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**Sunday 13 March 2022 to Sunday 20 March 2022**

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Sunday 13 March 2022

# From helplessness to hope

by Anja Markkanen

The devotions for the coming week are taken from LCA International Mission’s 2022 '40 Days – a Lenten Devotion and Prayer Guide' and are written by mission partners around the world. LCA International Mission invites you to pray for God’s global mission and churches beyond our borders. You can download an electronic copy of the '40 Days' guide at the LCA International Mission website or request a printed copy by emailing lcaim@lca.org.au or phoning 08 8267 7330.

**Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds (Psalm 36:5).**

Read Psalm 36

Think of a sunny day when the sun is high above you, and the clouds are far away. Think of standing on a rock where you can see a long way, with clouds high above you and a stream below your feet. You may think to yourself, ‘What beautiful scenery!’ It is easy to agree with the psalm writer when standing on the mountain and looking around. Everything is calm and beautiful, nature in peaceful order. At the same time, I know that many human beings suffer down here.

God´s love is eternal. We human beings make mistakes due to limited vision and knowledge and our constant struggle with sin. Still, God is always ready to forgive because of his steadfast love and grace. His judgements come from deep wisdom and righteousness. God has mercy on us.

Our imagination is limited in seeing what God is capable of doing. We can just trust that nothing is too small or complicated for God. His love covers everything because of his faithfulness. He has promised to be with us in all circumstances. No matter how great an obstacle we face, we can trust God to help. Jesus said, ‘all things are possible to those who believe’ (Mark 9:23). As those who have been forgiven and loved back to life by Jesus, we are called to join together in bearing his love and mercy to the world – love and mercy that makes all things possible.

'Home of Grace' in Bangkok offers a place to stay for women who are rejected by their family, community, relatives and friends. As women get counselling, empowerment and healing, they become capable of going back to their families and communities and living their lives as equal members of their community. They will also be witnesses of God´s love as they tell of what they have experienced of his love and care.

At Home of Grace, the staff sometimes feel helpless in front of trouble. Not all the challenges are solved when a young mother leaves the home. Prayers follow the young, fragile mother when she leaves the home full of hope for a better future.

If you feel you are dragged down by declining hope or diminished faith, or you have lost vision for your life, you can be sure that God is there with you and will guide you out of despair. He is entirely capable of accomplishing things far beyond our limited vision and humble attempts. God is faithful and righteous, and he has proven that by sending Jesus as our Saviour. Everything is possible with God.

**Prayer: Pray for the church work done in Thailand through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand parishes and Diakonia Department among vulnerable people. Pray for the beneficiaries of diaconal help, including the women who seek help from Home of Grace. Pray they can be witnesses of God´s love in their neighbourhoods. Pray that you trust God´s faithfulness and righteousness, his eternal love toward his people and earth.**

Anja Markkanen is Advisor of Diaconia Work in South-East Asia, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM).

Monday 14 March 2022

# Forgiveness and healing even in weakness

by Bishop Jack Urame

**Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit (Psalm 51:11,12).**

Read Psalm 51

Seasons of the church year draw our attention to the biblical narratives of God’s interaction with man. At the centre of those narratives lies the gospel of grace. As we journey through the Lenten season, we are reminded of Christ’s suffering – an expression of God’s love for the world. Psalm 51:11,12 is a prayer for forgiveness, healing and reconciliation when one realises their weakness, failure and sin. The prayer reminds us of the importance of turning to God. Because of his love and mercy, we turn to him and seek his divine grace.

God calls us to be his children through Christ, but we admit that we are not perfect and holy as long as we live in the world. We are humans. Due to our sinful nature, we are bound to fall. But by the grace of God, we are called, redeemed and reconciled to God through Christ.

This prayer in Psalm 51 informs us that we live in a broken world, torn apart by sin in the form of violence, greed, inequality and injustice. We suffer from our human physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual conditions of sin, sickness and other forms of misery. Those realities of our human condition motivate us to turn to Jesus, who says, ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28).

The prayer reminds us of our need for forgiveness, renewal and strength to live each day with hope in Christ. At the dawn of each new day, we are assured by the promise of Christ that he is with us (Matthew 28:20). Even when we fall or suffer misery, God does not abandon us. Amid difficulties and suffering, we turn to him in prayer to forgive us, renew us and fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we can continue the journey of our faith with a sure hope.

This Lenten season shall also remind us of the suffering brought to humanity by COVID-19. The pandemic has significantly challenged our life, faith, church and mission. Therefore, we seek the grace of God to live each day with hope in Christ. When we encounter challenges, difficulties and suffering through sin and sickness like COVID-19, we can turn to God. He is merciful and ready to forgive and heal. He says to us, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). From the heart of the gospel of grace flows forgiveness, renewal, reconciliation, liberation, new life and peace.

**Prayer: Pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea that they will live in the grace of God that they are called into – redeemed and reconciled children of God. Pray you will turn to God for forgiveness, renewal and strength to live each day with hope in Christ.**

Bishop Jack Urame is from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea.

Tuesday 15 March 2022

# When my foot is slipping

by Coral Gallasch

**When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your love, O Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul (Psalm 94:18,19).**

Read Psalm 94

Have you ever felt your feet slipping? Perhaps you were walking in the garden and felt your shoes slipping on the loose gravel. Maybe you were hiking along a steep incline, and loose rocks rolled out from under your boots, causing you to stumble. How did that make you feel? Did you cry out like the psalmist, ‘My foot is slipping’? Think of the relief you felt as a hand reached out to steady you or your grasping hands clutched onto a handy tree branch.

I am reminded of when Tony and I spent five hours on the open sea in an old workboat with a 40-horsepower engine, travelling from Lae to Finschhafen in Papua New Guinea. The local ferry was out of action, and I needed to be in Heldsbach to do the planned kindergarten teachers workshops. As the size of the waves grew, I was filled with fear, anxiety and anger that we had put ourselves at such risk that we were no longer in control. Nothing we could do would keep us safe. As doubts plagued me, I was tempted to think that God was not calling me for this. Like the psalmist, I thought to myself, ‘My foot is slipping’.

But when we face times of crisis, God hears our prayers, reaching out in his love and mercy. As I slipped into anxiety and doubt, God’s love was already there, surrounding and supporting me. Joyful relief filled my heart with praise and thankfulness when we finally arrived.

Are you in a situation where your foot is slipping? Do your troubles seem bigger than any ocean? How will your day be different because you know that God supports you when your ‘foot slips’ and that his ‘loving consolation brings joy to your soul’?

Our faithful God holds us up in his unfailing love no matter where we are or what we do. He who suffered for us in Jesus’ death and triumphed in his resurrection is there with us through the many challenges in our lives. What a relief for us to know we are safe in God’s loving grasp, and we can continue along life’s path with joy and confidence.

***Prayer: Pray for St Paul’s congregation and their partnership with the Heldsbach Kindergarten Project. Pray for Coral and Tony as they continue to support the kindergartens, the village women who teach the children, and PNG coordinators Pastor Walter Teunzac and Taningnao Zuhu. Thank God for his loving presence. Pray for his gifts of strength, courage and hope in your life.***

Coral Gallasch is St Paul’s Hahndorf SA congregation, which partners with Heldsbach, Finschhafen, Papua New Guinea.

Wednesday 16 March 2022

# The really big guy

by Jamie Fewster

**As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore (Psalm 125:2).**

Read Psalm 125

Sport has become a major source of enjoyment for me. I love going surfing, playing cricket and touch footy, and watching pretty much any sport on television. One of the more recent sports I’ve followed is the NFL (American football). At first, I didn’t understand it. However, through encouragement from some mates (and a healthy dose of NFL fantasy competition!), I have come to understand it and really enjoy watching it.

What fascinates me is the attention and protection given to one player, the quarterback. If I was paying a player upwards of 40 million USD per season, I’d want to look after him too! I love seeing how after the snap (when the ball gets passed between the centre’s legs to the quarterback), the offensive line (the really big guys) all push against the opposition. They slowly give ground, gradually move back, and surround the quarterback, encircling him and creating a ‘pocket’ of protection (it’s literally called the ‘pocket’). The defensive line (the other really big guys) of the opposition is trying to get to the quarterback. They want to tackle him and bring him down (called a ‘sack’).

When I read Psalm 125:1,2, I am reminded of the protection given to this one player. ‘As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people.’

Ironically, the seven peaks surrounding Jerusalem do not really make for much protection! With Jerusalem not having a seaport, military significance or really anything else that makes it stand out, it may seem strange that this city needs protecting at all! It is, for all intents and purposes, an ordinary town. However, the imagery we receive of a God who surrounds us with his love and protection is clear. The temple in Jerusalem was the place where God dwelt. And the account of how God redeemed us through Jesus in Jerusalem shows us how God surrounds the ordinary (Jerusalem/us) and makes us extra-ordinary (because of Christ).

We are his people. He surrounds us with his love and protection.

Does this mean we won’t get ‘sacked’? Of course not. Life knocks us down sometimes and may be doing so more than usual at the moment. But Jesus pulls us back up and reminds us that he will be there again and again to protect us.

‘Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved …’

May you be encouraged to trust in the Lord. His love will be with you ‘from this time forth and forevermore’.

**Prayer: Pray for the education secretary for the National Committee of Lutheran World Federation Ridwin Purba and Education Consultant Ruth Butler as they support the education within Lutheran schools in Indonesia. Pray God will remind you of his constant and abiding love for you and will continue to protect you from all evil – from those that would seek to do you harm, when you are feeling lost, alone and helpless, and when you are sick of body or soul.**

Jamie Fewster is from Navigator College SA, which partners with SMA GKPS Pematangraya, Kabupaten Simalungun, Indonesia.

Thursday 17 March 2022

# Open compassion

by President Justin Sansalu

**I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds (Psalm 77:11,12).**

Read Psalm 77

Over the last couple of years, we have experienced one of the worst pandemics. Its impact is still fresh in our minds. It has led to despair and hopelessness in the hearts of people because of the dramatic loss of human life worldwide, the devastating cascade effect on food systems, public health and economics, and the faith of many believers. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he shut up his compassion in anger?

Many have doubted the graciousness of God and his divine mercy and protection. Some are trying to find peace in the raging storm, rationalising its cause and effect. God seems distant, yet, is it true?

As we ponder Psalm 77:11,12 in the time of the Lent season, we can find peace and the joy of trustfulness post-pandemic. ‘I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.’ The psalmist remembers what God had done in leading and conducting his children of Israel through the Red Sea into the Promised Land. This astounding fact has inspired and given new hope for the psalmist in God’s assurance of salvation, the brightest hope that will pierce the darkest day in the valley of death.

As we look back on what God has accomplished in the past, rescuing us from sin and death through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and giving us new life through holy baptism, current trials can be faced with the joy of gratitude still filling our hearts. Even in the rough storm of a pandemic, God has the power to kindle the soul into raptures of gratefulness.

When the Lord seems distant, we are encouraged to remember that he has come near to us in Christ. His eyes never close, and his ears are open to hearing the cry of the people. He works miraculously to tend the needy, to strengthen the heart of the people with the hope of a new morning. His mercy and grace never cease to amaze his people.

Let his name be praised; let his compassion be known to many. Amen.

**Prayer: Pray for the Protestant Church in Sabah that their hearts will be turned to God and remember all his deeds and works of wonder. Pray the Lord will grant you the heart of compassion, graciousness and trust in his mercy for you in Christ.**

President Justin Sansalu is from the Protestant Church in Sabah.

Friday 18 March 2022

# Our hiding place

by Rev Tim Muller

**You are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with glad cries of deliverance (Psalm 32:7).**

Read Psalm 32

When I was 17 years old, I remember watching the movie, The Hiding Place, at the Albury cinema in NSW. It is about Corrie ten Boom and her family. They were Dutch Christians who hid Jewish people in their home for their safety during World War II. The ten Boom family were eventually reported to the Nazi authorities, and Corrie and her sister were taken to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Corrie survived and later wrote the book, The Hiding Place. She gave witness to God’s help and protection for her and her sister Betsie, who died in the camp. Corrie believed that Betsie died safely in the arms of Jesus.

The psalmist David knew firsthand of the protection of God, particularly when he hid from King Saul, who was trying to kill him. David hid among rocks and in caves on several occasions. Have you ever had to hide for your safety? Many people throughout history have had to literally hide, and some still do. We can take this psalm verse as a wonderful metaphor for God’s protection and care.

I have a banner of Jesus the Good Shepherd in my office, made by Christians in a rural village in Pakistan. There is a lamb safe on his shoulders and sheep of various colours close by him. Jesus holds a staff to protect and guide the sheep. He is like a moving Hiding Place. In the middle of the night, when your thoughts spin and your fears abound, Jesus is with you. You can talk to him anytime – even your thoughts are prayers. Jesus is your safe place, your go-to in any situation.

As a pastor, I know people can be deeply disappointed when it seems like prayers are not heard, and it feels like the safety or protection promised in this psalm verse and others like it is not there. I want to say: persist in prayer, keep talking, express disappointments, frustrations, pain. God can take it. When others express to you their disappointment about God’s care, listen to their pain and, over time, affirm God’s love for them.

Somewhere there will be glad cries of deliverance – on Easter Sunday, from saints on earth and in heaven. Think of people who have gone on ahead, who are shouting and singing praise to a delivering God.

Pray for all who are in hiding at this time, hiding even in their own homes, looking somewhere for a safe space.

**Prayer: Pray for Immanuel Woden Valley congregation and their partnership with the Lutheran Church in Cambodia. Pray that you continue talking, expressing disappointments, frustrations and pain to God, and entrust him to be your safe place and go-to in any situation.**

Rev Tim Muller is from Immanuel Woden Valley ACT, which partners with the Lutheran Church in Cambodia.

Saturday 19 March 2022

# Dwelling in safety

by Rev Terumitsu Hagenoshita

**Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! (Psalm 4:1)**

Read Psalm 4

This psalm has been called an evening prayer because it says in verse 8, ‘in peace, I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety’.

The psalm writer has been mocked and criticised and seems to carry heavy burdens. He shouts and prays directly to God in his deep suffering because he believes that only God knows the truth and may defend him righteously. And indeed, the merciful God heard his prayer. Trusting that God heard him enabled the psalm writer to rest and sleep in peace.

We also experience times of trials and sleepless nights where we are in great fear and anxiety. Particularly now in the world, I assume many people are spending peaceless nights, as COVID-19 puts thousands of people into hopeless situations.

When we are overcome with distress, let us, too, call upon God and plead for his mercy.

God delivered his beloved Son to die for our sins and always stands by our side. He always listens to our prayers, giving affirmed forgiveness and peace.

‘What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us’ (Romans 8:31–34).

When in distress, this psalm writer believed in the One who has promised to listen to the cry of his faithful servants, and so he called on him. May you also call on the merciful Lord to hold you in his arms and give you peaceful rest whenever you are restless.

**Prayer: Pray for the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church, Japan, that they will continue to call upon God for his mercy whenever they experience trials. Pray God will make you his faithful servant who calls upon him and lives in his loving-kindness every day.**

Rev Terumitsu Hagenoshita is from Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church, Japan.

Sunday 20 March 2022

# Repent

by Mark Schubert

**Do you think that these … were worse sinners? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13 2,5).**

Read Luke 13:1–9

When bad things happen to someone, is God punishing them for their sins?

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans killed by Pilate when sacrificing to God. Jesus responded to their unasked question, ‘Do you think that these… were worse sinners? … No …’ (Luke 13:2,3a).

No, they were not worse sinners than anyone else - the same for those killed by the collapse of a tower. No, they were not more guilty than others.

All of us are sinners. None worse than any other.

We can all say with Paul, ‘the good that I want to do I can’t, instead I do the evil I don’t want to do’ (Romans 7:19).

All are sinners inside – some can hide it better than others, but we are all turned in on ourselves, egocentric, hard-hearted – building walls, cutting ourselves off from each other by our thoughts and actions, working towards the final separation, death. ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23).

‘But unless you repent, you too will all perish’ (Luke 13:5).

To repent is to be sorry, to admit your selfishness and inability to change. Jesus started his mission with, ‘Repent and believe the good news!’ (Mark 1:15). Confess your sinfulness, and turn to the good news that you have been forgiven.

Jesus came to die for you – to take your death, to forgive you. And he rose again to live in you. He gives his goodness, holiness and love for all helpless, hopeless sinners.

This is the time of grace, the time to decide –stay in the power of sin and perish, or receive what Jesus has done for you, so his Spirit can produce good fruit in you.

**Lord, we admit that we sin – we hurt others, ourselves, and you. Have mercy on us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.**