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**Sunday 10 April 2022 to Sunday 17 April 2022**

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Sunday 10 April 2022

# Taking responsibility

by Maria Rudolph

**But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ (Luke 23:21).**

Read Luke 23:1–49

Today is Palm Sunday, and if you went to church this morning, you watched the crowd lay down coats and palm branches in front of Jesus, who triumphantly entered Jerusalem. You heard them shout ‘Hosanna (meaning “God, help us”)! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ (John 12:13). In Luke’s Gospel, chapter 23, verses 18, 21 and 23, we witness three times that the crowd is now chanting another chorus: ‘Away with this man! Crucify him!’ It even says that they shouted with one voice (23:18), and their shouts prevailed (23:23). How quickly the hearts of people can change. What we feel so passionate about one day can change into quite the opposite the next.

That is why it is not good to heed the words of the novella The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: ‘It is only with the heart that one can see rightly’. In fact, if we followed ‘our hearts’ as many contemporary books, films and opinions teach us, it would be a potluck whether we get it right or make a disaster of any given situation. God teaches us that we must look to Jesus Christ for everything. For absolutely everything. So we don’t see things with our own heart, but with the heart of God, revealed to us through Scripture. The prophet Isaiah tells us (Isaiah 55:8,9) that God’s ways are higher than our ways, and God’s thoughts higher than our thoughts. By walking to the cross and allowing the gruesome crucifixion to take place, Jesus knew that the very people who condemned him to death needed the forgiveness he was about to win for them. ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34).

God was willing to take responsibility for us in Christ, even when people stirred up by priests and Scripture teachers themselves were unwilling to take responsibility for Christ. When we are unwilling to take responsibility for Christ in our own lives, he still died for us in our unworthiness and took responsibility for us anyway. You are called by Christ to take responsibility for your faith, for the actions that come from your faith. You are called to take responsibility for the mission of the church and be an ambassador of the gospel by how you have been gifted, equipped and called by the Living God. Yet even when you and I fail in this responsibility due to our weak human nature, Christ still takes full responsibility for us. Even when sometimes the priests and Scripture teachers of our time lead a chorus of condemnation of the call in and for Christ, Christ takes responsibility for us all, walks to the cross, lays down his life, and unites us all in himself. Thanks be to God. Hosanna, God help us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Where do you think you fail in taking responsibility for Christ?

**Loving Jesus, you have walked to the cross and taken full responsibility for me and all my sins and shortcomings. I am overwhelmed and grateful and have nothing to offer you in return except my whole life, my being, myself. Take me and use me. Embolden me to take responsibility for you, and comfort me with your peace when I fail to do this once again. I give you my all today. Amen.**

Monday 11 April 2022

# While we were still sinners, Christ died for us

by Maria Rudolph

**He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief, as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it (John 12:6).**

Read John 12:1–11

Others always have it easier! It’s easy for other people to volunteer to be part of the church working bee! They don’t have my back problems, and they are stronger than me. It’s easy for other people to give to this mission project; they have higher-paying jobs than me and can afford to give more! It’s easy for other people to discipline their children; theirs aren’t as energetic and tiring as mine! It’s easy for Jesus to walk around with his bunch of holy followers who devoutly learn from him and put it into practice! They were chosen especially by God.

Really? What if I told you that those who volunteer simply do it despite their own physical limitations and time restraints? Or how many people choose to give money despite their financial constraints simply because God put it on their hearts? That every parent thinks every other parent manages better than them? And what if I told you that the disciples around Jesus were less than perfect? In fact, Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, long before he betrayed Jesus, used to be a thief and helped himself to the disciple’s common money.

Jesus, who knows all things (John 21:17), also knows that Judas is a dishonest man and even that he will be the one to betray him. And yet Jesus does not ostracise him but patiently keeps exposing him to his teachings and miracles. When Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume and Judas criticises her for wasting money, Jesus keeps Mary’s deed and its meaning the focus. Jesus will later share the Last Supper and wash Judas’ feet along with the other disciples’.

If Jesus treated Judas the Betrayer in that way, think about what this means for us. ‘God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:8). Instead of continuing our lives thinking other people have it better and easier than us, simply know that for God – who knows all things – you are enough. Christ has died for you regardless. Do not wait for the ‘if only’ moment so you can live up to being a Christ-follower; start with who you are today. You are enough for Christ, who has already died for you. What you have to offer – out of your weakness, poverty and exhaustion – is exactly enough for Christ, who bears with you in love.

What is one situation in which you constantly think you can only do it if something changes? Can you see how God can use you as you are today?

**Lord Jesus, you knew of Judas’ flaws and still held him close until the end. You know of my many flaws, yet you have already died for me on the cross and risen again. I can live because you died. Help me trust that I am enough for you, that I don’t have to wait to be someone great, important, powerful or more equipped than now to serve you. That time is now, and I can come to you just as I am. Melt my hardened heart so that instead of continuing in sin like Judas, I can come to you in repentance and receive your forgiveness once again. Amen.**

Tuesday 12 April 2022

# Come and see Jesus

by Maria Rudolph

**They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus’ (John 12:21).**

Read John 12:20–36

The palms to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem lay where they fell. The Passover Festival is in full swing in the city; pilgrims arrive from all over the place. Hustling and bustling, people staying with rellies for the occasion, and some making the trip for the first time.

And there was an added kind of excitement in the air. Many people had come especially because they heard that Jesus would be there. He had not only wowed the crowds with proclamations about the kingdom of God, but he also performed many miracles. Jesus had healed people with leprosy, brought sight to the blind, made the lame walk and even the mute speak again. Jesus had even performed a resurrection after Lazarus lay in a tomb for four days. Some in Jerusalem had been among the crowd when he had stepped out of the tomb, alive. Now they were trying to get a glimpse of Jesus, waiting to see if he would perform another miracle. Among them were Greek people from far away who approached Jesus’ followers with a request. ‘We would like to see Jesus.’

Come and see Jesus. It is the title of a well-known Sunday school curriculum in the LCANZ. Some of you may have taught from it, and many more would have been students of its lessons through your own Sunday school teachers. But whether you know this book series or not, the concept is obvious: Teaching about Jesus, so children can come and see him for themselves, get to know the Son of God, and receive love, grace and forgiveness in his name. Isn’t that the desire of our heart – to invite everyone, without reservation, to come and see Jesus?

These Greek people in the story had come from far away. This is only the beginning of many people being drawn to Christ, and for whatever reason they are first drawn, Christ’s love and grace transforms each of them, each of us, as we see who Jesus really is. As we read through the Book of Acts, we can see the beginning of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Even us at the ends of the earth in Australia and New Zealand have come to see Jesus and believe that the teacher from Nazareth who performed so many miracles is the Son of God. We share in the hope that because of his death and resurrection, we are redeemed and forgiven and will one day be resurrected with all believers on the last day.

How did you come to see Jesus? Who can you help to come and see Jesus this Easter?

**Loving God, work in and through our LCANZ so that all who come to see Jesus this Easter can see and hear him proclaimed by the men and women serving you in our church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Wednesday 13 April 2022

# Darkness and light

by Maria Rudolph

**As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night (John 13:30).**

Read John 13:21–32

Before Easter, Disney paraphernalia is popular to buy as gifts. Whether it’s Aladdin, Snow White or Encanto, they all have the strategic use of darkness and light in common. When the good characters are on screen, the weather is sunny. When the bad characters turn up, clouds appear, even thunderstorms and gusts of wind, and the colours become dark. Shadows appear. Once the good ones win, sun or brightly twinkling stars come up. Many authors and filmmakers use this approach.

Darkness and light are found all through the Bible. In the beginning, there was chaos, and everything was in complete darkness. Then God spoke the light into existence and ordered the chaos. A bright pillar of fire broke through the night to guide the Israelites on the way to the Promised Land. Isaiah prophesied a great light to the people walking in darkness (Isaiah 9:2). A bright star announced the birth of Jesus Christ, who said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life’ (John 8:12). And the New Jerusalem ‘does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp’ (Revelation 21:23).

Darkness is sin, death and destruction. Psalm 23 has a person walking ‘through the valley of the shadow of death’. Shadows mean threat and evil, but God protects and defends. When Jesus, the Light of the World, hung on the cross for us, ‘darkness covered the whole land’ (Mark 15:33) for three hours. When Judas was getting ready to betray Jesus and left the upper room during the Last Supper, it ‘was night’ (John 13:30). Jesus’ agonising time of trial, beatings and crucifixion was about to begin, and darkness spread itself out. Darkness is the reason Jesus was crucified because of the evil, sin and guilt of humanity. But the Light of Life breaks through that darkness. ‘In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it’ (John 1:5).

In the power of the Holy Spirit, hold onto the hope handed to you on the day of your baptism with the candle you may have received symbolically. ‘You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before all people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven’ (Matthew 5:14,16). The Light of the World died for you. When you light a new Pascal (Easter) candle in church again on Easter Sunday, rejoice that the Light of the World has overcome death, hell and the devil forevermore.

Can you recall a time the light of Christ broke through the darkness for you?

**Jesus, Light of the World, you illuminate even the darkest corner within me and in the world around me. You expose all deeds of darkness. Forgive me, renew me, restore me, restore this world, heal our church and the world around us with your Light of Life, starting with me as I journey to the cross with you this Easter. Amen.**

Thursday 14 April 2022

# Where love comes to life

by Maria Rudolph

**As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34b,35).**

Read John 13:1–17,31b–35

LCANZ pastor Adrian Kitson wrote a beautiful song that reflects the slogan of the church: Where love comes to life. As you opened this devotion page, you have likely already seen it. Your congregation may use it on their sign out the front of the building or on the bulletin. All official LCANZ communication bears these words. What do they mean to the church? What do they mean to you? Do the two answers match up? Actually, the only important thing to really ask is, what do these words mean to Jesus?

Today, as we read through the account of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet and giving them a new command to love one another, he provides us with the answer. Jesus himself is that answer. Jesus is the love who has come to life in the flesh at Christmas. He taught about the kingdom of God and healed many. After bearing all of our sins and shame on the cross and dying, Christ – love himself – comes to life again. ‘We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them’ (1 John 4:16).

You are part of the body of Christ whom Jesus commissioned to bring this love to life (Matthew 28:18–20). Whether you are young, middle-aged or old; fit, overweight or frail; female or male; rich or poor, Jesus uses each of us as the living stones that make up a living building – the church. You, no matter how insignificant you may feel or how important you may feel, with the constant help of the Holy Spirit, are a part of Christ’s mission to bring love to life in his name right where you are. If you think your local context is lacking to bring love to life, be the one to boldly and gently step out in Christ’s name to be the change you want to see. Being humble, serving one another, bearing with one another in love according to the example Jesus gave at the Last Supper. We serve, teach, preach and welcome in his name so that one day, every knee can bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

**Lord God, equip and lead the women and men of the LCANZ to serve together humbly in all ways you have graciously gifted, called and equipped us to bring your love to life in our local context and through your wider church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Friday 15 April 2022

# It is finished

by Maria Rudolph

**He [Joseph of Arimathea] was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds (John 19:39).**

Read John 18:1–19:42

The gruesome crucifixion washes over us like a wave of horror, like a nightmare. We see Jesus falsely tried. We see him mocked, whipped and bloodied. We see him in agony on a cross where he receives a sponge of wine vinegar and then says, ‘It is finished’ and gives up his Spirit. We see him pierced in the side with a spear. The bloody, wounded, and battered Son of God has borne all of God’s wrath and judgement. It is truly finished; we will never be punished like that. Jesus has taken what should have been unleashed onto us upon himself.

Surprisingly, none of his disciples was there to care for his lifeless body. Instead, the intense events brought courage to two followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who up until now had been too frightened to admit their support. Joseph only followed Jesus in secret because he was afraid of what the Jews might think or even do to him (John 19:38). Nicodemus is a man we have encountered before, right at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council (John 3:1). The Holy Spirit drew him to Jesus before Nicodemus could even understand what was happening. Being aware that Jesus was already in the bad books of his Pharisee colleagues, he only dared to visit Jesus at night under cover of darkness. Jesus taught Nicodemus what it meant to be born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). We use these words at each baptism performed in our churches. Jesus taught Nicodemus that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16). This might be the most famous Bible verse. It is the ‘gospel in a nutshell’. This verse encapsulates what happened on Good Friday and why we call it good.

And here are Nicodemus and Joseph, taking the lifeless body of Jesus off the cross. Nicodemus came prepared. He had brought 35 pounds (about 16 kilograms) of spices to embalm the body. When a handful of these spices would ordinarily be used, Nicodemus spent a significant amount of money on a number of embalming spices fit for Caesar himself. Jesus’ body was wrapped up and carefully laid in a tomb. Joseph and Nicodemus could not even fathom what was about to happen to Jesus. The famous words Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus that fateful night were not understood by him then. They provide comfort for Christians over the world on Good Friday when we long to hear the Good News of Easter Sunday but are left for a moment to contemplate the immeasurable sufferings of Christ on our behalf. Let us not be frightened like Joseph and Nicodemus and follow Jesus in secret – instead, let us be confident in Christ.

Are you secretly following Jesus, or can you speak about your faith openly?

**Loving Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for us. We can never repay you for your grace and forgiveness, but we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice. Take all of us to serve you in whichever way you ordain for us each day. Strengthen us to speak openly about you this Easter so that we don’t have to hide our love for you. Amen.**

Saturday 16 April 2022

# Seek refuge in God, your fortress

by Maria Rudolph

**Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me (Psalm 31:3).**

Read Psalm 31:1–4,15,16

Feeling ‘in limbo’ aptly describes this in-between time after Good Friday and before Easter Sunday. It is called Holy Saturday by some. Still reeling from the passion account, the crucifixion is vividly in your mind. You left the church service in a sombre mood. A bare, stripped altar and a black shroud covered the cross. Jesus is dead. Even though you know the end of the story, you live in suspense today. If only we could skip straight to Easter Sunday morning. At least we live in expectation of resurrection life and redemption. After the death of Jesus, his followers didn’t even know the resurrection was about to dawn on them.

It is often Holy Saturday in our lives. How often are we in between things, waiting for a new dawn that will bring good news? Could it be that our whole earthly life is a long, drawn-out Holy Saturday like today while we wait to walk into the loving arms of God into eternity?

And yet, the Saturday in between already passed over 2000 years ago. The first Easter Sunday has already dawned on us. Now we live freely, redeemed by Christ, adopted and forgiven by God. Eternity with God has already begun for us as we joined with Christ in our baptism.

God has created us for this earthly life with a purpose and with himself as a constant guide and defender. He has become our refuge, our rock, our solid foundation. Christ, the wounded healer, through allowing himself to be broken and by giving up his spirit and dying, brings an end to Holy Saturdays. We do not have to remain there any longer. You are saved because of God’s unfailing love; you can build on this solid foundation forever. In the darkest depths of a Holy Saturday that never seems to end, God is your hope and strength.

How do you experience this Holy Saturday?

**Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, grant us peace. You are our rock and refuge, our fortress, and in you, we trust. Amen.**

Sunday 17 April 2022

# Oh, Peter!

by Milton Eckermann

**He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself (John 20:6b,7).**

Read John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1–12

Brash, robust, loyal, strong, impetuous – traits one can see in Peter’s life as a fisherman and disciple of Jesus. When he first met Jesus, Peter must have seen him talking to the crowd while cleaning his nets. He was willing to have Jesus in his boat and launch further into the water, and then at Jesus' suggestion, he tried fishing again with great reward. Then when asked to leave it all and follow Jesus, off Peter went.

During his time as Jesus’ disciple, he was always ready to do his bit and spoke up very quickly in response to revelations from Jesus, even to the point of being willing to die for him. He even took admonishment from Jesus and remained loyal – until he was challenged by people after Jesus’ arrest and denied knowing Jesus three times. Oh, Peter! However, he then went and wept bitterly.

We next hear that he and the other disciples went into hiding until the woman gone early Sunday morning to take care of Jesus’ body came back to them and said they had taken his body. Peter and John went to the tomb. Peter, being slower, got there second but went straight into the tomb. Later, when they were fishing, Peter saw Jesus and jumped out of the boat into the water and, again, was challenged to follow Jesus.

Our lives may cause us to have guilt that we think is unforgivable. But there is comfort from Peter's life – that even though his denial of Jesus was so great, he could turn back to God, who welcomed him back for further service. In fact, Jesus never left him.

**God, I am sorry for ever having walked away from you. Thank you for never leaving me. Amen.**