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**Sunday 10 May to Sunday 17 May**

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Sunday 10 May 2020

**When all else fails, trust**

by Pastor Kevin Bell

**‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight’ (Proverbs 3:5).**

Read Proverbs 3:1–12

In the book of Hebrews there is this wonderful reassurance from God: *‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’* (verse 13:5b). God wants us to know he is absolutely trustworthy, no matter what our circumstances may indicate. He wants us to firmly hold onto his promise that he has not left us to the mercy of fate or any other fearful circumstances. God says to us in the words of Jeremiah 29:11: *‘For I know the plans I have for you’ …’plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’*.

But human energy runs out. Often after a time of trial, hurt, pain, struggle with fear, or uncertainty about the future, we don’t seem to have any energy left. Human endurance and willpower runs out. In the dark valleys of life we need a power and energy source bigger than ourselves. If we think we are going to make it through all the valleys of life on our own power, then we will be sadly disappointed.

When all else fails God calls us to rely on his strength, his power and his care. *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*, says 1 Peter 5:7.

If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed.
If you look within, you’ll be depressed.
If you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest.

***Heavenly Father, you are our true and certain hope when our energy runs out. We will trust in you. Amen.***

Monday 11 May 2020

**My strong right hand**

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘For I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand, and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you’ (Isaiah 41:13).**

Read Isaiah 41:8–13

I tend to carry so many thoughts and goals in my mind that I often have difficulty attending to the thing in front of me. One of the blessings of this time is learning to be more present: to my work, my family, my friends, my hobbies etc. I feel like a Year 1 student, building important skills that will be essential for the years ahead.

But instead of being present, I often catch myself scanning the horizon and wondering if I really will have what it takes for what is beyond this. Will I have the skills and focus to follow where Jesus leads in responding wisely and lovingly to the needs that will continue for some time? Will I be part of the change I hope to see in our church and our society?

What a beautifully intimate image we receive in the above words from Isaiah: the Lord our God is not only with us in a grand, universal way, but he also takes each of us by our right hand. How intimate! God is our strength, both today and in what lies ahead.

On the days I feel amazing, I give thanks for God’s strength so clearly present to transform me. On the days I feel more fragile, I am reminded that it was never about me and I try to listen again to what Jesus is so patiently teaching me.

***Dear loving God, thank you that through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection I am free from fear and condemnation and have full access to your promises. Through your Holy Spirit may I know this in my body, mind and spirit today. Amen.***

Tuesday 12 May 2020

**Live like a lamb**

by David Folker

**‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom’ (Luke 12:32).**

Read Luke 12:22–34

Have you ever thought it odd that Jesus often referred to his followers as sheep? From the above translation you can imagine it intended as an endearing term, but being called a lamb is still a bit … insulting, don’t you think? After all, sheep aren’t exactly known for their cognitive prowess. I can only imagine the disciples’ reactions to being directly addressed by Jesus as fluffy, cute and ultimately unintelligent livestock: ‘Did he really say that?’

It isn’t the first time God’s children are administered the same figure of speech, and when the Bible repeats the same picture in a variety of contexts, it isn’t by accident. There is something to learn here. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd. If we are the sheep, that means he is directly responsible for our wellbeing. What a liberating truth!

I don’t know about you, but I am actually pretty cool with living like a lamb. There is something so freeing about realising that you have a protector. A guide. An advocate. A loving Saviour.

Living like a lamb doesn’t mean that there won’t be trouble, nor does it mean that we are oblivious to the dangers around us. Living like a lamb means submitting to the ideal that we have a Shepherd. And you can bet he stands ready to move on our behalf – if we would only let him.

***My Lord, you are my shepherd. I am your lamb. I am happy to be called as such. May I awaken daily with the peace that comes from submitting to the protection of your mighty arms. Amen.***

Wednesday 13 May 2020

**Following Jesus**

by Maria Rudolph

**Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’ (Matthew 16:24).**

Read Matthew 16:21–28

Jesus requires his followers to be completely different from what we would expect from a worldly perspective.

Knowing Jesus causes a paradigm shift in us. The world promotes self-fulfilment, focus on self and a right to follow your dreams and desires. Jesus teaches self-denial.

Does this attitude come easy to you? You are not alone. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit daily, it isn’t us living but Christ living in and through us.

Also, Jesus never said that following him would be easy. Instead, he asks us to pick up our cross daily. What is your cross? Jesus carried a gruesome, heavy cross up a hill to his death. Through it, he freed us from condemnation forever and restored us to the Father.

The way of Jesus is full of obstacles and hardship, but Christ also promises to walk with us and carry our burden, our crosses, with and for us if we come to him with them. 1 Peter 5:7 reminds us to ‘cast all our anxiety [burdens] on him, because he cares for us’.

Jesus wants us to follow him. Let’s walk with him along the path of life. What is your greatest joy in following Jesus? Tell him in prayer now.

***Holy Jesus, my greatest joy in following you is …  To walk the road with you isn’t easy, but please strengthen and guide me every day as I long to follow you. Give me courage to deny myself and put my focus on you and what you want me to do in a situation. Please help me carry my burdens when they seem too hard to bear. I know you are always with me. You are the Good Shepherd who comforts and sustains me forever. In your precious name I pray. Amen.***

Thursday 14 May 2020

**Some things never change**

by Darren Pope

**‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8).**

**Read Hebrews 13:1–8**

Tried out a new takeaway cafe? Read a new author? Found a new series to binge watch on Netflix? Bought new shoes online or changed your mobile plan? All these changes are deliberate choices, self-motivated and informed by our emotions, thoughts, research and desired outcomes. Is this normal? On their own, each one is a small change, and not unsettling.

Has time in ‘Iso’ helped you discover something new? How has it shaped your new and emerging normal?

But is everything changing?

No! It is in our nature to question every aspect of life, especially our faith. It’s actually a healthy thing to do this; it helps us to continue exploring and growing in Christ. The gospel assures us that no matter how often we turn our back, doubt or walk away, our loving and living Lord keeps coming to us through the free gift of his love, mercy and grace. As we change, God is right by our side, walking each step with us. He listens. He forgives. He loves. We can lean into God and rest in his comforting embrace.

Social distancing does not mean spiritual distancing. Jesus is the same, yesterday and today and forever. He is always with us, and his faithfulness to us never changes.

***Lord of life, thank you for walking each step of our journey with us today. Help us to rest in your loving embrace, to live in your hope, and to trust in you. Amen.***

Friday 15 May 2020

**Two lambs**

by Linda Macqueen

**‘I will carry you’ (Isaiah 46:4b).**

Read Isaiah 46:4b

Forgive me the indulgence of writing this devotion on my birthday. On this particular birthday, which I suppose is a ‘maturity milestone’ (it ends in a zero), I wanted to share with you my favourite scripture of all time.

*I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age.
I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you … and save you*(Isaiah 46:3-4 NLT).

To understand why this is my all-time favourite, you need to know something about me. I’m not who you think I am. I’m not that person with the trusting childlike faith, or the one who recites the Creed every Sunday without ever a blink of doubt, or the one who’s always bubbling over with the joy of their salvation. I’m not that person. I’m a questioner. I’m an interrogator. I’m a wrestler with God.

For much of my life, immersed in a church of faith-overflowing family and friends, I was sure all my questions and doubts condemned me to hell.

Then, in the middle of the day I have a dream. There is a shepherd and twin newborn lambs on a bank of a fast-flowing stream. The mature sheep have crossed over it, but the newborns are too small. The shepherd will carry them across, one at a time. He picks up the first lamb and right away it snuggles into the crook of his arm and gets comfy. He carries the dozing lamb across the stream and reunites it with its mother. He returns for the other lamb, wild-eyed and baa-ing its head off, terrified of what is going to happen. The shepherd picks it up and wades across the stream, as the lamb bucks and bleats and struggles to leap out of its saviour’s arms. The shepherd merely tightens his grip and holds the frightened lamb close to his heart. He puts it down on the bank next to its calm, trusting twin.

My arrival safe to the shore has nothing to do with the measure of trust I have in the Shepherd. It has everything to do with the Shepherd’s strength. And his relentless love for me.

I am carried.

***Jesus, my Good Shepherd, when I am strong and when I am not, thank you for carrying me. When I can trust in you and when I cannot, thank you for carrying me. When I can cling to you and when I cannot, thank you for carrying me. Amen.***

Saturday 16 May 2020

**Shoulds: self-imposed stress**

by Jane Mueller

**‘Martha, Martha … you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one’ (Luke 10:41,42a).**

Read Luke 10:38–42

Are you a victim of shoulds? I should tidy the garage. I should top dress the lawn. I should set up a better email filing system. I should spend less on shoes. I should eat a healthier diet. I should do more exercise. I should sleep more. I should keep up with the news. I should watch less news.

If you answered yes, you’re not alone.

In Numbers 11, Moses was a victim of shoulds. ‘These people are wailing and demanding meat. I should take responsibility for their needs.’ This was an emotional burden God never asked Moses to bear.

Martha was a victim of shoulds. ‘I invited Jesus into my home. I should make a fuss and prepare dinner.’ Martha was distracted and worked up by things she deemed important, which took her focus away from Jesus.

We are easily hung up on trivial matters and insert ourselves into situations that are none of our business. We try fixing problems that are not our responsibility, and we adopt emotional burdens that are not intended to be ours.

When we do this, we are acting as though we know how to run the world better than God himself. We find ourselves undertaking meaningless activity that serves no eternal purpose. We essentially put God on hold, in order to contend with self-imposed stresses.

But God created us as human beings, not human doings. He is a God of grace. He gives us peace, he gives us rest. He doesn’t give us shoulds. God’s burden is light and it’s there for the taking if we want it. We need only to be still.

***God of peace, rest and stillness; forgive me when I insert myself into situations that take my focus away from you. Forgive me when I adopt unnecessary stresses, claiming they are in your name. Help me to recalibrate. Show me how to sit quietly in your presence and to surrender to your will alone. Amen.***

Sunday 17 May 2020

**A story of humility**

by Pastor Chris Mann

### Jesus … being in very nature God … humbled himself (Philippians 2:5,6,8).

Read Philippians 2:5–11

*In the midst of this Coronavirus pandemic there are lots of stories of pain, sorrow and heartbreak. But in the midst of the stories of pain are great stories – stories of healing, hope, and love. Now that we are on the other side of Easter, we can look back and see some of the stories that we may have skipped over in the crucifixion of Jesus. And because he lives in us, his story becomes our story.*

Today’s story is about Jesus’ humility.

Often humility is understood as not thinking much of ourselves. That may be true, but humility must be bigger than this. After all, Jesus is our example of humility, and yet he made huge claims about himself, such as: ‘I and the Father are one’ (John 10:30), and ‘Something greater than Solomon is here’ (Matt 12:42).

Rather than declaring ourselves worthless or useless, humility is far more about taking who we are and what we have and using it to make things better for others.

We see this in Jesus, being sinless, and going to the cross, for our sake. Jesus knows that he is someone, knows he is the Son of God – but goes and humbles himself.

Today, let’s be a part of Jesus’ movement of humility – not people who think nothing of themselves, but people who use who they are and what they have for the sake of others. Let’s have a fresh wave of humility serve our community during this time. Let stories be told not of how we are nothing, but of how we used who we are as children of God and what we have as people blessed by God to serve others.

***Heavenly Father, help us to be humble. Help us to see that you have made us your children, and are precious in your sight. Help us to take who we are, and what you have given us, and place it in service of others. Amen.***