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**Sunday 6 August 2023 to Sunday 13 August 2023**

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Sunday 6 August 2023

**Bring them here to me**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered. ‘Bring them here to me,’ he said (Matthew 14:17,18).***

Read Matthew 14:13–21

I was okay at maths during my school years, but to the best of my ability, five plus two doesn’t equal five thousand. I often wondered at the size of the fish and loaves in this story, thinking that the fish must have been massive and the loaves enormous. My mind would wonder about the person who brought them. Did the mother in their household represent the first Scout Leader who had the mantra, ‘always be prepared’, firmly etched in their thinking as they headed out each day?

How easy it is for us to enter any number of situations in life that seem overwhelming with a list of what to bring running through our minds? Think of what you might need as you enter a room full of strangers, knowing you have to cope with conversations with them. What will I talk about for two hours over the dinner table? How can I make the new person at the office feel more at home? What can I give to the neighbour in my street who has just moved in?

Being prepared is one thing – trusting God to provide us with what we need is often another. When Jesus gave directions for the people to be seated, he revealed something so wonderful about himself that should catch our attention also: Jesus turned to his (and our) Heavenly Father, gave thanks, and distributed what was necessary for the people in that situation, even if that meant those observing couldn’t see a logical or possible good outcome.

I can’t help but think of what little I often have when entering some of life’s overwhelming situations and how underprepared I am for the task ahead. It's wonderful to know that turning to our Heavenly Father to multiply our ‘little bit’ will provide enough for the best outcome. A smile, a flower or 10 minutes of our time can leave plenty of room for him to do what he does best – answer our prayers using that which we willingly offer him to bless those present in some way.

What resources, skills, gifts, talents and abilities do you have that God can multiply to bless others?

***Heavenly Father, thank you for taking what you have first given me to use to bless others in ways I could never have imagined. Please do it often so that you can be honoured and glorified. Amen.***

Pastor Steve and his wife Angelyn are virtually empty nesters living in the beautiful southern Perth coastal suburbs near Warnbro Sound beach. He likes gardening, watching sports, working on home projects and spending time with his wife and children. He is constantly seeking ways to help connect people to Jesus in a meaningful way.

Monday 7 August 2023

**Being more than what we were in the past**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11).***

Read [1 Corinthians 5:9–6:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+5%3A9+%E2%80%93+6%3A11&version=NRSVUE)

I have known many people who match the description of who Paul is talking about in this ‘in-your-face’ section of his letter to the Corinthian church. This world provides plenty of examples of people I am so glad I’m not like. The sexually immoral, the greedy, idolaters, a drunkard or two, and even brothers who have taken each other before the courts. What a list! Who’d want to be associated with people like that?

Then I need to pause for a moment and admit that some aspects of these people’s lives reflect some aspects of my life in times gone by. Come to think of it, those times have gone by rather recently – sadly. I have been guilty of having idols – putting things ahead of God, wanting my own way above what God wants. Oh, yes, and then there’s the moment in my life when I have been greedy in wanting more than I need instead of sharing or leaving something for others. And who wants to talk about sexual sins these days anyway? Everyone has done something ‘less than pure’ in their life, so I’ll not be the first to mention it if you don’t.

I love that Paul encourages this young, problem-filled church with that small past tense word ‘were’.

Being washed clean through the waters of baptism, sanctified (being made holy) and justified (being put right with God) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, has meant that our past doesn’t need to define us into the future. Thank God for new beginnings through Jesus’ forgiveness and presence in your life.

How well prepared are you to meet Jesus, should this life’s deadline come tomorrow?

***Gracious God, thank you for blessing me with a new start and better way of life as your word and Spirit have touched my life. Please help me every day in my struggle to leave behind ungodly ways so I can live for you as a witness of your grace. Amen.***

Tuesday 8 August 2023

**Honour God with your bodies**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).***

Read [1 Corinthians 6:12–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+6%3A12-20%09&version=NRSVUE)

‘It's my body, and I can do with it what I want.’ Ever heard that statement spoken or seen it lived out?

There is a glaring issue in our 21st-century world – ‘sexuality’ that defies God’s created order and design. Contemporary thinking might have us believe we can be whatever we want to be. Modern medical advances, hormone therapy, open or pre-marital relationships, and other factors have all combined to tempt us to believe that our Creator God and his word are obsolete authorities in this most personal aspect of our lives.

There is huge diversity in how people view their sexuality and, even more so, how they express it publicly. I understand that the Christian church isn’t immune from having to deal with these issues within its own walls and family networks. However, one perspective that I believe needs to be front and centre is that all human beings need Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, who came into this messy world to forgive and redeem us from any path that would eternally separate us from God’s love.

How increasingly hard it has become to speak God’s truth in love with people who have another perspective about their sexuality.

When St Paul says, ‘I have the right to do anything, you say – but not everything is beneficial’ (verse 12), I hear God’s wisdom speaking. It is a call to prayer asking for the Holy Spirit to infill us, inform our choices, and honour God with our bodies. After all, God knows what is best for us; so, some humility to accept his guidance and authority is to do His will.

How have current societal trends caused you to struggle with God’s word as a standard for life with him?

***Heavenly Father, every day, we are confronted with worldly thinking that sets us against your will. Forgive us for being led by worldly standards instead of those found in your word. Amen.***

Wednesday 9 August 2023

**No subject is off limits for God’s word**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***Now for the matters you wrote about: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’ But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband (1 Corinthians 6:1,2).***

Read [1 Corinthians 7:1–9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+7%3A1-9&version=NRSVUE)

Don’t you just love God’s word at this point? It seems no subject is off limits as we journey through the Bible. St Paul, the pastor missionary, had received a letter that raised the whole question of sexual relations with a woman. When was the last time such a topic got raised within your church? Is it even a topic of discussion, or has it been a lifelong taboo subject, so much so that it can’t even be mentioned?

How refreshing to have it raised and to know that even the early church contained people who wanted guidance on even the most intimate topics and that ‘Pastor Paul’ was willing to respond in writing for all to refer to time and time again.

The truth is that statistically, people have sex on their minds more often than is admitted. Depending on age and stage of life, there are phases when it can dominate and when it fades into the background. All the while, God has his ideal created order for us to enjoy: one man and one woman married to the exclusion of all others for as long as they both shall live. And within that relationship, they are free to enjoy the intimacy that expresses the love they share for their mutual pleasure and fulfilment.

Martin Luther wrote in his *Small Catechism,* addressing the sixth commandment: You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honour each other.

Keep praying for God to guide how you can express your sexual desires in all stages of life so they please him.

***Creator God, thank you for our bodies and the ability to express our sexuality in a way that pleases you. Please help all husbands and wives to keep their relationships free from hurtful attitudes and actions so they can enjoy the blessing of each other. Amen.***

Thursday 10 August 2023

**It’s more common than many people realise**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them (1 Corinthians 7:17).***

Read [1 Corinthians 7:10–24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+7%3A10-24&version=NRSVUE)

I’ve met many Christians over the years who are married to a non-believing spouse. While I acknowledge it can’t be easy being married to someone who doesn’t share the Christian faith journey with their spouse, there’s a lot we can learn from them and admire about their approach to life. In my experience, most are willing to share what that is like, given the right moment to discuss it.

Several common issues arise: How often do they attend worship knowing they go alone and leave their spouse at home to do something else? How much do they financially give that expresses their love for God and his kingdom’s work? Do they get their children baptised? What school might they want their children to attend that supports their faith? How do they cope with the disappointment when the non-Christian spouse refuses to socialise with their Christian friends and attend events? Even the choice of what music might be played in the house or listened to on the car radio when driving?

Often I sense a sadness that they can’t pray with their spouse or have ‘God conversations’ to help cope with the ups and downs of life. However, their deepest concerns centre around the eternal destination of their non-Christian spouse. Their body language, tone of voice and genuine love reflect their desire to spend eternity with them, but deep down, they know that it may not happen, so they don’t dwell on it.

Please pray for anyone you might know in these situations. The more sensitive we can be towards their situation, the greater God’s love can be experienced by them.

How can you be more sensitive to couples who don’t share the same Christian faith journey?

***Holy Spirit, there’s so much for you to do in this world, but we ask that you especially give strength to those with a non-Christian spouse so that their life can reflect Jesus in all they do and say. Help them be the best witness they can as they love someone you love also. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.***

Friday 11 August 2023

**What would St Paul know about marriage?**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this (1 Corinthians 7:28b).***

Read [1 Corinthians 7:25–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+7%3A25-31&version=NRSVUE)

With a wry smile on their face, I know quite a few people who would agree with these words. Others might add, ‘It’s too late. I’ve found out the hard way!’

St Paul never married, so what’s he doing commenting about something he knows nothing about in a personal way? It might be stating the obvious here, but upon closer reading, through to the end of this chapter (verse 40), he seems to have observed enough relationships that some godly wisdom can be found.

No one sins by getting married under normal circumstances. However, there’s more to any marriage than just the ceremony. Ideally, there are years of ‘wedded bliss’ ahead that will reveal the depths of love two people can share through all the ups and downs of life. Together, dreams can become realised, such as the blessing of children, establishing a home that reflects individual and collective aspirations, growing old(er), and sharing intimacy and special occasions that only they can cherish.

Paul’s comment, ‘those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this’, provides a reality check everyone needs. Even Jesus commented on us experiencing trouble in this world: ‘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). Both Jesus and St Paul speak God’s truth that nothing we will experience is unknown to him.

We all enter this world not knowing what’s ahead of us. Usually, we want a smooth journey with no hidden surprises, but that isn’t always the case. Our spouse and those closest to us can be viewed as God’s gift in times of hardship. They may not be perfect, but they can remind us just how much we need quality relationships when the troubles of life arise. However, we need Jesus especially. Stay close to him.

Who do you blame, and who do you turn to when the troubles of this life arise?

***Heavenly Father, thank you again for your word that reminds us that troubles in this life are inevitable. Give us the humility to cast all our burdens and cares onto you and see in those closest to us your hand at work to guide us through. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.***

Saturday 12 August 2023

**Listening to the Lord helps bring peace**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants (Psalm 85:8).***

Read [Psalm 85:8–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+85%3A8-13%09&version=NRSVUE)

It’s the end of another week. Whether you’ve spent it at work, home, school, on holidays, travelling or just relaxing, there’s nothing quite like a moment to stop and reflect on some recent days and events, to ponder what’s happened.

As you do, did you notice anything new or encouraging about who journeyed with you? Did you experience the love of your spouse or best friend in some special way? Did you stop to smell the roses? (Although there are not a lot around this time of year!) Importantly, did you identify something God did that reminded you that you didn’t travel the week on your own after all?

As God’s special child through faith in Jesus, you were never alone – not even for a second at any point during the week. Jesus’ words of reassurance from Matthew 28:20, ‘And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age’, were once again fulfilled. Reflect on that for a moment. The Prince of Peace came near, keeping watch over your body, mind and soul.

Often, it's not until we pause from the busyness of life that we notice the unspoken blessings of things that are always there. God is there, and he invites us constantly through the gentle reminders of his Spirit, nudging us to listen to his promises and be comforted and given a peace the world can’t give – or take away – no matter what we might be going through.

The writer of this psalm had it in mind to do something most essential – to ‘listen to what God the Lord says’. And when he says, ‘You are loved’, ‘You are forgiven in Christ’, ‘You are never alone’, ‘I will carry your burdens’, and ‘I will be your refuge and strength’, he means it. Let the peace and comfort of his promises be yours again now.

Reflect on some of the promises God offers you, and thank him for the peace and strength you draw from them.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for your many promises found in your word. By your Holy Spirit, reassure me once again of the peace, strength and comfort you bless me with daily because I am your child. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.***

Sunday 13 August 2023

**Don’t be afraid**

by Tatiana Overduin

***But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid’ (Matthew 14:27).***

Read [Matthew 14:22–33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+14%3A22-33&version=NRSVUE)

We live in precarious times. There is much that can cause fear. Wars and rumours of wars. Many forms of global political uncertainty and hostility. Financial pressures, such as rising food and living prices. Housing insecurities for many Australians. And then our own personal daily challenges. And yet, in Australia, our needs are considered largely met. We might ask, ‘Is this really a time in history that is worse than any other previous time?’

What impacted me most in today’s Scripture text were Jesus’ words, ‘Don’t be afraid’, and yet, as listed above, many reasons could provoke anxiety or fear within us. Researching how many times the statement to not fear is expressed throughout the Bible, the first answer I googled was 365 times. Wow! We are consoled 365 times by our loving God, saying we need not be afraid. That’s once for each and every day of the year! Whether or not this statistic can be authenticated (whether this statement is actually offered 365 times – as some biblical scholars dispute) actually becomes irrelevant at this point because knowing that this is the Lord’s promise to us, even once, makes this word very relevant!

Knowing that we can arise every day and not be afraid, just like the disciples in the boat, we can stand assured together with them and be unafraid. So let us daily turn not to our own understanding but instead trust in his promises. Let us continue to gather in worship of our Triune God with praise and thanksgiving. May we call to him in prayer, assured of our blessing. May we believe in his life-saving sacrifice offered up for us, once and for all, on the cross. May our hearts and minds receive the comfort of these words today and every day – these words offered to us by Christ himself, written for our consolation and reiterated many times throughout the Bible: ‘Don’t be afraid’, ‘ ... have no fear’, ‘… do not be alarmed’, ‘Take courage’. So, allow the ‘stormy winds’ to be stilled in your life. Trust and believe in his promise of peace: a peace that the world simply can never give. Might you share this message of hope with others?

***Lord, thank you for telling us we can take courage when confronted with life’s difficulties. Help us trust in you and not our own understanding. Reassure us daily to build our trust through the devotion of your holy word, and give us the gift of peace through your comforting promise that we need not be afraid. Amen.***

*Tatiana is married to Jim, and they live in Largs North, a seaside location in Adelaide. They have two adult children and six grandchildren, who are a wonderful blessing to them both. Tatiana teaches full-time as an English, history and religion teacher; she gained a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Australian Lutheran College in 1996, and in her spare time, she enjoys knitting, gardening, singing for church, writing and swimming. Her home congregation is Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide.*