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**Sunday 23 July 2023 to Sunday 30 July 2023**

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Sunday 23 July 2023

**This type of weeding isn’t for us**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them’ (Matthew 13:29).***

Read Matthew 13:24–30,36–43

Some of you who are better gardeners than I am may have trouble tolerating weeds in your pristine gardens. The presence of that which is impure and out of place is hard to take. Among your lovely lush herbs, vegetables and flowers are ugly weeds that aren’t supposed to be there. The natural thing, of course, is to get rid of them. However, in Jesus’ parable, this is the point at which the agricultural analogy breaks down.

In Jesus’ parable, the field is the world, the good seed is the children of the kingdom, and the weeds are the children of the evil one. Interestingly, Jesus doesn’t deny that the devil is active and has those on his side. The impulse, therefore, to get rid of evil isn’t the problem. The problem is that, as fallible human beings, we don’t have the insight to do this without inflicting tremendous damage. We’ll uproot the wheat along with the weeds.

In a time where the values of our surrounding culture are increasingly at odds with those of Christ’s church, it can become tempting for Christians to want to see the causes of evil removed from our world. Indeed, we do need to take sin and evil seriously and struggle against injustice. Especially in the church, we’re called to exercise discipline where appropriate to lead to repentance and protect the vulnerable. However, our Lord’s words today are a warning about humility and caution in this and that final judgement is always in Christ’s hands rather than ours.

Thank God for that! Not only is the Son of Man capable of rendering this justice in such a way that the wheat isn’t uprooted along with the weeds, but this judge is also your Saviour. He’s the source of goodness that makes good seed even possible, and because of him, you have the promise of shining like the sun in the kingdom of your Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

***Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to plant good seeds in this world. Help us trust in your perfect justice when we’re tempted to take final judgement into our own hands. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

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Monday 24 July 2023

**Restored to loving service**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***Jesus said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me? … Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’ (John 21:17).***

Read [John 21:15–25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+21%3A15%E2%80%9325&version=NRSVUE)

Simon Peter had messed up big time. He had followed Jesus so far in his time of need, but then, when it came to the crunch, he fell to pieces. To deny knowing him once was bad. To do it again was worse. To do it a third time, well, that just seems unforgivable. Now, however, Jesus comes to restore him. If you’ve ever been in this position of making a big mistake and then have been given a second chance, you know something of what this must have been like for Simon Peter. Jesus, in his resurrection, comes not to condemn or settle the score with those who had let him down, but rather, he comes with his blood-bought peace to restore Peter to his service in a remarkable way.

Jesus repeats his question three times, a parallel to Simon Peter’s threefold denial. The question is striking, though, as it doesn't exactly match. It’s not, ‘Simon, can you publicly admit now that you do know me and are one of my disciples?’ Instead, it’s ‘Simon … do you love me?’ As always, Jesus gets past the external manifestation to the deeper issue of the heart. The issue is, who or what has Simon Peter’s fear, love and trust above all things? Jesus graciously forgives and restores Peter to service, and in that restoration, Peter is invited to once again place Jesus at the centre of his service and life. He is invited to love the one who loves him.

If you struggle with past sins and wonder how Christ can still use you in his kingdom, look to Peter and how he was graciously restored to service. As we do this, we’re invited to respond to the same question our Lord posed to Peter, ‘Do you love me?’ At the centre of all service in the church and all of Christian life is the one who loves us and invites us to love him above all things. I once heard someone say that when a congregation is searching for a pastor or lay worker, they usually have many questions but can sometimes miss the obvious one: do you love Jesus?

***Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for restoring Peter to your service, even after his failure. Help us to fear, love and trust you above all things. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Tuesday 25 July 2023

**The joy of being face to face**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete (2 John 12b).***

Read [2 John 1–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+John+1%E2%80%9313&version=NRSVUE)

I’m often intrigued by the little personal notes in the New Testament letters that indicate the intimate relationships that existed in the early church. We find many of these in the Apostle Paul’s letters as he sends personal greetings to various people (for example, Romans 16). Here in our text, we have one from the Apostle John. Even though these apostolic letters have been a treasure for the Christian community ever since, for John, writing was second best. What he most desired was to see these dear brothers and sisters face to face. This, he says, would complete the joy they have as fellow believers.

At one level, this is simply how God has created us to be, isn’t it? I’ve recently been living overseas, and I thank God for the technology that allows us to not only hear our loved ones but also see them. Yet, we all know it’s not quite the same. FaceTime isn’t the same as being truly face to face. There is no substitute for being with each other in the flesh. The Apostle John knows this is just how life is as a human being, but I’m convinced there is for him also a deeper reason for this within the Christian community.

In Jesus, God has come to talk to us face to face, and our fellowship with each other follows from this. It’s no accident that in the longer reading for today, the Apostle John is mainly concerned with those who deny that Jesus has come in the flesh. For John, this is serious. It is, in fact, to be ‘the deceiver and the antichrist’ (verse 7). After speaking about how important it is that Jesus came in the flesh, it is only natural that Christians, too, desire to be in the flesh with each other – to talk face to face, so our joy may be complete.

In a world of loneliness and isolation, we need each other more than ever. Just as God has spoken to us in his Son and so has spoken to us in the flesh so that we have the privilege and gift of talking face to face.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to take on our flesh and speak your word of grace and truth to us. Increase among us the fellowship of the Holy Spirit so that our joy may be complete. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.***

Wednesday 26 July 2023

**Giving thanks for a big mess**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:4).***

Read [1 Corinthians 1:1–19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+1%3A1%E2%80%9319&version=NRSVUE)

The congregation at Corinth was a big mess. There had been in-fighting, arrogant rejection of the Apostle Paul’s authority, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, idolatry, highly irreverent conduct at the Lord’s Supper, disorderly worship in various ways, and much more. It is truly astonishing from this perspective that Paul begins his letter by thanking God for these people. He thanks God for a big mess. And it’s not as if this is a mere literary convention or transparent flattery. We can see in Galatians 1:6–10 that Paul is quite willing to go straight to a strong rebuke without thanksgiving if he deems it necessary.

Even with all their problems, Paul can stand back and see the big picture. He’s able to see that, although these people are sinners, they are also saints. The grace of God has been given to them. This is something to thank God for, even if, from a human point of view, they don’t always seem to be living out their calling to be the saints God has made them. It’s also important to notice that just because the Apostle Paul is able to thank God for them doesn’t mean he is naïve or blasé about the problems. He also thinks sin needs to be warned against, rebuked, corrected and disciplined. That will come. But first things first: thanksgiving.

No doubt in your family or congregation, there are some problems, and they are real and may need attention. But rather than starting from the point of anger and frustration over those problems, stop and consider giving thanks for the people involved. Give thanks to God that he has shown them his grace and mercy and hasn’t given up on your family or church. Life is messy, and by God’s Spirit, he helps to bring good order, growth, maturity and peace. As this is a work in progress, we can thank God, even for the mess.

***Lord God, Heavenly Father, thank you for every member of our families and congregations. We thank you even for those who have caused problems we’re still working through. Thank you for your grace for them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Thursday 27 July 2023

**Boasting in the Lord**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31b).***

Read [1 Corinthians 1:20–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+1%3A20%E2%80%9331&version=NRSVUE)

Here is a bit of a trick question: should Christians boast? Most of us will instinctively answer no, which is understandable given the most common definition of boasting. That definition would be something like this: ‘to talk with excessive pride and self-satisfaction about one's achievements, possessions, or abilities.’ Australians are especially averse to this sort of thing, aren't we? In the verse just before ours, we are warned, in particular, of ever-boasting in God’s presence. This is the ever-present human temptation to bring our own works before God to earn his favour rather than receiving it from him as a gift in Christ.

The Apostle Paul actually says this is one of the reasons God works in the way he does, namely through weakness. The first Christians in Corinth and many other places weren’t the high-fliers and the movers and shakers. They were the down-and-outs and people others thought inferior. This is similar to the way God speaks about Israel in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 7:7,8). As God chooses to begin his covenant with people or his church with those who aren’t impressive in the eyes of the world, it shows that no-one can claim they have God’s favour because of something in them. Instead, it’s all a gift; therefore, there is no boasting before him.

But then notice in our text that the Apostle Paul says there is a right kind of boasting. It's as if human beings are wired to talk with excessive pride about something or someone, but sin has distorted the orientation of that impulse. So instead of suppressing it completely, Paul redirects it. He speaks of a boasting that isn't focused inward but outward on another. Paul says we are to boast in the Lord. We are to talk with excessive pride about him, who he is and what he has done. The Lord Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. So, there is plenty to boast about when we are focused on him.

***Father in heaven, we thank you that we don’t need to boast in your presence, as you have given us all things in Christ. By your Spirit, make us bold to boast in you before the world. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Friday 28 July 2023

**God teaching us about God**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11).***

Read [1 Corinthians 2:1–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+2%3A1%E2%80%9313&version=NRSVUE)

Many times in the Scriptures, one of the inspired biblical authors gives us an analogy from our human experience to gain a deeper understanding of spiritual realities. This verse is one of those times and makes a simple but profoundly important point. The issue at hand is how a person can come to know something about God. Can we work God out, beginning with our own ideas?

The Apostle Paul tells us to think about it like this – who really knows you? Others can get to know you through your words and actions, but no-one can read your thoughts (incidentally, this is one thing that makes human relationships difficult!). As such, no-one really knows you in your innermost self, with all your deepest thoughts, desires, fears, and such. There’s a profound sense in which you’re the only one who truly knows yourself.

St Paul says if you can resonate with this, you have a window into how we can know about God. Just as it’s only our spirit that knows our thoughts, so it’s only the Spirit of God who knows the thoughts of God. Of course, this is infinitely more mysterious in God's case, as the Spirit of God is a distinct person within the Trinity. Yet we can still get the point of the analogy. You know you. God knows God.

What this means, then, for us is very simple. If we want to learn about God, we don’t start with our own ideas. Instead, we look to the Spirit to reveal to us what we can know about God. The Spirit does this for us through his word and his ongoing work of enlightening our minds to understand his word.

This is good news for us because the secret wisdom of God is not to do with justice, vengeance or punishment but with grace and mercy. Marvellously, when the Spirit reveals to us the innermost thoughts of God, they are centred on our salvation in Christ Jesus.

***Gracious Father, thank you for revealing yourself to us by your own Spirit through your word. Enlighten us more and more by your Spirit, so we may truly know you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Saturday 29 July 2023

**Longing for the Lord’s commandments**

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

***With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments (Psalm 119:131).***

Read [Psalm 119:129–136](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+119%3A129%E2%80%93136&version=NRSVUE)

In this verse, the psalmist says they long for the Lord’s commandments. Their desire is like that of a dry mouth for refreshing water. This may sound strange to us as we know our failure to keep God’s law so well, so it’s the mercy and forgiveness in the gospel we long for. But, of course, God’s law in itself is good, so there’s also a sense in which we can long for his commandments. Here’s one way to think about this today.

Most of us live in an increasingly secular society. Some people assume this means we will simply become more lawless. But I don’t think that’s quite right. Nature abhors a vacuum. In spiritual things, then, one of the ways this works is that human beings who reject God’s law simply make up their own, and what’s more, they seem to feel the need to make lots and lots of new laws. Have you noticed that people in our post-Christian culture are often burdened by trying to live up to the long list of secular commandments expected of them?

The Lutheran reformers actually discussed this 500 years ago. Their main concern was that people were being pointed to their good works in order to merit God’s forgiveness. However, a further point they made is that the so-called good deeds being promoted weren’t really good works at all. They were human inventions rather than those given by God. At one point, they say that even if they haven’t got the gospel clear yet, at least some of them have started to preach the law properly, and that’s actually a step in the right direction.

In a world with a dizzying array of choices and an overwhelming series of societal expectations, it’s a wonderful thing to have God’s will for our lives revealed to us. He has created this world and each of us and loves us. His commandments provide direction and shape to what a good and God-pleasing life looks like, so we don’t have to guess and come up with it ourselves. That’s something to long for.

***Gracious Lord, thank you for revealing your will and giving your law and commandments. By your Spirit, work in us a desire to see your will done in our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Sunday 30 July 2023

**In the end the bread will rise**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till all was leavened (Matthew 13:33 ESV).***

Read [Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A31%E2%80%9333%2C+44%E2%80%9352&version=NRSVUE)

God’s Word today invites us to contemplate the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. Our reading gives us four images to meditate on: the tiny mustard seed, the hidden leaven (or yeast), the treasure hidden in a field, and the merchant in search of that perfect pearl. These each offer us a peculiar way to consider the mystery of Christ’s power and reign over heaven and earth. The parables tell us that the kingdom of God is both hidden and life-giving—seemingly impossible to find, yet when discovered found to be of priceless worth.

So, what do we know about the kingdom of God? We know that Christ is the reigning King (2 Peter 1:11). We know that the kingdom of heaven has come in Jesus, and that we are called, like Him, to abide in the Father’s will so that we may enter it (Matthew 7:21). We also know that God’s kingdom bridges earth to eternity. It is not time-bound, neither is it limited to earthly things, nor is it set apart in a far-off spiritual realm (Revelation 11:15). It is both/and - temporal *and* eternal, now *and* forever.

If we only see things in an earthly sense, then God’s kingdom easily goes unnoticed. We know that the church is full of imperfect people who carry the scars of sin and struggle under the law. Nevertheless, like a pinch of yeast dispersed through a huge basin of flour the church ­– the scattered people of God – are called to be servants of the kingdom. For those with eyes to see, we know that that the yeast of God’s Word is working through the dough, growing God’s kingdom in faith and transforming all it touches. In the end the bread will rise. The church is called to receive and share God’s life-giving words of hope, peace and joy and to go out into the world with those same words. We bring Christ’s merciful gift of redemption to restore the world’s brokenness.

Christ’s kingdom reigns in his church in every time and place. As we honour God’s word, gladly hearing and learning it together, we can use it to pray for others, the world and ourselves. We pray that the Holy Spirit will bring God’s gift of grace and mercy to us. God’s word is the transforming agent. Let us be servants of the kingdom, dispersed through the world to bring God’s restorative mercy to His creation.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that your kingdom has come and grows in a hidden way like leaven in flour. Please bless us by your Word to grow our faith, hope and love. Through our reigning king, Jesus Christ, Amen.***

*Kimberley Pfeiffer is married to Joshua and they have four children. She is a member of the Lutheran Church of Australia and has served in various forms of churchwork. She is currently studying in the Graduate School at Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, USA. She is enjoying the challenge and the adventure abroad.*