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**Sunday 16 October 2022 to Sunday 23 October 2022**

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# Encouragement in prayer

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? (Luke 18:7a)**

Read Luke 18:1–8

In this parable, Jesus gives us spiritual food to strengthen us when we feel like giving up on praying. As we listen to what Jesus says, his Spirit fills us and frees us to pray to our Father.

In the parable, Jesus talks about a corrupt judge who doesn’t care about what humans think of him and doesn’t worry about God’s judgement either. A widow, with no money or other allurement to sway the corrupt judge’s decision, appeals to him for justice. Since there’s no advantage in hearing her case, at first, he does nothing. But finally, when he sees that she will keep pestering him, he says, ‘I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming’.

Jesus tells us to listen to the unjust judge. What he means is this: If even an unjust judge in this world will eventually relent when they are pestered, how much more will the true Judge of all, who is not corrupt but truly just, give us his righteousness as we call on him? God is not an unjust judge; he is the Father of his dearly loved children.

Jesus then says, ‘And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’ We can think that the problem in prayer is God’s lack of care for us or his reluctance to give us his justice. Jesus says the real problem is our lack of trust in God.

So, listen to what Jesus says; his Spirit will free you to call out to God in trust. Jesus is your justice: in him, you have forgiveness for your sins. You have all your debt cancelled by your Father and have the gift of the Spirit who raises you to new life. It is Jesus who frees you to call on God as Father.

***Lord Jesus, thank you for your word to me. Please give me your Spirit so I may listen to you with open ears and a trusting heart and call out to my Father for his healing and life-giving justice. Amen.***

Fraser Pearce is pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Flinders Street, Adelaide. He grew up in Sydney, where he attended St Mark's Lutheran Church, Epping. He was ordained in 1997 and served at St Paul's Box Hill, Victoria, and Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Bendigo, Victoria. Fraser has been married to his wife, Margaret, since 1995, and they have four children.

Monday 17 October 2022

# Dealing with disappointment

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**Then Eli answered, ‘Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.’ And she said, ‘Let your servant find favour in your sight’ (1 Samuel 1:17,18a).**

Read 1 Samuel 1:9–20

Often our needs and disappointments in life can drive us to God in prayer.

This is how it was for Hannah. She dearly wanted to have a child but had none. When she and her husband went to Shiloh, the place where God had made himself present in his favour for his people, she cried out to him in her deep distress. She wanted God to notice her and pay attention to her misery. She was willing to offer her child back to God as his special servant if only God would give her a boy to love and care for.

At first, the priest Eli thought Hannah was drunk, seeing how she was praying. Sometimes our distress can lead us to act in ways that are hard for other people to understand. When Eli heard Hannah’s plight, he gave her God’s blessing, saying, ‘Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him’.

Hannah listened to this word in trust and went back to live out the callings God gave her, including the calling with her husband Elkanah to live as a married couple. From trusting in God’s word and living faithfully in her calling, she became pregnant and had a son, Samuel, who would indeed be a great servant of God.

Do you have needs or even disappointments in life? God is not far from you. Call out to him in Jesus’ name, and he will hear you. Listen to the word he gives you in Christ Jesus – especially the word that, in him, you have life as a gift from God. Live your day-to-day life with the peace this word gives, and you will find that God will work his gifts in you in ways beyond human understanding.

**Dear Father, please look at me and see the needs and disappointments I have in my life. Remember the great love you have shown me in Christ Jesus, and give me your Spirit so that your work of new life may be seen in my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Tuesday 18 October 2022

# The house that God built

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**And now, O Lord God, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it forever; do as you have promised (2 Samuel 7:25).**

Read 2 Samuel 7:18–29

For those living in Commonwealth countries, we are used to talking about royal houses, such as the House of Windsor. We know we aren’t talking about an actual building, such as Buckingham Palace, but about a family whose royal power is passed on through the generations.

As it happens, King David wanted to build a literal house for the Lord – a permanent place for the Ark of the Covenant. We can read about this at the beginning of 2 Samuel 7, just before the reading for this devotion. But David was assured through Nathan the prophet that the Lord did not need David to build him a house. Instead, the Lord promised David that he would make him a royal house. More than this, the Lord promised David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me (2 Samuel 7:12–14a).

In our reading today, David thanks the Lord for his gracious promise to build him a house that will continue forever. As God’s people today, we can join with David in giving thanks to God, as we know that David’s Son, Jesus, is the true heir to the throne, who has made himself our King by shedding his blood for us on the cross. More than this, Jesus has built the house of the church, the true temple of the Holy Spirit. We know that Jesus is the King who wills to bring all people together under his just and gentle rule. Praise him!

**Lord Jesus, Son of David, Son of Mary, God’s own Son, by your Spirit-filled word, bring all the people of the world together into the house you build, your holy church. Let all your people live together in love so that the name of your Father may be glorified. Amen!**

Wednesday 19 October 2022

# Our lament and God’s help

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven (Lamentations 3:40,41).**

Read Lamentations 3:34–60

God’s people know that all things are under God’s rule, and whatever happens in our world (and our lives) happens because God permits it. This does not mean it is easy to bear suffering, or we should simply keep our mouths shut and take whatever hardship we face without any words of lament. In fact, God gives us his word so that we may take our cares to him, knowing that when we do so, we speak with the voice of his faithful people, and he will hear us in his grace and mercy.

In the Book of Lamentations, the prophet pours out his lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and his intense suffering at the hands of his enemies. More than this, the prophet also acknowledges that his own sin and the sins of the people have led to punishment from God.

But this does not lead to despair, but hope. God allows his people to suffer in this world, including the suffering that comes from our own foolish and sinful thoughts, words and actions. But God gives us his name so that we may call on him in our need and receive the forgiveness and healing only he can provide.

The name ‘Jesus’ means ‘the Lord saves’. Our Lord Jesus bore the punishment for our sins, taking on himself the suffering and abandonment we could not stand. Jesus’ love for us is stronger than death, and his life gives us hope so that we may take our lament to God, knowing he will save us as we call on him.

Have the courage to pour out your lament to God and confess when you have sinned. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, who saves you from sin, death and hell.

**Lord Jesus, you took on the burden of my sin and suffering and pray to the Father for me. Take my words of lament, and give me the joy of your Spirit so I may live life to the fullest. Amen.**

Thursday 20 October 2022

# Thanksgiving: sight for the blind

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word (Colossians 4:2,3a).**

Read Colossians 4:2–6

In life, when we think only about our own needs and concerns, we can become blind to the fact that we share the world with people made in the image of God. This blindness can show itself in simple, everyday things. Like what can happen when we are being served in a shop by an assistant – we are concerned only with ourselves that we can go through a transaction barely acknowledging or speaking with the person who serves us.

One thing that can open our eyes to others and bring us more deeply into reality is the simple act of saying thank you to the one who serves us. By showing our gratitude with these simple words, we acknowledge that we are dealing with another human being rather than a slave or machine. We grow in our understanding of our place in the world and status in God’s creation.

St Paul encourages us in Colossians to stay alert in prayer and do this ‘with thanksgiving’. St Paul wants us to understand that God serves us in many ways: with his word and sacraments, by giving us our daily bread, and by giving opportunities for his good news to be proclaimed. As we thank God for his gracious service to us, we stay alert and watchful to his presence and grow in humility as we honour others with our gracious conversation with them.

Not only are we free to thank God and grow in spiritual maturity through this, but we are also free to ask God to open doors to the word spoken by those who are especially called by him to proclaim the good news. As we pray in this way, we promote the gospel together with them and mature as people who are loved by God and love each other.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for your gracious service to us. Thank you for all the good gifts you give – for the word and sacraments, our daily bread, and the opportunity to speak graciously with others. Open doors to the word spoken by those you have called to preach and grow us together in love with them and all your holy people. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Friday 21 October 2022

# Confession and healing

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed (James 5:16).**

Read James 5:13–18

Our Lord Jesus has taught us to pray, ‘Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us’. Every time take these words on our lips, we all confess we have sinned. Every time we pray the Lord’s prayer, we also grow in our understanding that our freedom to forgive others comes from the forgiveness we have first received from God in Jesus’ name.

In our reading today, St James encourages us to confess our sins to one another. He encourages us to be real with ourselves and others, admit when we have made mistakes, and speak the truth about the wrong and hurtful things we have said and done to other people.

The point of confessing our sins to one another is not to make us feel bad or ashamed and other people embarrassed. The crux is that through confessing our sins, healing comes.

When we hurt someone, we often want to avoid them: we don’t want to be in the same room or even make eye contact. We can even so much as want to avoid the fellow Christians we have hurt that we stop going to church. This can lead to spiritual sickness – even physical sickness – as we try on our own and away from the community of God’s people to deal with guilt and anxiety.

As we confess our sins to each other, we take the path of healing. We come back into each other’s presence. We speak as people who have been forgiven by God and are free to forgive each other. We experience that God does not want to humiliate us or others because of our sins but lift us up into restored relationships with each other and make us strong in body and soul to life eternal.

**Thank you, Father, that you forgive us and heal us. Please give us your Holy Spirit so that we may confess our sins to each other and grow together in love as your people. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Saturday 22 October 2022

# The joy of the journey

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

**Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion (Psalm 84:5).**

Read Psalm 84:1–7

On the eve of a holiday, it’s natural to be filled with excitement and anticipation. Especially if we are holidaying with friends, and especially if we are travelling to a place that we have dreamed about, then the journey itself is part of the joy. Even if there are difficulties on the path, the closer we get to the destination, the more conversation with friends grows animated, and the more the anticipation of the arrival is heightened.

In today’s psalm, we hear about the joy pilgrims experience as they journey to Zion –to Jerusalem and God’s temple. They know that the temple is where God had made himself graciously present to his people. The pilgrims look forward to their arrival and to the joy they will have worshipping together in the presence of the Lord. They picture in their minds the beauty of the temple and the fact that even the birds find homes in God’s presence as they build their nests near the altars.

It's not that the journey is without difficulties. Along the way, they have to pass through dry and desolate country. But because the pilgrims have the joy of the destination in their hearts, then even the driest and most unwelcoming places become to them like land blossoming with spring rains. They go from strength to strength on their pilgrim journey.

As God’s holy people, baptised into Christ Jesus, we are on a pilgrim journey to be with God. The path is not always easy – in fact, we take up our cross and follow where Jesus leads. But with Jesus, we come to the true and lasting Zion, the eternal city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22). This gives us joy on our path together so that even in the driest places, we find refreshment from God.

**Father, as we journey on the path of faith with our brothers and sisters, keep our eyes fixed on our heavenly calling so that we may be filled with the joy of your Spirit and come to see you face to face. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Sunday 23 October 2022

# I’ve got nothing

by Kathy Matuschka

**But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ (Luke 18:13).**

Read Luke 18:9–14

This week, we are focusing on repentance: hooray! As humans, it’s one of the places we least like to go, and being a Christian doesn’t immunise us to this reluctance.

Take today’s reading, for example. If you ask yourself, ‘Am I the Pharisee or tax collector?’, there is no comfortable answer. If you’re the Pharisee, then everyone but you knows you have some significant issues and need to start repenting. If you’re the tax collector, then you are vulnerable. The tax collector doesn’t repent in the privacy of his room, but rather, he declares his sinfulness in a public place. In doing so, he opens the door for others to point their fingers at him, and the Pharisee needs no second invitation to do just that!

The tax collector gets the kudos in this story, but does anyone really want everyone to see them in a vulnerable state like that?

The tax collector isn’t simply playing a socially acceptable, virtue-signalling humility game. Instead, he responds viscerally to the repentance God’s Spirit has worked in his soul.

When God’s Spirit convicts us of the need to repent, we don’t care about others’ judgements. We simply confess to God and say, ‘It was me. I’m the one’, just as the Apostle Paul does in 1 Timothy 1:15.

Today’s text challenges us to fall on our knees and declare, ‘I’ve got nothing, God. Do whatever you want with me.’

Are we ready to go there this week?

**Dear God, I invite your Spirit to help me this week. Work in my heart: expose my self-reliance and remind me of my utter dependence on you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Kathy Matuschka loves gazing at and walking within God’s creation, listening to stories of life and faith, and spending time with family and friends. She serves within the LCA Queensland District as Assistant Director for Ministry & Mission.