****

**Sunday 29 November to Sunday 6 December**

****

Sunday 29 November 2020

# Are you in shape?

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand’ (Isaiah 64:8).**

Read Isaiah 64:1–9

Do you like to keep in shape?

Many of us during the different COVID lockdowns and restrictions had the best intention of keeping in shape so we would dodge the 'COVID spread', and some people have succeeded in keeping in shape during this challenging year. But have you ever thought about what shape you are in when it comes to your relationship with God?

Would you say you are in good shape? Perhaps you might say that you are doing okay but need to spend a little more time with God? You might, at this point, feel guilty that you are out of shape with God.

Yet, our Heavenly Father loves you no matter what shape you are in. He sent his only son, Jesus, to suffer and die for our sins to make us right with him. We are made right because we believe what Jesus has done for us. He died and rose again for us. God forgives us and saves us from sin, eternal death and the power of the devil. He gives us eternal life. All of this is done for you. All you need to do is receive this gift. We are not strangers who are out of shape with God. Instead, by God’s grace through Jesus, we are in the best shape we can be – we are children of God.

In our reading today, we hear that God is our Father, and if God is our Father, he has made you and me his children. We are the clay, and God is the potter. You and I are the work of his hand. No matter where you find yourself in life, God is shaping you by his hands through his word in Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God is shaping, changing and renewing your heart to be more and more like Jesus. All you need to do is receive God’s gift – the baby Jesus. As Jesus lives in you, by his word, you will continue to be shaped to share God’s love with the world in all you do.

Peace be with you.

**Dear Heavenly Father, shape me daily by your word through your Spirit that I may continue to grow to be more like your son Jesus in whose name I pray. Amen.**

Monday 30 November 2020

# What special message do you have?

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘The prophecy of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty’ (Numbers 24:16).**

Read Numbers 24:15–18

Has a special message come to you from God? Do you have eyes that see clearly? Do you know the Most High?

We live in such a fast-paced world now that when we are busy to the point of burning out, we reach for our phones to check the apps that tell us we are almost burning out, and then what do we do? We put the phone down and tell ourselves we don’t have time to even think about burning out. But when we stop and dwell for a while in the word of God, we will start to have eyes that see far more clearly.

You may have knowledge of God already. What is it you know about God? Is he the God of judgement, doom and law? Or is he the God of endless love, mercy and grace in Jesus?

Meet Jesus in his word, pray and spend time reflecting on that word in your hearts, and you will see and know the Lord with eyes of faith, and you will know of his love.

We all have a special message from God in Jesus Christ to share. We all have that message alive in us – Jesus himself through faith. That message is the good news, the gospel of our Lord Jesus. God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus, to suffer and die for the sin of the world. By believing in him, you are forgiven, saved and will live forever with him.

The Advent season is a time that helps us to stop and focus on the fulfilment of the prophecy that the Most High God would come and dwell with his people. God became flesh – Immanuel, God is with us. Jesus was born to save, and through his death and resurrection, you have been made right with God. This is God who loves you.

**Gracious Father, you are a God of love. Please help me to not just know of you or look at you from a distance or just hear your word. Let me know you deeply in Jesus and your love for me. Let me see you clearly in faith. Let me hear your word and live it out in the world around me. Amen.**

Tuesday 1 December 2020

# When you give account

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people’ (Joel 3:16).**

Read Joel 3:16–21

When you think of the day of the Lord, what emotions do you have? Are you scared to meet Jesus face to face? Are you afraid that you will need to give an account of every single part of your life to the Lord? Are you excited to finally see your Saviour, Jesus?

Does the roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem – that is, God roaring and thundering – unsettle you at all?

Well, it shouldn’t. For what will you say to the Lord as you give account for your life to him? Will you need to run and hide? No way. You will simply say in faith, ‘Here is my life. Jesus Christ, in whom I believe, is my account for every breath I have ever taken and everything I have ever done. All of my sins have been washed away by the water of baptism and the gift of eternal life, salvation and forgiveness. Not because I got it right, but because Jesus won my victory on the cross, and my pardon is written in his blood shed for my sin’.

You see, everything we have ever done – our sins, failings, selfishness, our hurtful words, actions or anger that damaged others – is forgiven in Jesus. God is love. That love, our God in Jesus our Lord, does not keep any record of wrongs.

So, on the day of the Lord, and every day before then, our Lord is our refuge and safe place. He is a place of peace and strength in our weakness. So, we have nothing to fear, though there are signs of the return of our Lord Jesus. The Lord, who is our rock and refuge, protects, heals, uplifts, forgives, and loves us as we face all things.

We know in faith that we will stand on the day of judgement not looking to hide like those who do not believe, but we will be at peace, for Jesus has paid our account in full.

**Jesus, you have suffered and died for me and my sin and set me free. Let me live each day knowing that you are my refuge and that when I am called to give account for my life, you will give account for me. Amen.**

Wednesday 2 December 2020

# Going for a walk

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever’ (Micah 4:5).**

Read Micah 4:4–7

Do you like to walk? Going for a walk can clear the head. You can walk on your own to think or take a friend or partner along and chat. But when it comes to living, would you say that you walk the walk?

In the days of Micah, the nations walked the walk in the name of their gods. In contrast, the people of God walked the walk in the name of the Lord, and not just for a short walk, but as Micah says, ‘for ever and ever’.

Do you remember the name in which you were baptised? If you have not been baptised, you are covered in faith by the same name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You are blessed by that name. You are forgiven by that same name. You are loved by that same name. Do you walk in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Do you know how to walk this way?

Jesus says, ‘Follow me; I am with you always’. He says, ‘Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’. Jesus says, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’.

These words invite and encourage us to move – to walk and to run, even. That is the heart of walking in the Lord: to be in his word as he lives in you, simply by reading or hearing the word of the Lord and praying or studying it. Walk in the Lord, not because you have to, but because you can in response to his grace, love and mercy poured out on you in Jesus.

When the devil or the world tells you that you are not good enough or that the things you have done are too bad, walk boldly in the name of the Lord, knowing that in his name, you are saved and forgiven of all your sin. Your shame and guilt have been removed, and in Jesus, you will live forever. St Paul reminds us that the righteous shall walk/live/be alive by faith. We have been made right before God by the blood of Jesus. Go in peace and serve the Lord.

**Dearest Jesus, you call us to come to you. You call us to follow you and then to go out and share you with others. Give me a deep sense of peace, knowing the truth that in you, I am forgiven, I am set free, I am saved, and I am loved. Please help me to walk in your name now and forever. Amen.**

Thursday 3 December 2020

# Giving it up

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it’ (Luke 17:33).**

Read Luke 17:22–37

Have you ever tried to hang onto something too tightly? Then you find out it is the wrong thing that you are hanging onto? It happens often in life, doesn’t it?

You know, even in our church organisations, some of those rules we hold onto very tightly sometimes push others away. We hold on tight, not wanting to lose the things that, in the end, are not very important, especially when it comes to eternal life in Jesus. We justify it by telling ourselves that we are fighting for an honourable thing. Often the honourable thing is not what God calls honourable. Instead, it is selfish.

When it comes to life, we are no different. How much do we want to sometimes get out of a church service because it is going too long, so we can get on with living – you know, the living for ourselves? We fight people so much, wanting to do what we want to do at the expense of another. We put down those around us when we are challenged to give something up for them.

We see it in shopping centres – people cutting others off in order to get the last item that they want. When the COVID pandemic first hit us earlier this year, the ugly scenes of an attitude of entitlement came out so strongly. ‘I want all this toilet paper for me; get out of my way.’

We read in St Paul’s letter to the Galatians, ‘Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires’.

So, Jesus calls us to follow him as we are – but he will not leave you where you are in life. He will call you to himself, working in you by his Spirit to shape you and mould you to be more and more like him and to help you put to death your old self and selfish ways. Let us stop trying to save our worldly, selfish life that we become unhappy with. Let us give it up so we can live in Jesus in all we do.

**Dear Lord, let me daily put to death my selfishness and to keep my eyes fixed on you. Go with me into the world each day to serve others, putting their needs before my own, for I know that you provide all I need in this life and the next. Amen.**

Friday 4 December 2020

# Put on Jesus

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Romans 13:14a).**

Read Romans 13:11–14

When you wake up in the morning and put your clothes on for the day, how often do you stop to put Jesus on? Do you take the time each morning to clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps like so many people, there is just so little time to clothe yourself in your Lord Jesus, or perhaps you don’t even think of him when you are waking up in the morning.

What a wonderful gift Jesus is to the whole church (not the buildings, but the people of God), and what a wonderful gift Jesus is to you. God sent his only Son to suffer and die for your sins and offer you forgiveness, eternal life and salvation, simply to be received in faith.

When it comes to clothing yourself with Jesus, you don’t have to put on Jesus or God will not love you anymore. You don’t have to put on Jesus or you will be punished. You get to put on Jesus, clothing yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ for your benefit. You can do this not only in the morning but in the middle of the day, in the evening, and even during those 4.00am wake-up times when you just can’t sleep because of worry or fear.

But how do you clothe yourself with Jesus? Praying, reading his word and spending time with others in fellowship united by the Holy Spirit in love. As you are clothed in Christ Jesus, you are protected from all evil, and you are safe in his love.

Do you know the best sermon you will ever preach is your life? Clothing yourself with Jesus means he is living in you. Jesus is for you, behind you, beside you and above you. Jesus is always with you, and when someone meets you, they will see Jesus.

**Dear Lord Jesus, cover me this day with your love, grace and mercy. Guard my heart and my mind so that in all my thoughts and actions, I may serve you. Grow your word deep in my soul so that I bear fruit, living as one who lives in the light of day. Amen.**

Saturday 5 December 2020

# I will listen

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**‘I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants – but let them not turn to folly’ (Psalm 85:8).**

Read Psalm 85:1,2,8–13

In our modern world, there is a huge emphasis on communication. During our COVID year, much has been said about communication across not only Australia and New Zealand but also the world.

The recent short-term closure in South Australia and the longer-term border closures have added more issues to the debate of communication and how things should be done in what acceptable timeframe and so on. But if people are not hearing, let alone listening, to advice, much of the communication, no matter how good and timely it is, can be lost.

Our psalmist today says, ‘I will listen to what God the Lord says’. Do you listen to what God says to you? Have you recently heard that your sins are forgiven? These are the words Jesus says to a paralysed man in Matthew’s account of the gospel of Jesus. These are the same words Jesus speaks to the woman who anoints his feet with perfume and her tears in Luke’s gospel.

When you hear those words, do you listen deeply to them? Do you know the truth that you receive what Jesus says? Trust Jesus in his word. This is faith, which, by his word, is created in you by his Spirit.

God promises peace in Jesus by believing that you are forgiven and by being a faithful or faith-filled person to receive all that God offers you. You might say, ‘Well, I don’t have much faith, or I am not really a good Christian’. But listen to the good news. Jesus meets you where you are at in life. You might be struggling; you might be taking a hammering in a storm in your life. You might be sad, grieving or even depressed. You might be hurting in a place where it seems God has given up on you. Hear and deeply listen to God in his word. His word is Jesus.

Jesus says that your sins are forgiven and to go in peace. Jesus says to you, ‘I am with you always’. Jesus says to you, ‘Come to me, and I will give you rest’. Jesus says to you, ‘I love you’.

**O Holy Spirit, fill me with deep peace, joy and hope, knowing and believing that Jesus died for my sins, and he has forgiven me. Now, let me live each day in his love, free to be the person he made me, in a personal relationship with him, to go and serve others in his name. Amen.**

Sunday 6 December 2020

# A good shepherd

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**‘He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom’ (Isaiah 40:11).**

Read Isaiah 40:1–11

My dad was a sheep farmer. One of my favourite photos is a view of him walking along, emptying a bag of wheat for a flock of sheep with the sheep lined up behind him eating the grain.

Dad loved his sheep – he loved all animals. He couldn’t bear to see them suffer, be it from footrot or a careless shearer inflicting too many cuts on an animal. It was fun to drive around the farm with him in the ute as he checked on his flock. He would pick up the motherless lambs or the ailing sheep to bring them home so that we could care for them.

Dad’s arms were big and strong. For me, he represented strength, safety and comfort. It is my dad I see in the picture when I read these verses from Isaiah – Dad in his sweat-stained hat with a hand-rolled cigarette hanging off his bottom lip.

I am blessed to have had a good and loving father – a strong man who had the softest heart! Under his big booming voice and large physical presence, he had a heart made of marshmallows. He would help those in need without letting on to anyone else what he was doing. He had the gift of generosity, which oozed out of him whenever someone needed his help.

Now, I know that not everyone is blessed to have had a good and kind father as I did, but all of us are blessed with a Father in heaven who is good, kind and just. He is a Father who gives us comfort and cares for us like a faithful shepherd caring for a flock of sheep. And just like my dad knew where to find his sheep, God knows where to find you so that he can pick you up and carry you to a place of safety.

**Good Shepherd, help us to let you pick us up and carry us to the place of safety you have prepared for us. Please help us to trust that you will look after us even when we feel as though we are in a wilderness. Amen.**