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**Sunday 17 May to Sunday 24 May**

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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.***

Monday 18 May 2020

**A story of godly responses to authority**

by Pastor Chris Mann

**‘Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above … From then on Pilate tried to set Jesus free”’ (John 19:11a,12a).**

Read John 19:1–16

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One of the stories we read in the crucifixion is how Jesus responds to those in authority.

There appear to be sharp contrasts in how Jesus responds to different leaders – especially between the religious leaders and Pilate – which at different times in history and different parts of society is used to justify some good choices, and some not-so-good choices.

But one thing is clear: Jesus understands that authority is given by God (John 19:11) and that it is to be used for the sake of people, and Jesus submits to decisions that harm him, but serve others.

It reminds me to be mindful of wisely submitting to the decisions of others in authority over me, even when I don’t like their choices. It also reminds me to use the authority and influence I have in a range of spheres to always put the needs of others first. And finally, it reminds me that sometimes people use authority poorly, and as followers of Jesus, we have a duty to pray and seek God’s guidance in how to respond.

At the end of this time, may the story be told of you and me responding well to authority, in a godly way, for the good of people.

***Heavenly Father, help leaders who have faith in Jesus follow his example. Give them wisdom, and help them to make choices that benefit others. And help us to respond well. Amen.***

Tuesday 19 May 2020

**A story of how people helped us**

by Pastor Chris Mann

**‘As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus' (Luke 23:26).**

Read Luke 23:23–27

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One of the most amazing stories I see in the crucifixion of Jesus is his receiving of human help on his way to the cross.

Simon of Cyrene is seized by the soldiers and helps Jesus carry his cross.

It reminds me: if Jesus is willing to accept and receive help from others – indeed, dare I say it, even needs help to get to where he needs to go – then I also need the help of others to get where I need to go. I can’t make it on my own. I need the people God has placed around me, even perhaps people from the crowd, to help me.

May the stories we tell during and after this time include stories of people who helped us make it through to the other side.

***Heavenly Father, please send people to help me. Please also send me to help others. Together, may we get where we need to go. Amen.***

Wednesday 20 May 2020

**A story of surprising freedom and grace**

by Pastor Chris Mann

**‘So Pilate … released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder’ (Luke 23:24a,25a).**

Read Luke 23:13–25

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One of the stories we read in the crucifixion is the story of the last-minute reprieve of Barabbas.

It is amazing how Barabbas gets to go free. He hasn’t done anything to deserve going free. He just happens to be there. He just happens to get caught up in the life of Jesus. We have no knowledge of his repentance, or his gratitude. We don’t hear the next steps in his story. The story is simply there.

Some of us are less affected than others during this time. We are all affected to a degree, yes. And some of you reading this will be experiencing something quite devastating, and for you, we pray.

But others of us have stories of surprising grace, unexpected reprieves, suffering that should have happened, but didn’t. We, of course, all have this story in Jesus taking our place on the cross.

Let us tell those stories, and then let us build on them with stories of thankfulness, gratitude, worship, and service.

Let’s pray.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for the last-minute reprieve of Barabbas. Thank you that you have also saved us by your death and resurrection, and the giving of faith. Help us to be thankful for all reprieves, and help us to live a new story. Amen.***

Thursday 21 May 2020

**A story of embrace instead of judgement**

by Pastor Chris Mann

**‘Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a).**

Read Luke 23:32–37

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Among the hardest stories I find to replicate in my own life is the story of Jesus forgiving those who executed him in Luke 23:34.

In my socially isolated state, I’ve become (in my own mind) a world-renowned expert on pandemics, infections, social distancing, stimulus packages, governmental policy and more. I have a judgement for everyone and everything, and anyone who doesn’t make choices in line with my thinking is in line for condemnation – especially those on the clear wrong side of government directions who have spread the virus.

You may be like me, too, perhaps.

It’s why we need Jesus' help to forgive others, to show grace, when everything we see would indicate that judgement is warranted.

I pray that we are one day able to tell the story of forgiving others who have done the wrong thing during this time – if for no other reason than it will help all of us be more aware of the amazing forgiveness Jesus grants us. The truth is, I so often do not know what I am doing too, and need to trust Jesus with my life.

May the story of grace instead of judgement be the story we tell in, through and after this time.

***Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus grants forgiveness so radical that it causes us discomfort. Help us to both receive it, and grant it, with his help. Amen.***

Friday 22 May 2020

**A story of changing who we embrace into our life and community**

by Pastor Chris Mann

**‘Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).**

Read Luke 23:32,39–43

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One of the stories I think we all struggle to live out is the story of Jesus embracing a relationship with the criminal on the cross.

You will remember that Jesus has one criminal mock him, and the other defends Jesus. In response to the criminal’s request to be remembered, Jesus declares that they will be together in paradise.

Jesus embraces the life of the criminal in two senses: the first, Jesus joins him in the same earthly consequence; the second, Jesus has the criminal join him in paradise.

Changing times give us a great opportunity to embrace the changes Jesus leads us to. One of the changes Jesus would always have us make is to embrace people who are so different that we wouldn’t embrace them, without the love of Jesus.

Let’s embrace who Jesus wants to embrace during this time, those beyond our normal church or social groups.

Let the story be told of how every person and every congregation embraced people who were not normally part of their lives and part of their community. Let the stories be of us joining them in their life, so that they could join us in paradise.

***Heavenly Father, help us to embrace those different to us, those we wouldn’t normally associate with, and help us to see that you are calling us to join them, and them to join us. Amen.***

Saturday 23 May 2020

**A story of trust**

by Pastor Chris Mann

**‘Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last’ (Luke 23:46).**

Read Luke 23:44–49

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The biggest story we see is Jesus’ story of trust in his father in heaven. Even though he feels abandoned, he expresses trust that he has not been abandoned, seen as he calls out ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’.

Jesus trusts that his death is not the end of his story.

And the death and the pain and the sorrow and the heartache that we experience is also not the end of our story.

And so our story both in this time, and through this time, can be a story of trust – trust that God is working, trust that God is still with us, and trust that we can commit our lives and our world to our father in heaven, and follow his path. And we can trust that even if we do meet death in this time, that it is not the end of our story, nor is it the end of God bringing life to the world.

May our stories be stories of trust, knowing that Jesus trusted his father, and that same trust lives in us.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus, and for his trust in you. Help us to live in the same trust. Amen.***

Sunday 24 May 2020

**Abundant living**

by Jane Mueller

**'God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work' (2 Corinthians 9:8).**

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–15

Where doubt exists, faith does not. And without faith, the abundant blessings of God become hard to see and grasp.

God doesn’t say, ‘I’ll occasionally fight for you’, ‘You’ll probably prosper’, ‘My favour is intermittent’, ‘I’ll consider renewing your mind and strength’ or ‘Today you might be in paradise with me’. Our God doesn’t mince words. Rather, he speaks with authority, clarity and promise.

Sometimes we operate from a mindset of doubt, deficiency or fear. When we break free from this and instead adopt a mindset of expectation, abundance and optimism, our eyes are opened to God’s overflowing vastness, limitless provision and unspeakable joy. Difficulties and obstacles crumble and vanish when we are sure of the things we hope for and certain of the things we cannot see.

Faith doesn’t ignore reality. Quite the opposite, faith knows we will suffer and experience difficult challenges. But faith also knows Jesus has overcome the grave and defeated the world. Faith transports us to a new reality – one that walks in step with Jesus where perfect love drives out fear, making way for abundant living.

A mindset of expectation, abundance and optimism is not reserved for the most theologically astute. It’s a mindset that exists for all. So how can you embrace it? Live in thankfulness, knowing the peace of God guards your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Live in love, knowing that when you live in love, you live in God, and God lives in you. Live in grace, knowing you are alive in Christ and have been saved through faith. Live in fullness, knowing Jesus came so that you would have life and have it in abundance.

And rest assured you need not do any of this under your own strength. God works within you by the power of his Spirit.

***God Almighty: all things originate with you and we know you work within us to bring them to fruition. All glory be yours.
Jesus, Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End: you are our all-sufficient, abundant Lord who will not fail to complete the good work you have begun in us. We give you thanks and praise.
Holy Spirit: breathe over us and inspire us to live by faith and not by sight. We rest in your advocacy. Amen.***