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**Sunday 7 April 2024 to**

**Sunday 14 April 2024**

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Sunday 7 April 2024

**'Ruach' – Spirit, breath or wind**

by Sal Huckel

***Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’. And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:21,22).***

Read [John 20:19-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A19-31&version=NRSVUE)

We probably cannot comprehend the traumatic effects on the disciples of the death of Jesus and the disappearance of his body. It’s hardly surprising that even after the account of Mary Magdalene they are still locked away in a private place in fear of their own lives.

Reflect for a moment on the healing effect of the words of Jesus: ‘Peace be with you …’ he breathed on them and repeated it.

They are not just words, they bring the Holy Spirit and healing. Physical and spiritual healing.

We can forgive Thomas. We don’t know why he wasn’t there. We read nothing to show that Mary’s account was believed by the disciples either. Thomas wanted to experience Jesus himself. In his trauma how can he believe anything right now?

Yet with Jesus’ grace for Thomas, we also read: ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’.

That’s us. That’s you and me. We don’t have what we might feel is the ‘luxury’ of the post-resurrection sightings of Jesus, but we have the Holy Spirit in us through our baptism, we have the word of God in the Holy Scriptures, and we have God’s promises and all of these accounts through which our faith is nurtured. We don’t need to hide away in upper rooms. We are not in danger of our lives when we are identified as God’s people. We have the responsibility to share our faith with others; we are instructed, like the disciples, to forgive the sins of others: ‘… if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’.

Outside the upper room, what are we doing with our freedom? Just as Thomas was no good isolated and alone, neither are we. Nurture your faith. We have freedom to worship in our church family every week and the responsibility to share our faith and God’s love in our daily lives.

***Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do. Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure, until my will is one with yours, to do and to endure. Amen. (Edwin Hatch 1878)***

*Sal is married to Pastor Matthew Huckel, and they live in Victoria with their six children. Music, theology, literature and languages are passions the family share and explore together. Sal loves writing, speaking and walking to the beach at every opportunity.*

Monday 8 April 2024

**You did it to me**

By Sal Huckel

***‘Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation (Luke 11:3,4).***

Read [Luke 11:1–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3A1-13&version=NRSVUE)

Many of us have probably heard about the homeless person walking into the church to ask for help (food, use of facilities or money) but being turned away.

Here, we have the pattern of prayer modelled for us by Jesus – including the petition for daily bread before we even get to the repentance and forgiveness of sins and deliverance from temptation.

Physical needs are important, and we do well not to overlook them. We move on, in the same passage, to a picture of a man asking his neighbour for food in the middle of the night, and finally, a comparison to the request from a son: ‘Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

Yes, this is a passage that teaches about the Lord’s compassion, mercy and generosity on us. He shows this spiritually and with our salvation and spiritual gifts – but the Lord does not ignore the temporal – the body. He provided food by a physical miracle with loaves and fish. His first miracle for the disciples was a catch of fish. Schools know that children cannot learn when hungry – this is why some schools feed children breakfast for free when their families cannot feed them before school.

Let's come back to the homeless person knocking at the door. Yes, we are a church. Yes, there are programs out there to help. And yes, whatever we say to them in that moment will be our moment of witness. We are ambassadors. Is Jesus sending them away empty or fuller? Will we ever be able to feed their spirit if we are unwilling to feed their body?

‘You did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40) are Jesus’ words to us in this moment. We pray the Lord’s prayer every Sunday. We ask for daily bread each time we pray that prayer. That might even be the only prayer the homeless person knows. Who will answer their prayer on behalf of our generous, forgiving, gracious God?

**Give us each day our daily bread, Lord – and help us deliver this bread to others in need as they come across our path. May we have compassion on others as we have our own needs generously and graciously met by you, just as we pray in the words you taught us. Forgive us for the times we find reasons not to help others, and may we leave judgement to you alone. In the saving, giving and forgiving name of Jesus Christ, Amen.**

Tuesday 9 April 2024

**House divided**

by Sal Huckel

***Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters (Luke 11:23).***

Read [Luke 11:14–23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3A14-23&version=NRSVUE)

It might seem incredible that Jesus himself would be driving out demons, and there would be onlookers divided in whether he is driving them out in the name of the prince of demons or whether it was the ‘finger of God’ (verse 20).

We may often quote the wisdom of Jesus that ‘a house divided against itself will fall’. This is true of families, churches, even businesses. How can Jesus drive out demons with the power of demons? This is what his comment means. If he is driving out demons with demonic power, then Satan truly is a house divided. We know Jesus was driving out demons with the power of God because he is God. No division there! Our God is three in one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus and the Holy Spirit were present at creation, God is never divided.

Let us model Christ in this regard too. A house divided against itself will not stand. Meditate on this. What does this mean for you today – in your family, church or business?

I am reminded of this hymn:

The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;  
she is his new creation,  
by water and the word.  
From heav'n he came and sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her,  
and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation,  
yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation:  
one Lord, one faith, one birth.  
One holy name she blesses,  
partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses,  
with every grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder,  
men see her sore oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed,  
yet saints their watch are keeping,  
their cry goes up, ‘How long?’  
and soon the night of weeping  
shall be the morn of song! (SJ Stone, 1866)

**Lord, may we be one in the gospel – and undivided – in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.**

Wednesday 10 April 2024

**True obedience**

by Sal Huckel

***He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it’ (Luke 11:28).***

Read [Luke 11:24–36](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3A24-36&version=NRSVUE)

Do you read the whole passage or just the focus verse? I would really encourage you to read the entire passage each time you see these devotions, whether on social media or by email. There is so much richness in the passages, and today, like many days, it’s a hard choice settling on the focus verse. Today, our passage has a message running through it – don’t just hear the word of God (or read in your inbox, on your newsfeed, or in your Bible – how many places we can access it!).

Hear it and respond.

Do you remember the wickedness of Nineveh? At least they repented – and put their houses in order! Jesus says that they will stand in judgement over those who do not repent and turn from their ways in response to the gospel.

We are to ensure that our light is put on a stand and remains full of light, not darkness. We are exhorted through our baptism to shine with the light of the world, Jesus.

We may feel the world is dark. We are the light. Back to that newsfeed … how are we filling our souls? Are we feeding our soul and mind with the word of God, the Light of the World, and how is that light shining out from within us?

‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it’ (Luke 11:28).

**Lord, thank you for the many opportunities I have to hear, read and obey your word. I pray that you will continue to shine through me, that your light will guide those around me to the truth, and that others will come to know you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Thursday 11 April 2024

**Hard words to hear**

by Sal Huckel

***Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering (Luke 11:52).***

Read [Luke 11:37–52](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3A37-52&version=NRSVUE)

We continue in a week of hard words to hear.

It’s not a popular thing, is it, to deliver the bad news? Of course, that’s an oversimplification. We might discuss law and gospel; one cannot receive the gospel without first hearing the law. The law is the diagnosis of our sin, of our state. The gospel is the amazing news of what Jesus’ death on the cross means for us.

We can’t celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus without knowing why we need it. We cannot live in our baptism daily if we don’t know what that means or why we need to.

In a passage like this, we hear Jesus’ law for the experts in the law. We must also hear this law for ourselves. What can we pick out? (Read the passage if you haven’t yet. I’ll wait …)

In the text, we find:

* Don’t neglect justice and the love of God.
* Don’t seek out the most important seats for yourselves.
* Don’t load people down with burdens and refuse to help them.
* Don’t keep knowledge for yourselves and the key to that knowledge from others.

How might that look for us? Love others, and love justice. Share the burdens of others and help them understand the gospel message – most importantly – by living it out. Stay humble and teachable.

What we know of the Pharisees is that they were experts in all of this knowledge of the law – but it was more important to them than people. Our knowledge must never be exclusive or more important than loving people and living the gospel. This does not mean sugar-coating God’s truth to make it acceptable to others. It means being prepared to use the law to diagnose the issues and share the gospel message of love and salvation through Jesus’ perfect sacrifice.

**Lord, help me to use the law as a mirror to remind me of my sins, live your gospel message and love others in response to the freedom and forgiveness I have through Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Friday 12 April 2024

**Hypocrites**

by Sal Huckel

***Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight (Luke 12:1b–3a).***

Read [Luke 11:53 – 12:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3A53+%E2%80%93+12%3A12&version=NRSVUE)

There has been a theme of hypocrisy running through the teachings of our readings this week.

This is the yeast of the Pharisees. It is also something we must be very sensitive to – in ourselves and the body of Christ, of which we are members and ambassadors.

Have you ever heard the church be accused of hypocrisy? Perhaps, sometimes, critics have got a point. Have you ever asked for help and been made to feel small? Or have you had a lot of good reasons why you couldn’t help someone? Perhaps you think you are only allowed to share good news with those around you. Maybe you even avoid church coffee because you don’t want to admit what is going on in your life. It might be suffering … or it might be sin.

These are sobering passages, and here is a stark warning. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight. What is hidden will be made known.

Jesus is the Light of the World. It shines in the darkness. Jesus is truth. Truth will be made known. Jesus knows the condition of our souls. Nothing we can put on will hide it.

‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32).

**Lord, may we be distinct and set apart for you, walking in the light, living the truth, and living obediently in your word – whether others are watching or not. Lord, expose the darkness and remind us who we are to fear – you and no other. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Saturday 13 April 2024

**A prescription of psalms**

by Sal Huckel

***Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer (Psalm 4:1).***

Read [Psalm 4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+4&version=NRSVUE)

I have always loved the Psalms. According to Martin Luther’s introduction, we find prophecy, instruction, comfort, prayer and thanks in the Book of Psalms. You can find a publication of Luther’s summaries of the Psalms in one helpful volume (Concordia Press, 2007). My journey with Psalms began with receiving my individual Good News from the Psalms for confirmation. I loved having them in one volume with an index showing me where to look at different moments.

Here, we have a psalm we can use in distress. The psalmist does a great job of putting the words together for us that we may need when suffering at the hands of others and waiting for physical restoration. We pray for God’s light to shine on us and can go to sleep at night (the time we may often suffer most with these thoughts of difficulty) in peace:

In peace I will lie down and sleep,  
for you alone, Lord,  
make me dwell in safety (verse 8).

Another comprehensive psalm for times of trouble, and one worth memorising, is Psalm 20.

We are told by Jesus that, in this world, we will have trouble: ‘I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33).

In the Psalms, we often see the psalmist lamenting their trouble and then finding rest for their soul in the promise of God’s victory and the peace that only he can bring. Memorise the beginning or end of today’s psalm – or Psalm 20 – and use it when you need a prayer in times of distress. One mark of our faith is not that we do not suffer; it’s that, through Christ, we have victory over that suffering. Don’t forget to get to know the praise psalms for those hilltop moments, too!

**Lord, thank you for the peace and safety I have in you. Help me to trust in you when I suffer or am anxious. May your word be hidden in my heart so I may not sin against you (Psalm 119:11). In the saving name of Jesus, Amen.**

Sunday 14 April 2024

**Are you real?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ (Luke 24:36).***

Read [Luke 24:36b–48](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24%3A36b-48&version=NRSVUE)

When last did you touch someone with the love of Jesus? When last do you remember being touched by Jesus' love through someone else?

You might be at that place in your life where your daily walk has little meaning or love in it. You might have come to the point of crying out, ‘Are you real, Jesus?’.

When Jesus appears to his disciples on the beach after his resurrection, he begins with these beautiful words of comfort, ‘Peace be with you’.

Asking them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?’, Jesus knows their hearts, and the disciples are troubled and frightened, thinking they have seen a ghost.

Jesus knows your heart, too. He knows your thoughts, your dreams, your feelings of failure. He knows your disappointments and your hurts. He knows you. But maybe you wonder if he is real. Sometimes, it seems like the more you pray and seek Jesus, the further away Jesus feels.

But Jesus comes to us. He comes and says, ‘Peace be with you!’ When you feel Jesus is so far away, he is closer than you realise. For Jesus lives in you by his word. Jesus is the word that is planted in your hearts and grows by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When you are feeling lost, alone, scared and in need of comfort, call on the name of Jesus, who answers prayer. As you pray, know that the Lord has answered your prayer even before you finish praying, and he knows exactly what you need even when you can’t put it into words. You might just find you will meet Jesus in the people he sends your way to encourage you and share words and acts of love.

Jesus works in us and through us, and as we grow in Jesus, spending time in his word, he sends us out to those around us who are feeling lost, alone and hurt to share the same love of Jesus that comforts and heals us. Know this peace Jesus gives you, and know that as you love others in Jesus' love, they too will come to meet Jesus and know just as you do that Jesus is real.

**Dear Jesus, come and be with me and bring your words of peace. Comfort me and show me how real you are in all I do and in the people around me you have blessed me with. Help me be your hands and feet, Jesus, by showing your love to others you have sent me to. Amen.**Pastor Mark Gierus currently serves as a Lutheran pastor in Redcliffe, Queensland. He has three beautiful girls and enjoys hiking with them, looking after their pets as a family and going on road trips. Mark prays that God will continue to bless you as you grow in him and come to know him more and more through his life-giving eternal word.