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**Sunday 6 February 2022 to Sunday 13 February 2022**

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Sunday 6 February 2022

# Trusting Jesus when you think you know better

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets’ (Luke 5:5).**

Read Luke 5:1–11

As followers of Christ Jesus, he calls us to trust him in all of life. It’s one thing to trust him in the areas we have little competence in, such as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It’s another thing to trust him in areas of life in which we think we have a bit of a handle, such as relationships with family and friends, our professional work, our finances or even how the ministry and mission of the church are carried out.

Something challenging in this regard happens in the well-known text of the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. Jesus gets their attention, not by calling them to trust him and obey his word when it comes to prayer or driving out demons but regarding the very activity they were experts at, namely fishing. These tired and frustrated fishermen had worked all night and caught nothing and were then instructed by a carpenter’s son to try again in another spot. To their amazement, it worked! They caught so many fish the nets began to break. For Simon Peter, this was so confronting that he recognised the holiness of Jesus and felt unworthy in his presence, even asking Jesus to go away.

Jesus is, indeed, the holy one of God who is calling these disciples to follow him all the way to the cross and empty tomb. There, he will bring the forgiveness and cleansing Peter sensed he needed and show once and for all he can be trusted. By faith in Jesus, we receive God’s mercy in our need and new life with him. As his disciples, he calls us to trust him not only for eternal life but in all of life. He calls his church to trust him in his instructions no how to go about this mission of ‘catching people’ in the net of the kingdom, even when we think we may know a better way. In what area of your life may Jesus be calling you to trust him?

**Lord Jesus, I believe; ‘help thou mine unbelief’. Thank you for calling me to follow you on the path leading to life. By your Spirit, lead me to trust you in all areas of my life, even when it’s challenging. Amen.**

Monday 7 February 2022

# The Lord who never gives up on us

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22,23).**

Read Lamentations 3:22–33

I’ve been blessed to know a lot of love in my life: from my parents, my wife, my children, many other family members, friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. From these same people has come much mercy and help in times of need. Human beings cannot thrive for long, maybe even not survive for long, without love and mercy from others. Yet as wonderful as the love and mercy I have received from other human beings is, it all has this in common: it has a limit. It is finite. Sometimes, the difficulties of life bring us up against this limit as relationships break down or people move away. Ultimately, the reality of death means that no matter how strong our human love is, there will come a time when the love I rely on from another person will no longer be there in the way it is now.

Yet the Scriptures testify to us of a steadfast love that never ceases. It never ends. It has no limit. This is the steadfast love, faithfulness, grace and mercy of the Lord, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The verse from Lamentations points us to a very simple sign of the Lord’s steadfast love built into his creation, namely, the morning. As we lay in bed and hear the first chirping of the birds, as we see the first rays of the morning sunshine peak over the horizon, as our feet once again touch the ground and we rise to discover another new day – God’s people are to see in all this a sign of the Lord’s steadfast love for us. No matter what has happened the day before, his steadfast love and mercies are new for you every single morning.

The people of old were left with this promise, not fully knowing how God would bring it about in their midst. We know that there was one definitive morning in history when the sun was rising, and the women went to the tomb to find it empty, which shows this is love even stronger than death.

**Heavenly Father, I thank you that your steadfast love never ceases and that your mercies never come to an end. I thank you that they are ever-new for me, just as sure as the morning sun rises. Strengthen my love for you and others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Tuesday 8 February 2022

# A good spiritual investment

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).**

Read Matthew 19:16–30

At the time of writing, interest rates in Australia are extremely low, so cash savings aren’t growing at all. Those in managed funds might be doing a bit better, and those with real estate could be experiencing some decent growth. But how would you like a one-hundredfold return on your investment? This is exactly what Jesus promises in this verse above when it comes to the spiritual order of faith and eternal life.

The verse comes at the end of the account of the rich young man who comes to Jesus wanting eternal life. He leaves sad because Jesus calls him to sell his many possessions and give the money to the poor. Evidently, this man’s wealth was his real god, and as much as he endeavoured to keep the other commandments, Jesus’ focus on the first commandment was his undoing. Then follows the disciples’ amazement and the discussion about the impossibility of the rich entering the kingdom of heaven, except with God for whom all things are possible.

Peter picks up on the vocabulary of finances and investing as he asks about what they will have for following him. For modern Christians, it can be striking that Jesus doesn’t rebuke Peter for thinking in these terms. We tend to be suspicious of comparing our Christian faith to an investment in eternity. But this is precisely the way Jesus speaks. He promises his disciples that following him is the wisest possible investment. It results in a pay-off one can hardly imagine. It’s almost as if Jesus knows we are wired to think and act in this way. The issue then is not if you invest with the hope of a future return, but it’s what, or better whom, you invest in for a return that truly lasts.

Following Jesus does require sacrifices. Sometimes it can even mean leaving homes and family in one sense or another. Jesus wants to encourage you in this – that it’s all worth it. It’s more than worth it. It’s a wise investment, and your true inheritance is eternal life with him.

**Heavenly Father, thank you that all things are possible with you, even my salvation. Lead me by your Spirit to leave behind what I need to follow Jesus and invest wisely for the life of the kingdom of heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 9 February 2022

# Spiritual sickness and health

by Kathy Matuschka

**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31,32).**

Read Luke 5:27–32

I don’t know too many people who like going to the doctor. It’s certainly not at the top of my list of favourite activities. A part of it is simply the rigmarole associated with finding the time, booking, waiting, following up, etc. However, there are deeper dynamics at work as well. We may sense that going to the doctor is to admit an aspect of our weakness and frailty we’d prefer to ignore. We may fear the possibilities of what the doctor will find. We may not want to hear and act on the necessary lifestyle or dietary changes required. All of this is, of course, somewhat silly because doctors are there to help us and bring healing. Yet this is how it often is for us as human beings.

Jesus uses the image of a sick person and a physician to describe his own reason for coming. When Jesus was challenged as to why he was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, he responded with the verse above, showing these are precisely the people for whom he came. We don’t need to achieve a certain level of spiritual health – righteousness – to become acceptable for Jesus, but rather, it’s in coming to terms with our own spiritual sickness – sin – that we’re prepared to encounter him and receive his gift of the healing of forgiveness.

Meditation on this imagery has led many people to say that the church should be something like a hospital for sinners. There is something very true about this. Yet, we also need to notice that when Jesus calls these ‘sick’ into his ‘hospital’ of the church, he calls them to repentance. In other words, the spiritual sickness of sin is not simply something we happen to catch through no fault of our own, but instead, it is that we are guilty and are called to turn away. To go back to the earlier analogy, Jesus’ call to repentance means not only coming to the spiritual doctor for healing but turning toward the new lifestyle he lays out for us.

**Heavenly Father, I thank you that you sent your Son for sinners like me. Help me never hide away from my spiritual sickness but come to Christ for the healing he brings. By your Spirit, grant me true repentance and faith. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Thursday 10 February 2022

# Praise the Lord and press on

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).**

Read Philippians 3:12–20

‘Praise the Lord and press on!’ These are words I’ve heard several times from a much-loved Christian brother in the LCA circles. Some of you probably know of whom I speak. No matter the conversation or circumstances, he almost always leaves on this note: ‘Praise the Lord and press on!’ I find it a simple yet profound Christian encouragement. The temptation is always to look back and dwell on past hurts, sufferings, wrongs, failures and sins. But Christ would have us look forward in hope. He is the goal and prize of our Christian life, so we can confidently ‘praise the Lord and press on’.

This little motto is seemingly drawn from – and inspired by – the Apostle Paul’s words in the verse above. It’s worth remembering in that context that on his Christian journey, the Apostle Paul knew hardship, suffering and obstacles. You can read the full list of these experiences in 2 Corinthians 11:23–12:10. It even appears that as he wrote this very letter to the Philippian Christians, he was, in fact, imprisoned and perhaps literally in chains. Even in these circumstances, he maintains what could be called his ‘holy optimism’, saying not once but twice: I press on.

Paul was under no illusion that he could persevere and gain eternal life by his own strength. He says he can ‘press on to make it his own because Christ Jesus has made me his own’ (verse 12). The ‘goal’ and ‘prize’ he is striving toward is, in fact, a call of God in Chris Jesus. In other words, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is drawing him graciously to himself. Yet, in the mysterious interaction between the grace of the Almighty God and the redeemed will of the Christian believer, the Apostle Paul does ‘strain forward’ and ‘press on’.

You may be facing situations in your life that hold you back, weigh you down, and even tempt you to give up. Be encouraged: Christ Jesus has made you his own, so whatever you face, you can press on.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for the prize of your heavenly call in Christ Jesus. When I am downhearted, encourage me by your Spirit to press on. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Friday 11 February 2022

# Face to face

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**When … we were made orphans by being separated from you – in person, not in heart – we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face (1 Thessalonians 2:17).**

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13–20

During our COVID-influenced times, I’ve lost track of the number of people who told me that although they are very thankful for the technology we have, there simply is no substitute for being with those we love face to face. Many people have been unable to physically be with family and friends for extended periods and have realised they are missing something of immense significance in human life. I’ve also had interesting conversations with people about how different they’ve found face-to-face interaction with the wearing of masks and how much we rely on facial expressions in our communication and relationships.

In our verse today, the Apostle Paul writes to one of the early Christian communities he was instrumental in founding. He had been forced to be away from them, so he longed with great eagerness to see them face to face. It always amazes me how much warmth, love and affection comes through in the letters of the New Testament between the apostles and the early Christians. Sometimes Paul is thought of as somewhat hard, cold or overly intellectual, but surely, we could never hold on to this idea when we read these letters closely. There is a genuine network of love in the early church, which survived forced separations and prolonged absences and drove the early Christians to travel to each other and be together face to face.

I’m convinced this Christian impulse to be together face-to-face grows out of the incarnation – that is, God becoming a human being in Jesus Christ. God did not remain at a distance but has drawn near to us. Although God first spoke through the prophets and messengers, he has now finally spoken to us in his Son. The word became flesh. God has a face. As followers of Christ then, we do not live our Christian lives in isolation and only in a virtual world, but we gather together, face to face in the presence of God to receive his gracious service to us and encourage each other in the life of faith.

**Heavenly Father, I thank you for the gift of Christian community and being with each other face to face. Help me never take this for granted, and increase my love for my brothers and sisters in Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Saturday 12 February 2022

# Meditating on the Lord’s word day and night

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked … but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night (Psalm 1:1a,2).**

Read Psalm 1

If you’re reading these LCA Daily Devotions, you’re likely in reasonable habits of meditating on the Lord’s word day and night. Or perhaps not? Maybe like me, you’re tempted to skip over the actual key Bible verse and the longer text linked below it. Instead, you think about the author of the devotion and where they might be from, and then superficially scan the reflection to check whether they’ve come up with anything particularly interesting or memorable for today. Lord have mercy on me, a sinner! Of course, the tradition of devotional reflections is designed to aid our meditation on the Lord’s word, which is always the deepest source of spiritual nourishment.

Psalm 1 is the classic expression of this. It says the trap is to listen only to the advice of those who don’t know God (‘the wicked’) and those who scoff at his ways. There certainly is plenty of scoffing at God, faith and religion in our day, isn’t there? We might hear these words from family, friends, coworkers or on the news. They do tend to get in our heads and hearts and can roll around there in times of solitude. That’s meditation. It’s just not a helpful form of it. In fact, the psalm says it’s a spiritually dead-end road with no fruit for life.

Instead, we are happy and blessed in listening to the Lord’s word day and night. His word is like an invisible underground source of life from which we draw vitality and strength. As fruit trees grow well by streams and bear much fruit, so we are enlivened and made fruitful as our roots go deep into the Lord’s word. Having said that, we remember too that the fruit always comes in its season, so sometimes patience is required to see what is promised.

Meditation is very popular in our day. We Christians have our own long tradition of meditation. For us, the distinguishing factor, though, is not in the method but in the object. Christian meditation isn’t so much a matter of how, but of what, or even better, who.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for your word and the way you nourish me through it in this life. Help me listen to you and delight in what you say to me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 13 February 2022

# ‘We look for the resurrection of the dead’ (Nicene Creed)

by Sal Huckel

**If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised (1 Corinthians 15:13).**

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–20

I can’t go past the Nicene Creed as I select the Scripture for today: here, we have an absolutely essential truth of the faith.

Already, Paul in early church times needs to correct the false teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead. As Paul works through the logic here, we discover what the essential conclusion must be if this false teaching is true. It reminds me of a person I know who, in their professed Christian faith, also does not believe in the devil.

We cannot pick and choose which elements of our faith we believe.

I grew up on the Nicene Creed and Apostles’ Creed in my Anglican church school experience and the many choral services I was privileged to partake in. I had no discipleship or catechesis, but I could recite the creeds standing on my head. This is not a bad thing. Learning something like this means the Holy Spirit can bring truths to mind whenever he chooses.

One of the purposes of the creeds is to guard against error and false teaching. We discover in today’s reading the outworking of one false claim. Perhaps it reads like a riddle. Maybe you read it and skip over the words. Does Paul ever waste words? If he seems to be repeating something here, we must take note. Take some more time over today’s reading if you skipped it a little the first time. Even if you didn’t, go back and meditate again. Ask the Holy Spirit to use all he has at his disposal – from these readings and from your own history in the faith – to show you Truth today.

We find our hope here. We discover the outworking of Christ being raised from the dead …

‘… And the life of the world to come’ (Nicene Creed).

**Lord, thank you for your simple truth. Help me appreciate the prayers written by the church fathers. Help me stay true to the faith and be aware of and challenge false teaching. Where I need to stay in your word or immerse myself more in it – make this the desire of my heart and help me put it into action. In the name of the resurrected Lord Jesus, I pray, Amen.**