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**Sunday 17 March 2024 to**

**Sunday 24 March 2024**

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Sunday 17 March 2024

**Seeds and new life**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***… a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to make many seeds (John 12:24).***

Read [John 12:20–33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+12%3A20-33&version=NRSVUE)

I’m a gardener. I have lots of packets of seeds. Some are beyond their use-by date, but most are still viable. If I leave them in the packet, they are of no use to me or anyone else. But if I plant them in the ground, invariably, they produce ... flowers, vegetables and even trees.

Jesus paints an interesting picture when he talks about his death. He compares himself to a grain of wheat – a seed if you like. I once read about someone who asked: What if Jesus had not risen but had stayed dead? It is a hypothetical question because there are so many eyewitness accounts of him alive again, both in the Bible and historians of his time.

But if Jesus had not come back to life … well, life would not have the meaning it does. We’d still be living under the law, trying to please God and win his favour. We wouldn’t know about grace nor understand it. Forgiveness would be even harder to grasp and practice than it is now! But like a grain of wheat that dies and then brings forth many seeds, so Jesus’ death led to resurrection, with many positive results … many seeds being sown. Life and hope and peace for each one of us.

When I plant a seed and it sprouts, it is always a miracle to me; it reminds me of resurrection. How did that tiny seed become a carrot, a zucchini, a tomato? But it did, and we can enjoy the produce. If I let the plant grow long enough, it will produce many seeds. (In fact, expert gardeners will tell you the best plants are the self-sown ones!)

Each time I see a new plant, it reminds me of resurrection, possibility, hope and future. When we die, who knows what will truly happen? But it seems to me we will be like Jesus; we will come to life again, knowing life, hope and peace. It will be a miracle. It will be a resurrection. We will be children of light (John 12:36).

***Creator God, Master Gardener, help us to die to ourselves and have new life in you. Through Christ, the one who was lifted up for us! Amen.***

*In the early months of the year, Peter is often out in the garden, watering, picking and pruning – chasing the birds away from his fruit! Or he is indoors – stewing, drying, preserving. Peter also enjoys walking his dog, riding his bike, reading and spending time with his family. To keep out of mischief, Peter says he is currently teaching himself to play the piano and is writing a paraphrase of each of the Psalms – now up to Psalm 56.*

Monday 18 March 2024

**What has God done for you?**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***Tell people how much God has done for you (Luke 8:39a).***

Read [Luke 8:26–39](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8%3A26-39&version=NRSVUE)

Don’t know about you, but I’m not really good at telling people, one on one, about my faith. But, then, this is not what Jesus tells the healed man to do. Rather, it is simply: tell people how much God has done for you.

Obviously, the man in this parable has an amazing tale to tell. Having demons cast out, regaining his right mind. I think it’s fair to presume most of us don’t have a story to tell like that. But the thing is, each of us does have a story. A sad truth is that in our church, and most churches, we’ve done a good job of disempowering anyone except the ordained from telling what God has done for them.

Yet God has done something(s) for each one of us. Each of us is unique, has lived our own lives, and has our own story. What is yours? For a few, it might be as amazing and life-changing as the man healed from demons. For many, if not most of us, we might consider our story quite mundane. We’ve lived an ordinary life.

What has God done for me? Apart from the obvious, correct answer, that is! Even if your life is mundane, God is at work in you – and in your life. Most often, God works in ordinary ways; will we stop and see that? Will we stop and listen for the Spirit moving among us? Will we experience Jesus present in us and our neighbour? Think about that for a moment, and then consider how you can tell what God has done for you.

Some of you will use words. Others will ‘tell’ by the way they live their lives. Still, others will share what God has done by sharing their joy at a brilliant sunset or sunrise.

We’ve all been healed; we’ve all been made new. We each have a God story to share. Be brave and try to do that today in the way that works for you.

***Generous Healer, heal me! Open my eyes and ears to what you have done. Help me discover the best way to share what you have done for me. Amen.***

Tuesday 19 March 2024

**Don’t tell anyone!**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened (John 8:56b).***

Read [Luke 8:40–56](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8%3A40-56&version=NRSVUE)

Hang on a minute! Confused yet? Yesterday, we were encouraged to tell people how much God has done for us. Today, don’t tell anyone what happened! What does Jesus want of us?

If you read the whole passage today, it becomes even more confusing: verse 40 says a crowd welcomed him; verse 47 says all the people listened; verse 52 says all the people were crying; verse 53 says the people knew the girl was dead. Then Jesus restores her to life … albeit with only the father, mother, Peter, James and John present. And then Jesus says, don’t tell anyone!

What are her parents to do? Their daughter is alive again. Made whole. A feast is called for, surely! But Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what happened. Mmm! (And just to complicate things more, in tomorrow’s reading, Jesus sends out his disciples, who ‘preach the good news and heal people everywhere’ Luke 9:6).

I suspect this instruction (don’t tell anyone) has to do with timing and circumstance. While it is certainly important to share what God has done for you, there is a time and place. You can’t just go up to anyone and ask them to read the Bible with you; you can’t stand up in your workplace or student lecture and suddenly proclaim the gospel. The setting, situation and circumstances are important. People need to be ready to hear, listen and have their life changed.

Remember, Jairus (the father) was a leader of the synagogue. The leaders of the synagogues were some of the most outspoken of Jesus’ opponents. They wanted him stopped; they wanted him killed. But the time was not yet. (In Luke 22, it is the leading priest and older Jewish leaders who come with Judas to arrest Jesus.)

Jairus perhaps needed protection from himself. Imagine what might have happened if he had rushed off to the other leaders with this wonderful news that Jesus could raise people! Better for the moment to rejoice with those who were there and enjoy family time.

What is God’s timing for you? Is it the moment to share what God has done for you, or is it the moment to not tell anyone? Either way, the Holy Spirit is with you, prompting you to speak or stay silent.

***Holy Spirit of God, Comforter, Companion, give us discernment to know the right time. Allow us to know when to keep our mouths shut and when to praise you as loudly as we can. Thank you for your timing in our lives. Amen.***

Wednesday 20 March 2024

**Who do you say I am?**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***Who do you say I am? (Luke 9:20a)***

Read [Luke 9:1–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9%3A1-20&version=NRSVUE)

The disciples were an interesting lot! They take Jesus at his word and heal people everywhere (verse 6); they return and tell Jesus everything they have done (verse 10), presumably excitedly; then, after Jesus welcomes all the people who found him, they tell Jesus to send the people away (verse 12). And finally, even though they had been performing miracles, when Jesus encourages them to share the sparse amount of food they have, they say we don’t have enough!

Faith to move mountains! Hardly any faith at all!

Are you like that? Am I? Very often, if not always. Sometimes, I think I can change the world with God’s help. Other times, what is happening in the world drives me to despair. I suspect you may have mountain-top – and then valley experiences – as well.

What if Jesus asks you: Who do you say I am? What would your answer be? Would you answer correctly, as Peter did (but not really understanding what your answer means)?

In reality, that’s life. We can confess Jesus in our own words or using the creeds of the church. We can even mean the words sincerely. But then life happens, and we contradict our words with our actions. Or our words lose meaning as we struggle with life’s complexities.

The good thing is Jesus’ words are consistent and true. They are full of love and compassion and grace and forgiveness. They are backed up by the way he lived, treated all people with love, died and then rose again.

Jesus is the one who lived, died and rose again so that even if my actions don’t back up my words of confession, he allows me to start again. He is indeed the Christ. Because of that, you – and I – have life.

***Jesus, you are the Christ. Help me to live that out in all I say and do. Amen.***

Thursday 21 March 2024

**To tell, or not to tell? That is the question!**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***Jesus warned them not to tell anyone (Luke 9:21).***

Read [Luke 9:21–43a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9%3A21-43a&version=NRSVUE)

This yo-yo set of instructions from Jesus continues. Perhaps not surprisingly, when we read verse 33, Peter did not know what he was talking about. (Don’t tell me God hasn't got a sense of humour.)

Someone once told me that God was telling them to do this, to do that. My response (not the most subtle one) was to say, ‘It seems to me that God has been saying some crazy things lately!’

So, how do we work with these conflicting instructions from Jesus? How do we manage the words in verse 35: ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to him!’? A good starting point might be to begin listening to Jesus. To examine his life. To look at how he lived and treated people. To recognise him as truly human and truly divine.

Peter didn’t know what he was talking about because he got caught up in the moment. That can happen to us, too. Sometimes, when wonderful (or not-so-wonderful) things happen, we just want to blurt it out. But, sometimes, it is probably wise to wait, reflect, seek feedback and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. That would seem to fit with the instruction: don’t tell anyone.

Then, when things begin to make sense, when we have looked through the eyes of Jesus and listened to him, it might be time to start telling. Note: this doesn’t mean asking, ‘What would Jesus do?’ And then attempting to do that; instead, it means walking with Jesus daily, spending time listening, seeking discernment from the Holy Spirit and trusted (and honest) friends, and considering the impact on others.

To tell, or not to tell? There is no right answer. But there is prayer, waiting, discernment and guidance from the Holy Spirit. And hopefully, a sense of peace, whether you speak or stay silent.

***Jesus, help me to walk daily with you, be patient, listen carefully, and, at the appropriate time, speak words of grace, compassion, peace and hope. Amen.***

Friday 22 March 2024

**God at work**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***Whoever is not against you is for you (Luke 9:50b).***

Read [Luke 9:43b–62](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9%3A43b-62&version=NRSVUE)

I grew up long enough ago to be taught our church had the truth! Anyone else was a heretic. They would do well to learn our truth!

Nowadays, we live in a world where Pilate’s question, ‘What is truth?’, has so many answers that it’s hard to know where to begin. So how do we know what is truth? The old certainty has been challenged and changed in many situations. While we might believe our pastors, bishops and church teachings – although there is nothing wrong with questioning them – most people now are more open to what other churches (even religions in some cases) teach and believe.

I am not sure Jesus was thinking of the above situation when he said to his disciples, ‘Don’t stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you’. However, he was talking about a situation where the disciples wanted exclusivity. They had been performing miracles. It probably made them feel good and a little bit proud (see verse 46). We don’t want anyone else to do what we can do!

Jesus is clear. That is not the way of God. God can – and does – work through whomever he chooses. Consider the honour role of the Old Testament: murderers, liars, cheats … or think about the disciples themselves: fishermen, tax collectors, betrayers.

And God continues to work through whom and what he chooses. When I worked in a Lutheran school, I was known in my chapel devotions for discussing nature and creation. For me, that was the connecting point with the students. Virtually all of them went camping, fishing or swimming in their holidays. Many (particularly those who did not attend church) encountered God at these times. The Holy Spirit was at work in God’s wonderful creation, opening their hearts and minds to the love of God.

God still continues to work through whom he chooses. Perhaps that is you. Perhaps that is someone else with whom you surprisingly encounter the God of compassion and grace. Be open to God’s work in your life.

***We thank you, creative God, for the many ways you reveal yourself. Give us discernment, and keep our hearts and minds open to the movements of your Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Saturday 23 March 2024

**Let us rejoice**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! (Psalm 118:24)***

Read [Psalm 118:1,2,19–29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+118%3A1%2C2%2C19-29&version=NRSVUE)

My apologies to those of you who can’t get the old spiritual song out of your head! But what a great verse. This is the day the Lord has made. If you read verse 22 and recall how it is used in the New Testament by Jesus (Matthew 21, Mark 12, Luke 20) and Peter (Acts 4), there is great reason to rejoice. Jesus is the cornerstone of our life, our faith, our hope. What a great day!

But the day the Lord has made is not limited to one moment in time. Each day is a gift from our loving, creator God. Each morning, mercies are new (Lamentations 3). Each sunset, a kaleidoscope of colours reminds us of the breadth and depth of God’s love. Each (new) day reminds us that God’s love continues forever (a refrain repeated five times in this psalm, at the beginning and the end!).

When some people get to my age, they say they are just grateful to wake up each morning. Surely, each of us is called to be grateful when we wake up each morning. Another gift. Another opportunity to live in grace. Another opportunity to receive mercy.

If we begin each day this way, maybe it will flow into the whole day. Living the day as a gift, in grace, with mercy, we can then be glad each day and share our gladness through our actions and words. We can allow the grace and mercy that springboards our day to flow into the lives of those we encounter. As we are gifted with life each day, we can gift life to those we meet.

Thank the Lord because he is good. His love continues forever (verse 29). This is indeed the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

***Loving Creator God, thank you for the gift of life each and every day. Let us live our lives rejoicing in the life you gift us. Amen.***

Sunday 24 March 2024

**I will never disown you**

by Dianne Eckermann

***But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you’. And all the others said the same (Mark 14:31).***

Read [Mark 14:1 – 15:47](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+14%3A1-15%3A47&version=NRSVUE)

Today’s lengthy reading, starting with a woman anointing Jesus and ending with his burial, includes many significant events in the last hours of Jesus’ life on earth. The opening verses of chapter 14 sound ominous as Mark describes the high priests stealthily plotting the best time to arrest Jesus. Even while Jesus and his disciples plan the Passover feast, we learn that Judas has visited the high priests, who were delighted to financially reward Judas for betraying Jesus. During the Passover, Jesus’ last meal with the disciples, he dramatically reveals his knowledge of this betrayal and his betrayer.

Mark relentlessly unfolds the history of the arrest, trial, humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus. And while Mark’s account begins with Jesus in the presence of his disciples, the disciples quickly disappear from the story, leaving Jesus alone and unsupported throughout his ordeal. Three times, Peter says he will not disown Jesus. All of the other followers say the same but, one by one, they fall away from Jesus. One follower is so afraid when Jesus is arrested that he runs away naked, leaving his linen gown behind. Judas places more importance on money than his relationship with Jesus. Peter, with an instinct for self-preservation, denies any knowledge of his Lord. The speed with which Jesus is left alone with his persecutors, who want nothing less than his death, is horrifying.

However, in our human hearts, we understand why the disciples act as they do, even though their actions may horrify us. We are also Jesus’ disciples. We are Peter. We are even Judas. Just like the followers of Jesus, those people who knew him best but still betrayed, denied and deserted him, we are quite capable of putting ourselves first. We, like the disciples, are truly human. We also act out of fear – or greed, shame or self-interest – even though this is not how we want to act. Jesus understood when he said, ‘The spirit is willing, but the body is weak’ (Mark 14:38). His great sacrifice is that because of his great love, he died to atone for all of us, despite our weaknesses.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and compassion shown through the death of Jesus, a sacrifice for all. Forgive us for our fear and uncertainty, and give us faith in your everlasting love. Amen.***

*Dianne has served in Lutheran education as a teacher, school leader and system leader at Lutheran Education Australia. Now retired from full-time work, she continues to volunteer on several committees and as a school board member. She lives in the Adelaide Hills with her husband, Robert, and is in strong demand as a babysitter for her three grandchildren.*