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**Sunday 21 April 2024 to**

**Sunday 28 April 2024**

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Sunday 21 April 2024

**One flock**

by Faye Schmidt

***I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16).***

Read [John 10:11–18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A11-18+&version=NRSVUE)

The image of Jesus as the good shepherd is a beloved image that demonstrates the love, care and gentleness of God to his people. It is a very personal image, with the shepherd declaring that he knows us, and we know him. Psalm 23 also supports this thinking when we say with the psalmist, ‘The Lord is *my* shepherd’.

But the text shows us that we are not just a scattering of individuals but part of a flock, a community, a family. The dangers are to the flock, not just the individual sheep. In verse 12, we read, ‘... the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it’. Division and disharmony result.

In Isaiah 53:6, we read, ‘We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’.

So, what does it mean to be a sheep of Jesus’ flock? It means that we enter through his gate. Jesus is the way to salvation. We know his voice and follow him. He cares for us, keeping us safe. And when we wander away, which we know we do all too often, he comes and searches for us.

These are wonderful, comforting images, but this passage includes another challenging thought. The good shepherd decides who is in the sheepfold; we do not. ‘I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold’ (John 10:16). The Pharisees and disciples thought they knew who God's chosen ones were. But this shepherd is telling them, and telling us, that there will be ‘one flock, one shepherd’, and it is God, in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit – not us – who brings together that flock.

***Dear Heavenly Father, we pray you will send your Holy Spirit to those who do not know you and that they may hear your voice, come to know you and be welcomed in the fold as members of your flock. Amen.***

*Faye Schmidt continues her diaconal calling through governance, having served on the Vic–Tas District Church Board, the General Church Board and currently as chair of the Standing Committee on Constitutions and her congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. Having lived and worked in many locations within Australia and overseas, Faye has a heart for the stranger and the newcomer and for being open to new ideas, learning from others and responding to needs.*

Monday 22 April 2024

**The small and humble make a big difference**

by Faye Schmidt

***What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough (Luke 13:20,21).***

Read [Luke 13:18-30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13%3A18-30&version=NRSVUE)

Have you ever baked your own bread? During the COVID lockdowns across the country, there were shortages of flour as people found themselves confined to their homes with time to challenge themselves to make their own bread.

It all starts with the yeast, the smallest ingredient used in the process that makes everything happen. But what is yeast? A dictionary tells me that it is a ‘single-cell organism, called *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, which needs food, warmth and moisture to thrive’.

So, although yeast has much power, left to sit on a shelf it does nothing except deteriorate in effectiveness if not used when fresh. The yeast also needs flour, warmth and moisture to yield a product.

Scripture teaches us that those who are baptised and believe in Christ as their Saviour are already part of God’s kingdom. We may not be many – we may be out-numbered in our family or community. But our text tells us that we are like the yeast, that where we are fed with God’s word and the sacraments, bathed in the warmth of fellow believers and daily aware of the waters of our baptism, the kingdom thrives.

So let us always remember that it is God’s kingdom, and although the world looks to demonstrations of might and power as giving things meaning, our God looks to the small, the humble, that in spite of their humility and size, have an influence that outstrips everything else.

That humility came into focus through Christ himself, who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross.

***We praise and thank you Heavenly Father that you accept us your children and heirs of your kingdom through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

Tuesday 23 April 2024

**Jesus comes to us**

by Faye Schmidt

***I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Luke 13:35b).***

Read [Luke 13:31–35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13%3A31-35&version=NRSVUE)

The Lutheran church is known as a confessional and liturgical church. This means that we have documented confessional statements that set out the basis of our beliefs and teaching. We are also liturgical – our worship services are set out in a format that takes from Scripture elements that set out the story of salvation. The gospel is proclaimed to us through the liturgy itself.

If you have ever worshipped in a church where the language spoken is not your own, it can be alienating. But if it is a liturgical church, there is a rhythm, a flow to the service that can be familiar and welcoming. By the tone of the responses, the actions of the pastor, we can gauge where we are in the service. We can identify the confession and absolution, the collect for the day, the kyrie (Lord have mercy), the sermon, the offering thanksgiving and the blessing. This enables us to participate in spirit without saying aloud the words.

The event that Jesus refers to in our text today is his arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when the people cry out, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’. And, in our communion liturgy, we repeat this phrase just prior to the institution of holy communion.

Because this is where Jesus comes to us, in the bread and wine of holy communion. He comes to us! We may ‘go’ to communion, but it is where Jesus comes to us. As the song says, ‘Here we meet you once again, God of mercy, God of grace ... ’.

Through our liturgy, Palm Sunday is every Sunday when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. It is part of remembering that last supper, the recognition that our salvation is God’s action at every step of the way and we, like those at the first Palm Sunday, cry out in thankfulness – ‘Hosanna, hosanna in the highest’.

***God of mercy, God of grace, we thank and praise you for the gift of the sacrament of holy communion in which you come to us to forgive us and strengthen us through your love. Amen.***

Wednesday 24 April 2024

**Where shall I sit?**

by Faye Schmidt

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

Read [Luke 14:1–11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A1-11&version=NRSVUE)

There are some events to which we are invited when it is quite clear as to where we shall sit and the position that we hold at the event. When we go to the theatre, we have set seats and hunt for our numbers on the back of the seat. Or, when we board a plane, it is quite clear where we sit, although the people surrounding us can be a surprise! Such positions have been determined by others. We may have set some criteria – for example, a window seat on the plane – but the allocation and position is out of our control.

At other times, we can be unsure. There was a custom previously that when attending a wedding, you were placed on either the bride or groom’s side of the church. Or, if you are invited to a conference as a guest speaker, do you sit up the front, or just wait until called?

Even in church, we can often dither as to where we should sit. This is particularly an issue when visiting another church – as people often sit in the same place each week, it can be unsettling to find that we have sat in someone’s regular place.

The guests in the above text were comparing themselves with the other guests and determined for themselves the position that they considered appropriate to them.

Our decisions are often predicated on how we perceive ourselves – as a special guest, a speaker, etc. But Jesus is saying to us that when it comes to entering his kingdom, we are not the arbiters of our position – he is.

There are many ways in which we lack humility and measure ourselves against others – the suburbs we live in, the cars we drive, academic qualifications, holidays, career positions. But do any of these identifiers make us more worthy in Jesus’ eyes than our neighbour who is different to us? In Philippians 2:4 we read, ‘Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others’.

***By your Holy Spirit, Lord, turn me from pride in myself to be more like you, seeking to see you in those who surround me so that I may be worthy to be a child of your kingdom. Amen.***

Thursday 25 April 2024

**Everything is ready**

by Faye Schmidt

***At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready’ (Luke 14:17).***

Read [Luke 14:12–24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A12-24+&version=NRSVUE)

In preparing for an event many of us would rely on a checklist to make sure that nothing is forgotten. However, we cannot achieve perfection as we are not in control of all circumstances – sudden changes to attendees, quality of venue or food, weather, etc. There would always be a qualification as to whether ‘everything’ was ready.

Some of the most amazing words spoken by Jesus when on the cross on that first Good Friday, were, ‘It is finished’. When facing the end of our days, how many of us would be able to say the same of any event or our life – that all we were required to do had been achieved, completed?

For us, being mortal, we are not in control of our lives or made aware of all that we could or should accomplish while here on earth. We are bound and limited by our humanity.

It is only God who knows the completeness of things and so these words of Jesus on the cross speak again that this was not just a man being crucified, but the Son of God. All that was required to atone for our sins was made complete on the cross and Jesus’ rising from the dead on the third day, Easter morning.

So, it should not be a surprise when we meet with Jesus at the Lord’s supper that the words we hear after the elements have been consecrated, ‘Come, for everything is ready’.

Everything has been completed that enables us to meet with Jesus at the altar as he comes to us in the bread and wine and we witness God’s grace in this act. There is nothing required of us but to ‘come’.  God has made it all possible and we are invited to partake of the feast of victory.

***May we humbly come and accept your invitation of saving grace as you have made all things right with you. May we also be a witness to others and invite those who do not yet know you, to be fellow invitees to the feast of victory over sin and death, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

Friday 26 April 2024

**Discipleship has consequences**

by Faye Schmidt

***Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? (Luke 14:28)***

Read [Luke 14:25–35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A25-35&version=NRSVUE)

Are you an impulse buyer? A person who, when shopping for an item will see something they like and buy it and then, on taking it home are faced with some realities – it is too big for the space, the wrong colour, or too expensive to be covered by the money in the bank? Then we are faced with what we can do with the now-unwanted item.

In today’s text, Jesus is making it clear to us that being one of his followers is a serious matter and has consequences far beyond just the decision to make our commitment to him.

It is not a matter of following the crowd and relying on the strength of the crowd to carry us – it is personal, individual, about our commitment to loving and serving Jesus and having a relationship with him. And that has consequences.

Am I prepared to work on this relationship? Am I prepared to listen to God through his word? Am I prepared to serve wherever he sends me and to those he puts in my path? And am I prepared to make him and his will the priority in my life?

This is not easy, but we are not left to flounder our way through this. God has sent his Holy Spirit to guide, strengthen and uphold us on our journey of faith. In Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed he states, ‘I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith’.

So, what seems impossible to us to achieve is made possible by God himself, who desires all creation to be made whole and one with him.

***By your Holy Spirit, Lord, strengthen me in my faith in you and love for my neighbour so that I may be a true disciple accepting all you require of me, trusting in your grace. Amen.***

Saturday 27 April 2024

**He has done it!**

by Faye Schmidt

***Posterity will serve him, future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it! (Psalm 22:30,31)***

Read [Psalm 22:25-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+22%3A25-31&version=NRSVUE)

After identifying those of his time, David then looks to the future – future generations and those yet unborn. That means us and those who are yet to follow us – our children, grandchildren – and on through the generations. The message of proclaiming God’s righteousness continues, and not because of anything we have done. As the text states, ‘He has done it!’ What a relief!

When I lived in the Philippines, I was often faced with typhoons. The advice was to put myself in a place where I would be away from the risks of flying objects, breaking glass or disappearing roofs. Therefore, I would place some cushions in a downstairs bathtub, surround myself with candles – and wait. The wind would howl, and tree branches would bash against the walls. The pressure would build and my ears would pop. I would pray for safety and peace. But, at the same time, all I could think of was that there must be something I could do. Feeling so powerless in the face of such a storm is frightening, and I could easily relate to the disciples in that boat on the Sea of Galilee. Letting go, relinquishing any impulse to control what I can’t, is hard. But it was only when I was able, amid tears of frustration, to declare, ‘I give up – I’m in your hands Lord’, that I found peace and went to sleep.

That is the great gift of trusting in God and his promises to us through faith in Jesus Christ. It enables us to let go, to be relieved of making ourselves right with God, because he has done it for us.

It doesn’t end there, however. In response to this gift, we then endeavour to live according to Jesus’ command that we love one another, serve each other, and live our lives praising God and continuing to proclaim this message to future generations and those yet unborn.

***We give you thanks, Heavenly Father, for the faith of our forebears, and that through the Holy Spirit, you help us to be your proclaimers to those who follow us, so that they too may know you and abide in your grace. Amen.***

Sunday 28 April 2024

**Source of sustenance**

by Charles Bertelsmeier

***I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing … This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:5,8).***

Read [John 15:1–8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+15%3A1-8&version=NRSVUE)

Jesus used many examples and stories (parables) to help us understand how he wants to live in relationship with us (shepherd/sheep; farmer/produce; vine/branches). All of these rely on a very close connection between us and him. Any of us who have done some gardening will realise how quickly a branch withers and dies when not connected to a source of sustenance. We can maintain life in the cut branch for some time if we place the cut end in water, such as placing cut flowers in a vase. Or we can place a cutting in a special soil mixture to get it to send out its own roots and commence a new plant of its own. And there is the option to graft the cutting into a living plant so that it becomes part of that living plant.

But without that source of sustenance, the cut branch will very quickly die. Jesus uses this example to teach us an important truth about how we remain alive as children of his Father and live out his purpose for us. Since Jesus is the source of all the sustenance we need to stay alive and be productive, we need to maintain that intimate connection with him. We generally know what this means: regular systematic Bible reading, times of intimate prayer, spending time with other Christians. These all help us to focus on God’s will for us, help us find answers to the challenges we face and give us encouragement when we lose energy and focus. But we also get to know God in a very personal way, feel safe and loved in his presence, and excited enough about our relationship with him that others observe his impact on our lives.

When we are feeling ineffectual in our Christian witness or we feel discouraged about the lack of impact our church community is having on the wider community, maybe all we need to do is go back to the source of our sustenance, the Jesus vine, and review how much we are utilising the resources he makes available to us. Are we immersing ourselves in his word? Are we spending intimate time with Jesus and his Father in talking about our life and the issues we face? Are we finding encouragement in worshipping God in the company of other Christians? Are we focusing on all that God has done for us and is continuing to do for us?

Being connected to the Jesus vine and receiving all the sustenance it provides will result in us producing fruit – fruit that others will see as being sourced from God himself, stimulating their curiosity as to the source of this fruit.

***Heavenly Father, many of us have been trying to produce fruit for you, relying on our own efforts and ideas, and producing very little. Thank you for reminding us that we can only produce fruit for you if we are connected to the Jesus vine. We surrender our lives to you, for you to achieve your will and purpose in us. Amen.***

*Charles is a retired engineer who has worked on communications projects for the air force, army and navy. He lives in the outer north-western suburbs of Sydney with his wife, Diane. Together they have four children and eight grandchildren with whom they love spending time. He keeps himself busy with pot plants, a community vegetable garden, researching his family history and volunteering in the community and at LifeWay Lutheran Church.*