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**Sunday 26 June 2022 to Sunday 3 July 2022**

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Sunday 26 June 2022

# Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:52b,53).**

Read Luke 9:51–62

I find it interesting that Luke comments that the Samaritans didn’t receive Jesus because his face was set towards Jerusalem. Now, you might think that it seems strange that Luke is suggesting that the Samaritans might dismiss Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem, but if that’s the case, you may just be missing a literary cue in Luke’s writing. When Luke refers to Jerusalem – especially in the chapters of his account leading to Jesus’ crucifixion – typically, he means the cross and Jesus setting his face (and path) towards his betrayal and crucifixion.

When Luke comments that the Samaritans didn’t receive Jesus because he had set his face towards the cross, he implies that the Samaritans wouldn’t welcome Jesus because he is committed to being a failed Messiah, one who dies rather than brings wealth and prosperity to the people of Israel.

Is this also true of you and me? Do we not also find it hard to identify with a suffering Messiah? And yet, that is precisely who Jesus is, the Son of God who suffers with all creation.

So, as you reflect on our times of climate change, wars in Europe, Africa and many other parts of the world, and any other examples of suffering, be assured that this is not a sign that Jesus is absent; rather, he is fully present in all suffering. Through that suffering, he has made all things new, and he will renew us in the last days. Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem to enter into our suffering now, to join us for life now. In Jesus, God is not absent but fully present for all time.

**Lord Jesus, thank you that you set your face towards Jerusalem. Help us to see you in the midst of our own Jerusalems and times of trial. Reassure us that you are near and present in all the suffering of this world … and you have overcome it. Amen.**

*Tim Castle-Schmidt is the pastor of Onkaparinga Lutheran Parish in the Adelaide Hills. After spending many years as a teacher in Lutheran schools, he says he finally listened to God’s call to pastoral ministry. Tim is passionate about social justice and engaging the church with contemporary society. Tim shares his life with Fiona, daughter Miranda, a Jack Russell called Otto and 10 chooks.*

Monday 27 June 2022

# Jonah set his face towards Tarshish

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:3).**

Read Jonah 1:1–17

I find it interesting how yesterday’s text rubs up against today’s. Yesterday, we reflected on Jesus turning his face towards Jerusalem – toward suffering and rejection. Then in today’s text, we see Jonah likewise turning away from what we might expect (fulfilling God’s call to call on Nineveh to repent) because it would bring suffering upon himself. Jonah wants to escape the Lord’s call on his life because of suffering!

Suddenly, I see I have more in common with Jonah than with Jesus. Yet the good news is that God does not run away from us even when we run away from God. Jonah gets a second chance just as we are constantly given a second – and third or fourth – chance. God remains faithful to God’s purposes in Jonah, just as in you or me.

I ran from God’s call on my life for many years. And yet God did not curse me or leave me alone, but gently – and eventually not so gently – disrupted my life until I could hear his call more clearly.

Even when (not if) we set our faces to our own Tarshish situations, God stays with us and even works through our faithlessness. Whether you are still running from God, or if you have let him find you, draw comfort from the God who followed Jonah after he set his face towards Tarshish.

**Lord Jesus, thank you for turning your face towards me even when I might flee from you. Help me to hear you more clearly and have the courage to follow. Amen.**

Tuesday 28 June 2022

# Set your face towards the lost sheep of Israel

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6).**

Read Matthew 10:5–23

When God calls, we are in a privileged place to be invited into God’s mission. Sometimes that takes us along smooth paths, but more often, we get called to roads we neither expect nor might choose. That’s certainly been my experience.

And when God calls, he typically sets our faces towards the lost. Indeed, if we are honest with ourselves, we are all lost (and so terribly lost!), and until we acknowledge that, we cannot be found.

Jesus came, remember, to seek the lost.

And so, as soon as we can recognise that we are as lost as the next person, the sooner we can know that God is actively seeking us. But God never leaves us where he finds us. Whether that is to a new station in life, a new town or country, or a new mindset, God leads us to a new place.

We, the lost, are found and then sent with a new call on our lives. That may be a call to see things differently in our own backyard or a whole new backyard. Either way, we are called to set our faces towards the lost.
 **Lord Jesus, you set your face towards us because we were lost and then call us to seek the lost sheep of Israel. Help me acknowledge my own lostness so that you can truly find me, and then give me eyes to see the lost ones you lead me to. Amen.**

Wednesday 29 June 2022

# Set your face towards the little children

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me (Mark 9:37).**

Read Mark 9:33–37

Whenever I hear the footage of Muhammed Ali declaring, ‘I am the greatest’, I shudder somewhat. As important as good self-esteem is, the raucous declaration of superiority eats away at my Australian – and I might add Christian – soul. Greatness is never something to claim for oneself.

And so, when Jesus responds to his disciples’ debate over greatness by showing them a child, I find myself even more attracted to Jesus and his teaching.

But look at where Jesus takes this discussion. He doesn’t just call on us to emulate the little children but to welcome them.

We, as Jesus’ followers, are called to welcome the little children, for, in this, our Father welcomes us.

So, who are the little children? Well, it’s not just children, but all those who are vulnerable and in need. It is in looking out for and standing up for the little ones, the poor and the disadvantaged, that God welcomes us.

We have recently commemorated National Reconciliation Week (27 May to 3 June 2022), where we have been asked to consider how we can best reconcile with Indigenous Australia. Indigenous Australians are some of the most disadvantaged, so I think Jesus identifies closely with them. Australia’s new Commonwealth Government has committed to fully implementing the Uluru Statement. Take time to learn more about it, and see if Jesus meets you among these ‘little children’. Try the Uluru Statement https://ulurustatement.org/ or Common Grace https://www.commongrace.org.au/

**Heavenly Father, thank you for meeting us in the little ones in our world. Help us set our faces towards the little children – the ones considered the least and are the most vulnerable in our world – knowing that you meet us in them. Bring true, deep reconciliation between all nations and peoples in this land now called Australia, helping us see you in one another. Amen.**

Thursday 30 June 2022

# Paul sets his face towards gratitude

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? (1 Thessalonians 2:19).**

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13–20

I cannot begin to imagine the trauma and suffering occurring inplaces like Ukraine, Afghanistan and Myanmar or the individual suffering caused by COVID. But then, neither can I imagine the suffering Paul went through for the gospel, even being stymied in his attempts to visit a congregation to build up their faith.

Yet, I have learnt that when we go through such times, we do not come out of them the same.

Life changes us. And that’s not necessarily a bad thing. We learn that we don’t need everything we thought we did to be happy. I hope COVID has taught us that.

But like Paul, we can know that God is sovereign even – especially – when it doesn’t look like it. We can, again like Paul, set our face towards gratitude and find in that gratitude a glimpse of the eternal joy to which we are called.

In fact, if you read this passage closely, you find that Paul’s joy is in those who have held onto faith despite the troubles of life. So let’s give thanks for those we share our faith with and celebrate the gift of life that we are given through Jesus, recognising how our faith grows through life’s experiences.

**Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being with us through life’s trials and celebrations. Help us be changed and live in gratitude by embracing those people you join us with through life. May we reflect your life and love to them too. Amen.**

Friday 1 July 2022

# Set your face towards the days

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable (2 Timothy 4:2).**

Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5

Some days are more favourable than others. Some days, it’s the weather; some days, it’s other people. But without question, some days go better than others.

But does Paul encourage us to proclaim the gospel only on those easy days?

Far from it. Paul encourages us to embrace the times we live in and speak God’s word into those days and in the context of those days. And that is because God is present in all days, the good and the bad. Good Friday was actually a bad day. And yet, Easter Sunday tore open the veil to the never-ending days of direct access to our Father (Mark 15:38). And so, when we become fearful that the days – the times – are against us, we can be reassured that God is Lord of all the days.

It is our privilege to be the means through which God speaks into our days. We are employed as God’s contemporary mouthpieces to address our days with God’s message of peace, justice, hope and mercy.

In fact, through Paul, God calls on us to set our faces towards whatever our times hold. God will be present in those days and reveal himself through them – both to us and through us. God is present here and now.

**Lord, give us the faith to speak into our world and address the cares and concerns of our days. Move in and within us, and grant us peace in knowing that you are Lord of our days. Amen.**

Saturday 2 July 2022

# Set your face towards God’s blessing

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals (Psalm 66:5).**

Read Psalm 66:1–9

We’ve been doing a lot of setting our face towards things this week. And yet, ultimately, we can only do this because God has set his face towards us.

Psalm 66 is written by what we can only describe as an anonymous psalmist. I think this is a bit ironic but quite fitting.

This ‘no-one’ composes this Psalm that calls on the nations to praise God for the blessings all creation lives by. God speaks through the most unexpected means!

Ironically, when we can see God in our everyday moments, be they good times or trials, we set our face towards God’s blessing. God’s blessing is not our feeling of being blessed but God’s good intentions to lead us in his ways. It is nothing we have done; it is all God has done in and for us.

Set your face towards God’s blessing. See it and receive it in your ‘food and clothing, home and property, devoted family, orderly community, good government, favourable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbours’ (Luther’s explanation of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer). Not because you have to, but because our God ‘is awesome in his deeds among mortals’.

**Thank you, O Lord, for the many blessings of life. Help me see you active in all I see and experience in this world. Amen.**

Sunday 3 July 2022

# Nothing will harm you

by Tatiana Overduin

**I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19).**

Read Luke 10:1–11,16–20

In this scriptural text, we read in verse 1 that Jesus sends those he had appointed, two by two, ahead of him ‘to every town and place he was about to go’. And though these ‘workers of the harvest’ are commissioned by him, he nevertheless warns them all that it will be dangerous work. Jesus commands in verse 3 to ‘Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves’. When depending only on ourselves, this does present a terrifying image fraught with pain and suffering.

In my life, I’ve had the fortunate opportunity to have experienced travelling to many different countries, sometimes with a loved one, sometimes alone. One place that was very interesting was working as the resident volunteer craftworker in 2008 for eight weeks on the Island of Iona. I met many interesting people and took advantage of exploring the beautiful Scottish culture and country.

But as much as the experience was interesting and allowed me to grow in my faith in God, it was just as frightening to be away from family and my safe, familiar life back home. A favourite Scripture text I held close to my heart during this travel experience was Psalm 91. This psalm was a great comfort to me, but one line didn’t quite make sense until the very end of my journey. In verse 13 of this psalm, the text writes, ‘you will trample the great lion and the serpent’.

This line is not dissimilar to today’s focus verse in Luke 10:19. ‘I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.’

I embarked on that journey, trusting God would shelter me under his wings and bring me safely home again. But in my last days in Scotland, as I faced uncertainty about my journey home because of a booking error, at that very moment, I saw beneath my feet serpents, dragons and snakes imprinted into the ancient Scottish cobblestones. Immediately, my faith was reassured that all would be well. It was not because of anything I did to correct the issue but because of God’s authority over my life and his promises. Today’s scriptural passage, therefore, encourages us that at whatever point of our life journey we find ourselves in, we can trust in Jesus, who has trampled death itself.

**Lord, thank you for reminding us that we need not be afraid when confronted by life’s challenges but rather be reassured daily when we place our trust in your holy word, in your comforting promise and say, ‘Nothing will harm us.’ Amen.**

Tatiana is a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. She lives in Largs North, a seaside location in Adelaide, and has two adult children and six grandchildren. She continues to teach English, History and Religion full-time at a secondary Catholic College. Prior to her teaching degree, she qualified with a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Australian Lutheran College (ALC) in 1996, as one of the early groups of female students to graduate from ALC. She enjoys a variety of crafts, art, gardening, singing, writing and swimming.