****

**Sunday 21 August 2022 to Sunday 28 August 2022**

****

Sunday 21 August 2022

# I have come to set the captives free

by Craig Heidenreich

**When Jesus saw her, he called her over (Luke 13:12a).**

Read Luke 13:10–17

Have you ever dealt with a chronic problem like the poor woman in this passage – 18 years bent double? Long-term suffering is one of the hardest tests of our character, and we can even start to doubt whether God is listening at all. Sometimes our suffering is internal and does not even show on the outside.

What a comfort to read in verse 12 of this passage that ‘Jesus saw her and called her over’. Even when we do not know it, our Lord is watching over us for good.

Jesus began his earthly ministry, declaring, ‘I have come to set the captives free’, and this is certainly demonstrated in this story. How amazing it must have been to see the woman straightening up, and what a ‘walking testimony’ she would have been to the villagers in the days that followed.

However, verse 14 says there was an indignant synagogue official. It is astonishing that in the midst of all the joy that day, there was pushback from someone. Humans can really miss it sometimes, and there is a warning here for us to not get so invested in the system that we miss when the Holy Spirit moves.

The leader of the meeting wanted things to be orderly with the focus on the plan for the day. When Jesus showed up, he directed the attention to a woman in need (an insignificant woman). The leader had an idea of the letter of the law, while Jesus demonstrated the spirit of the law, saying, ‘should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’

Let us make sure that all our religious activities and forms serve the needs of people and do not exist as an end to themselves.

***Lord Jesus, thank you for showing compassion to this poor woman, and thank you that we can dare to hope that you ‘see’ us as well. Help us, Lord, to ‘straighten up’, be free of Satan’s influence and show compassion to others. Amen.***

*Craig enjoys making friends with people from other countries and trying to learn a few words of greeting in their languages. He says it’s fun to see the joy on a person’s face to hear their mother tongue. When he has some spare time, he is happy renovating the home he recently purchased in Kapunda, South Australia.*

Monday 22 August 2022

# The joy of the Lord

by Craig Heidenreich

**This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10b).**

Read Nehemiah 8:1–3,5–12

Our passage today describes a large gathering of the people who came together to listen to the reading of the law.

Nehemiah keeps repeating throughout this passage that all the people were gathered together. This would have numbered thousands.

Have you ever been part of a gathering of thousands of Christians together?

Recently the results of the 2021 Australian census were released, and 43.9% of the Australian population declared as Christian. The actual number is 11,311,540 people. For some reason, I began imagining all these people gathered in one place. The number of Christians in Australia is more than the combined populations of Sydney and Melbourne. If we all gathered, it would fill the Melbourne Cricket Ground 110 times over.

That is a heavenly-sized multitude, and it is worth pondering if you think Christians cannot have an impact anymore.

Getting back to our passage from Nehemiah. There is a sense (as we read) that the people had not heard the law for a long time, and what they heard was convicting. In fact, they were so convicted that they started to weep.

The leaders responded so graciously by reminding the people that the Lord was merciful and that he had heard their cry. Here we read the well-known words, ‘Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength’.

**We thank you, Father, that you are gracious and want to be close to us! You sent Jesus to take our punishment and turn our mourning into joy. Lord, help us show it on our faces today. Amen.**

Tuesday 23 August 2022

# It is time that the nations honour Jesus

by Craig Heidenreich

**And they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles (Isaiah 66:19b).**

Read Isaiah 66:18–23

I suspect that most of us reading this today are not Jews. That means you are numbered (with me) among the Gentiles referred to in this passage.

The Lord uses Isaiah to open up some new thinking for the Israelites and begin shifting their focus to his greater purpose – to ‘win the Gentiles’. God had spoken to Abraham many centuries before, saying, ‘all the nations will be blessed through you’, but the Israelites had become habitually focused on themselves.

Thank God for the prophetic insight given to Isaiah and for men like Paul who understood that the Jews were God’s chosen people – to be priests to the nations, not just to themselves.

Most of us are old enough to have seen a dramatic shift in the ethnic mix of Australia and New Zealand over the last few decades. Are we seeing an outworking of these verses in Isaiah? Are we in a time when God is choosing to declare his glory among the Gentiles?

Last time I checked, God uses his people to declare his glory!

In Exodus 33, Moses asked the Lord, ‘show me your glory’, and he responded by saying, ‘I myself will make all my “goodness” pass before you’.

Perhaps we are to show the goodness of God to newcomers in our midst so that they get to see his glory. Surely the gospel is good news and unique among the messages of the world religions. People should have the opportunity to taste it.

**Lord, help me lift my eyes above my own situation and show your goodness to others who have come from afar. May we come to your holy mountain together. Amen.**

Wednesday 24 August 2022

# Putting on a heart of compassion

by Craig Heidenreich

**I desire mercy, not sacrifice (Matthew 12:7).**

Read Matthew 12:1–13

In this passage from Matthew, we return to the theme of our Sunday devotion from Luke when Jesus healed the woman who was bent over for 18 years. This time, Jesus is healing a man’s arm, but the things he says to correct the people are quite similar.

It is interesting to note that on seven different occasions, Jesus repeated this action on the Sabbath. I think he was making a point, don’t you?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus kept acting this way on the Sabbath?

The Sabbath for Jews was similar to our Sunday – a day we want to keep holy and act suitably religious. Like the Jews before us, it is possible to lose sight of the real goal here.

Jesus wanted to restore a certain attitude to the ‘keeping of the Sabbath’, and we find it in verse seven, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’.

Effectively Jesus is teaching us to please God by showing mercy, not by looking pious. I suppose another way to describe ‘mercy’ is to show kindness to those who may not deserve it.

A final thought worth adding here is that our whole life is to be a Sabbath rest. This means that we do not act this way just on Sunday but always. We express ‘mercy’ (kindness) as part of our worship daily. As we step into this attitude, the Lord helps us.

**We pray, Lord, that you would open our eyes to your ways. You are a God of compassion and slow to anger. May we lay aside the outer structures of religion and be people who love others. Amen.**

Thursday 25 August 2022

# Spur each other on!

by Craig Heidenreich

**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).**

Read Hebrews 10:19–25

Let’s reflect for a bit on verse 24 today: ‘spurring one another on to love and good deeds’.

We Lutherans are somewhat reluctant to talk about good deeds because of the potential for self-righteousness. We are the people of grace after all, and we don’t much like ‘those boastful ones’ who draw attention to themselves.

This can mean we rarely talk about the actions that flow because we love Jesus. We miss out on the encouragement of hearing about the good things happening in our midst.

When someone obeys the law, they strive in various ways to do good and earn their own salvation. This is the pattern that underpins every world religion other than Christianity.

Christianity is unique in that we live under the ‘good news’ – Jesus intervened and saved us (when we were lost). This is equivalent to someone hopelessly in debt finding out that another person has paid it all.

Deep gratitude is the appropriate response to grace! Our lives are bought with a price, and we just want to walk with Jesus and be like him.

Jesus lived a life full of ‘love and good deeds’, and as he lives in us, the same deeds can flow. Perhaps getting this right depends on where we are focusing.

If our eyes are on ourselves, and we find ourselves in the ‘midst of a good deed’, we become like Little Jack Horner in the nursery rhyme, thinking, ‘what a good boy [or girl] am I’. When our eyes are on Jesus, we are just amazed that he includes us in the good he is doing. We might be involved, but it feels like it is ‘all him’, and we just had the privilege of joining in.

The writer to the Hebrews points out how much we need encouragement. We are part of a body capable (in Jesus) of many sorts of good deeds. We are to encourage one another to all be our best reflection of him.

**We thank you, Lord, for settling the big question of our salvation and taking away the stress of trying to be righteous in ourselves. You are so wonderful, Lord – help us walk closely with you today and hear your prompt when we are to act. Amen.**

Friday 26 August 2022

# Jesus in his glory

by Craig Heidenreich

**Do not be afraid (Revelation 1:17b).**

Read Revelation 1:9–20

I often avoid reading from the Book of Revelation because I find all the apocalyptic imagery somewhat confronting. Having said that, there are amazing sections in this book – today’s passage is a vision of the Risen Lord in all his power and glory.

Who could stand before those blazing eyes and that mighty sword coming from his mouth? John’s response was to fall to the ground.

Whenever the Lord or an angel appears to someone in Scripture, they usually start with the words ‘fear not’ – and with good reason.

Thankfully, as we ponder this description of our Lord in his fearsome glory, we remember that Jesus loves us and has washed us in his own blood.

As we watch the daily news reports, it can look like humans are running things. Some wealthy billionaire seems so powerful, or a dictator starts a war that causes untold misery. The truth is that everything has been placed under our Lord’s feet, and he is ruling over the nations.

Interestingly, Jesus directs his attention here to a group of churches he is using to bring his kingdom. The subsequent two chapters have the seven letters that Jesus dictates to John. As we read these letters, we can well imagine what Jesus would write to us.

Chapter two of Revelation starts with a letter to the church in Ephesus, and this church seems to bear some striking similarities to our Lutheran experience. Let us consider the main points Jesus makes in the letter to the church of Ephesus.

He starts by commending them for their endurance and perseverance and for how they were careful to seek the truth. Paul had launched this church and taught them well. Apparently, the Apostle John was a member, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Timothy. What could go wrong?

‘I have this against you! You have left your “first love” – repent and do the things you did at first.’

Let us learn from the experience of the Ephesian church and remember our love for Jesus.

**Lord, you are a mighty God, and you rule the nations. It is amazing that you love us so much. Help us tune into your heart and obey you today. Amen.**

Saturday 27 August 2022

# Living lives of compassion for the poor

by Craig Heidenreich

**Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous (Psalm 112:4).**

Read Psalm 112

It is comforting to reflect on the promises of this psalm and that the righteous will never be shaken. Hopefully, that has been your experience.

We live in an era when many Christians seek to uphold standards of righteousness in our fallen world. They highlight issues like abortion and euthanasia or sex education for children as moral battlegrounds and attempt to win through politics.

What sort of Christianity does this reveal to the world? Do people experience compassion when in the company of these groups?

This psalm contains three statements I believe describe what it means to be ‘upright’. Verse five says they are ‘generous and lend freely’, and ‘they conduct their affairs with justice’. Then verse nine gives another clue, ‘they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor’.

I believe this psalm describes a righteousness shown in how the person treats the ‘needy’.

I recently heard a politician say that there are about 3000 passages in Scripture on how we treat the poor in our society – implying that this motivated her in her political life.

If we are honest, it is easier to focus on an issue that will not cost us much personally when our focus should be closer to home.

Verse four speaks of light dawning on those who live a ‘gracious and compassionate life’. That is a goal worth pursuing!

**Thank you, Lord, for your daily protection. Thank you for blessing us even when we don’t deserve it. Help us be gracious and compassionate people who freely scatter gifts to the poor – you are our supply. Amen.**

Sunday 28 August 2022

# At the table

by Dianne Eckermann

**For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 14:11).**

Read Luke 14:1,7–14

Throughout his ministry, Jesus dined with many different people in various places. Jesus ate with a tax collector and a Pharisee, as in the reading today. He fed a crowd with a couple of fish and some loaves of bread and dined with his friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He attended wedding feasts and ate more privately with his disciples at the Last Supper.

These settings have one common feature: Jesus uses these mealtimes to teach others. When he went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, we are told that he was carefully watched. Perhaps some of the other guests were interested in seeing where it was that Jesus chose to sit at the table. However, Jesus also observed that guests picked seats of honour at the table. Jesus chose this moment to talk about humility.

Our modern society generally sets little store by where we sit at a dinner table, so we are unlikely to suffer the humiliation of being moved to a less important place. However, Jesus’ words still hold a message for today, encouraging us to not overestimate our own importance but humbly accept who we are, and we know we are beloved children of God.

While Jesus understands the social hierarchy of his time, in the second part of this reading, he encourages his host to consider those in greatest need, the poor or those with disabilities, and invite them to dine. Unlike close friends and relatives, it is unlikely they can return the favour; however, humbly inviting them will provide happiness for those in need as well as their host.

This is exactly how God receives us. We will never be able to repay the grace and mercy offered to us. Humbly and thankfully, we accept.

**Heavenly Father, we humbly thank you for the way in which you know us in all our imperfections yet receive us as your children. Amen.**

Dianne has worked in varying roles in Lutheran schools and is currently Director of Leadership at Lutheran Education Australia. She lives in the Adelaide Hills with her husband Rob, two dogs, and several kangaroos who visit regularly. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, the company of her children and grandchildren and walking along the River Torrens Linear Park Trail.