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**Sunday 22 October 2023 to**

**Sunday 29 October 2023**

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Sunday 22 October 2023

**Integrity**

by Georgie Schuster

***Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no-one, for you do not regard people with partiality (Matthew 22:16).***

[Read Matthew 22:15–22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A15%E2%80%9322&version=NRSV)

Here we go again… Another showdown.

On one side we have disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, intent on ensnaring Jesus with a web of words. On the other, we have Jesus, seeing right through their ploy to the very hearts of those seeking his capture.

And yet, the words spoken as a means to flatter Jesus are not only true, but the way Jesus used to brush ‘the web’ away!

Jesus is indeed a man of uncompromising integrity. He isn’t buffeted by the influence of others when they miss the mark. Jesus’ foundation is truth.

Jesus is secure in his identity as God’s beloved Son. While on earth, he lived in the confines of humanity and obeyed the laws of the land. And yet he never lost sight of the fact that everything belonged (and belongs) to God (Psalm 24:1,2).  Jesus’ eternal perspective kept him grounded.

In a world that at times weaves webs of confusion, we too can stand on truth, secure in our identity in Christ, knowing who we are and who we belong to. Knowing this, what truth from God can you hold on to today that will help you clear away those webs?

***Dear Jesus, you are the way, the truth and the life. There are times when life gets loud and confusing. Help me remember my identity is in you. You are my anchor. In your name I pray, Amen.***

*Georgie lives in Adelaide. She loves getting out into the country to experience God’s creation. She likes taking photos when she can. After teaching for many years, she now enjoys working in a church/ school setting when she still gets to share stories about Jesus with children and families.*

Monday 23 October 2023

**You’ve got it backwards**

by Georgie Schuster

***But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:43,44).***

Read [Mark 10: 32-45](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+10%3A+32-45&version=NRSVUE)

Can you just imagine the feeling in the air when the other 10 disciples heard James and John asking for a couple of the most prestigious positions in heaven? Awkward! How does Jesus deal with the situation? He bursts the bubble of tension by providing a perspective that turns their whole way of thinking upside down!

It is difficult to comprehend that God himself (Jesus) left heaven to strap on human shoes (or sandals) so he could walk among us on our level, in all our mire and mess. To love, care and serve and ultimately offer himself as a sacrifice … so that we can be lifted up. And yet, he did!

Jesus’ parting gesture of love and servitude before he went to the cross was to perform the lowly task of washing his disciples’ feet …

And then he called them (and us) to follow in his steps ... in love and service to others.

Keep your eyes open ... the Holy Spirit just might place someone in your path for you to serve today!

***Dear Jesus, thank you for your great love. You came down to rescue me and I exalt you as the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Holy Spirit, please guide me to the people you would have me serve today. In your name Jesus I pray, Amen.***

Tuesday 24 October 2023

**Eyes Opened**

by Georgie Schuster

***Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well'. Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way (Mark 10:52).***

Read [Mark 10:46-52](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+10%3A46-52&version=NRSVUE)

I wonder what Bartimaeus used to think about on the side of the road before he met Jesus. It appears that there was a time when he could see. Did he compare the life he once had with his present circumstances, where he had to rely on the mercy of strangers for his survival? Was there any hope for his future, for him to break out of the darkness that imprisoned him?

While he was blind, he wasn’t deaf. Word of Jesus reached his ears. Stories of his healing, stories of his teaching, stories of hope. What did that mean for Bartimaeus? Was his heart now filled with hope? Hope that one day Jesus would pass his way, hope that Jesus would notice him, hope that Jesus would actually really ‘see’ him …

Then the day arrived. Ignoring those who tried to silence him, he called for Jesus loudly and repeatedly. And Jesus noticed him. Jesus ‘saw’ him and his faith. Bartimaeus leaped up and came to Jesus. And Jesus restored his sight.

What did Bartimaeus do next? He had received what he had hoped for. He could have run off to share the good news with relatives. He could have taken time just to absorb the change that had just taken place and taken in the sights that surrounded him and the sights he had missed for so long. But no, *he followed Jesus.* Bartimaeus’ eyes were truly opened. I wonder what else Bartimaeus saw in the days that followed?

***Dear Lord God, thank you for your gifts … I often take them for granted. You are the gift giver. Help me to keep my eyes on you. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.***

Wednesday 25 October 2023

**Great expectations**

by Georgie Schuster

***Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' (Mark 11:9,10).***

Read [Mark 11:1-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+11%3A1-11&version=NRSVUE)

How do you go with waiting? After what feels like forever, the person that you have been pinning all your hopes on finally arrives. Excitement, elation… relief? You rush to greet them, wanting them to feel welcome. What thoughts race through your mind?

You might have preconceived ideas as to how things are going to pan out. Now things will be good. He/ She is going to deal with all the mess you’ve had to endure. It is going to be awesome!

The people in the crowd that day were joyful and jubilant. After years of living under Roman oppression, and waiting for someone to come and rescue them, the day had finally arrived. Jesus had come to town. They had seen his miracles. Everything would get sorted and they would finally be free. ‘Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!’ It was a time to celebrate and sing for joy. ‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

But it was only the beginning of the week …

Can you think of a time when God answered your prayers, but it wasn’t in the way you imagined?

***Dear God, thank you for seeing the big picture, even when I don’t. Help me to trust you. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.***

Thursday 26 October 2023

**It wasn’t meant to be this way**

by Georgie Schuster

***(Jesus) was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers' (Mark 11:17).***

Read [Mark 11:12-26](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+11%3A12-26&version=NRSVUE)

One day, curiosity got the better of me and I went back to visit my childhood home. Driving down the old familiar country road, I didn’t know what to expect. The gum trees in the paddocks were as I remembered, but the house was empty. The garden my parents had lovingly created and tended was now vastly different and overgrown. I felt sad.

Sometimes I wonder how Jesus felt. He knew, in the beginning, the perfect creation. Then he spent years walking around in the brokenness of humanity … a far cry from what God planned. What emotions stirred within him? Sadness, Frustration? Then he came to the temple …

Today’s bible reading reveals a zealous side to Jesus as he leaped into action, clearing the noise and activity of the marketplace from the temple courts. He demonstrated in no uncertain terms a passionate desire for the temple to be restored to its intended purpose, a place of prayer!

Jesus’ earthly mission focused on restoration. He gave his life so that our relationship with God could be restored. Our wonderful, zealous, resolute, dedicated Saviour!

***Loving God, from the beginning you wanted to restore my relationship with you. Thank you for sending Jesus, our Saviour, so that could happen. I am eternally grateful! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.***

Friday 27 October 2023

**A question of authority**

by Georgie Schuster

***(The chief priests, the scribes and the elders) said, 'By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?' (Mark 11:28).***

Read [Mark 11:27-33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+11%3A27-33+&version=NRSVUE)

There used to be a show on TV called ‘Undercover Boss’. Bosses would go ‘undercover’ in their own companies to investigate how things worked on the ground level. Many interesting conversations ensued, with workers having no idea of who they were talking with until the big ‘reveal’ at the end. It was a way for bosses to get in touch with the challenges they may not have been aware of, and make improvements.

Jesus, however, knew exactly what was going on. He had ‘upset the apple cart’ in cleansing the temple and the ‘authority figures’ demanded answers! They were intent on getting rid of him and wanted to know what authority this man was operating in.

Jesus chose to evade answering them in that moment, targeting their beliefs in the process. He could see their hearts and motives. He also knew that the timing wasn’t right. His time, though drawing very close, had not yet come. There were significant things to be done before the trial that eventuated several days later.

Jesus, the Son of God, would ultimately surrender his life to save the world. He had the authority and was in fact the only one who could! Even after the big reveal, when he rose victorious from the dead, there were some who still dismissed him … choosing to stay in the paradigms of authority they were accustomed to. But for all who would/will believe, Jesus’ authority over death and the devil is final, and life changing! That is authority worth living under!

***Dear Jesus, to say you put up with a lot is probably the biggest understatement ever. But thank you for doing it. Thank you for being my Saviour. I praise and thank you for your amazing love. Thank you that I now get to live and serve you under your authority. In your name I pray, Amen.***

Saturday 28 October 2023

**Nourished**

by Georgie Schuster

***But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do (Psalm 1:2,3 NLT).***

Read [Psalm 1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+1&version=NRSVUE)

I remember driving out by Silverton (near Broken Hill) many years ago and being surprised to see a tree-lined creek bed. I love gum trees, but these had a distinct beauty about them, standing out in the arid landscape. While the creek bed itself was dry, I realised when the rains came and the water flowed, these trees drank in the nourishment that sustained them in the harsh climate in which they lived.

The writer of Psalm 1 evokes a similar image, likening people to healthy trees planted by reliable streams of water. Their nourishment is God’s word, which they meditate on day and night. They flourish and produce fruit in season.

We know what happens when plants are deprived of water for too long. They struggle and eventually wither and perish. But those that have an adequate supply, thrive.

It is easy to allow the busyness of our lives to dictate how we spend our precious time. (I’m thinking quite a few of you have got through to late in the afternoon with your stomach rumbling, only to realise that you skipped lunch!) The nourishment we receive from our food is important for our health, but so is our spiritual nourishment.

Time spent in God’s word does more than just refresh us. It sustains us, resourcing us for moments of the day when we need God’s insight and guidance. Have you ever had a Bible verse bubble up inside you, just when you needed it? God didn’t just create us to survive in this world, he created us to thrive! But we were never meant to do it without his help.

Why not pour yourself a drink of your choosing and ‘drink in’ a little extra time reading his word today. You never know how it might impact your day!

***Dear God, thank you for the gift of time. Holy Spirit, please guide me to what I need to hear from you today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.***

Sunday 29 October 2023

**The greatest commandment**

by Pastor Fraser Pearce

***On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:40).***

Read [Matthew 22:34–46](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A34%E2%80%9346&version=NRSVUE)

One way to think of the commandments is as God’s blueprint for our lives: they give us a picture of the sort of life that God is building for us. The good news from today’s reading is that love is at the heart of God’s commandments – love for God himself, and love for our neighbour. This means that as we put our trust in Christ Jesus, he gives us his Spirit, who gives us the freedom to love others as God first loved us.

There’s a context to today’s reading: Jesus has come triumphantly into Jerusalem, he has cleansed the temple, and now he is teaching in the temple, in the place of sacrifice. As he teaches, he is confronted by many people, including the Pharisees. The Pharisees were people who sometimes prided themselves on keeping God’s commandments, and one of the Pharisees tests Jesus to see what he considers the greatest commandment.

It's in response to this question that Jesus says that all the law and prophets ‘hang’ on loving God and one’s neighbour. That is, whatever else God commands makes sense as we see how it shows love for God and for the people that God puts in our lives. God, in other words, does not give orders just to test how obedient we are. Rather, he gives commands that build us up so that we can enjoy life to the full.

Of course, we don’t always keep the commands to love as we should. Our hope, therefore, is not in what we can do for God, but in Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins, and who lives to intercede for us with the Father. And the Father, who gives us his Holy Spirit through his word, is the one who is building in us the love that has no end.

***Thank you, God, that you are love, and that you call us into the life of love. Please give us your Holy Spirit, so that we may keep the commands of your Son, and love one another, as you have first loved us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.***

*Fraser Pearce grew up in Sydney, and has served as a pastor in Melbourne, Bendigo and Adelaide. He is married to Margaret, and they have four children ranging in age from 23 to 15. Fraser enjoys being with family and friends, listening to (and playing) music and reading.*