea where this wind is coming from, except somewhere vaguely from the west or south-west!!

As Christians filled with the Spirit, which we all are, we are told we are like this. We can be exuberantly gusty one day and blissfully calm the next. Probably all of us tend to one a bit more than the other. The great thing is both are valuable; both are worthwhile and both bring benefits.

As followers of Christ, it is good to be gusty: to blow the netting off some things which need to be freed up; to freshen our churches and communities; to help with pollination – some of us are called to plant seeds; some to water; some to help God give growth (see 1 Corinthians 3:5–9). We all have a role.

As followers of Christ, it is good to be blissfully calm: to be the calm in someone else’s storm; to be still and know God; to wait for the still quiet voice (1 Kings 19:12).

Look forward to the wind blowing in ways you don’t expect, from directions you don’t expect, and at volumes both vast and small. And when that occurs, ask the Spirit to provide wisdom and understanding, and to enable you to live with grace and kindness, mercy and justice. Then the wind blowing where it wills will be a blessing.

**Creator God, thank you for examples and metaphors from our daily lives. Help us to be alert to the Spirit’s quiet whisperings and rowdy gusts. Amen.**

Saturday 11 February 2023

**The law is good!**

by Pastor Peter Bean

### I will obey your demands, so please don’t ever leave me (Psalm 119:8).

Read Psalm 119:1–8

How do you go at obeying the Ten Commandments? Or even one of them? What about the 613 commands listed throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? There are 248 positives ones (do this ...) and 365 negative ones (don’t do this …). One for each day! Too much to think about?

If you are like me, it’s a struggle. I don’t really like the law, or any one of the laws - because they trip me up. They let me know I can’t obey God’s demands; I can’t keep his rules (verse 2); I can not 'not do what is wrong' (verse 3). Urggh, the law is a pain!

So, how can this psalmist write 176 verses praising it, in a sophisticated poem of 22 lots of 8 verses (reflecting the Hebrew alphabet)? Could such a perfect person have existed?

Well, perhaps the writer knows something we can all know. The law is indeed perfect. And Jesus came to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17).

The writer obviously wanted to live a good life and recognised that the various laws were given so there would be peace and harmony among people and in the land. But, of course, laws were broken or cast aside, as people went their own way. Do we do that too? If we are honest, the answer is yes!

So, the only way we can say with the psalmist, ‘I will obey your demands’, is by adding the next line, ‘so please don’t ever leave me’. Which immediately reminds me of Jesus’ parting words, ‘I am with you always’, or the meaning of the first born – Immanuel – God is with us!

So Jesus walks with us through the Holy Spirit. He allows us to follow the Lord’s teachings in love. And he offers a new beginning every time we fail one of those tests (laws). Perhaps more than 10 times, more than 22 times, even more than 70 times 7. Jesus forgives us again and again when we admit we can’t keep the law, and then through his grace and forgiveness, we can begin again and say, 'I will obey your demands, so please don’t ever leave me'.

**Law-giving and loving God. Thank you for fulfilling the law in Jesus. Help me to daily walk with Jesus, putting the law into action in love and kindness. Amen.**

Sunday 12 February 2023

**Keep it simple**

by Ruth Olsen

### Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (Matthew 5:37).

Read Matthew 5:21–37

Even though the crowds were coming to Jesus, in this chapter, Jesus is initially teaching his disciples (verse 1). The following verses spell out ways of living that are totally opposite to the ways of the world – and the thinking of the world is the ‘water’ we swim or live in here on earth, impacting us from day one.

Do you take notice of what you are thinking? How much are your thoughts influenced by advertising or what you watch or read or hear?

Do you notice what prompts you to self-indulgence and what moves you to care for others? Which of these are you pursuing?

The ways of God are continuously self-giving. The ways of the world are continuously self-grasping. Earlier in Matthew 5, Jesus calls us to be like salt and light right where we are (verses 13 to 16); because he came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them (verse 17). And then he tells us his perspective, his teaching from our heavenly Father’s perspective regarding murder, adultery, divorce and oaths. Then Jesus ups the ante: ‘anyone who is angry … who looks at a woman lustfully … who divorces … do not break your oath (vow) … ‘.

The law will not save us. It simply reveals our sin, our self-focus, our being ‘turned in on ourselves’, as Rev Dr Harry Wendt often speaks in the Crossways materials. Looking at self, we forget to look up or look out for others.

As Jesus says, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). And:

‘I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth … who will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’ (John 14:16–18,26).

Our lives are no longer led by self-effort but through learning to follow our Helper, who teaches us Jesus’ perspective and moves us to walk in his radical ways, so different to the ways of the world.

**Lord Jesus, only you can enable me to keep it simple, to simply love with your love, to see life through your eyes, by the power of your Spirit. Please guide me, day by day.**

*Ruth is Steen’s other half, lives in Adelaide, and loves reading. From the Bible, books on Christian living, biographies, especially of someone’s journey of faith, through to Reader’s Digest, the Inquirer section of The Weekend Australian, or travel information etc., many things are opened through reading. That’s also why she enjoys helping Afghani women learn to read and write in English, when they were denied that opportunity with their own language as children.*