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**Sunday 2 October 2022 to Sunday 9 October 2022**

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Sunday 2 October 2022

# A living, growing faith

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’ (Luke 17:5)**

Read Luke 17:5–10

‘If only I had a stronger faith, then I could serve God better. Then I'd be able to give a better witness to Jesus Christ in my life!’

When we speak like that, we can think that before we can do anything worthwhile for God, our faith in him has to reach a certain level.

We may also think that only a person with a strong faith can ever be really used powerfully by God. We may even go as far as to say that only a person with a strong faith in God can really be sure of eternal life.

But none of those things is true. While we might think that measuring the strength of our faith is important, what is essential is that it is faith in Jesus Christ.

We're saved by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. So even what we might consider a weak or faltering faith, when it's focused on Jesus Christ, is a saving faith and a potential power for good. That's because Jesus Christ connects us to the almighty transforming power of God himself.

God invites us to have a living, growing faith so we can be confident and cheerful about who we are. So he invites us to look to him for strength so that we can give a good witness to others about our relationship with him.

So, we pray, ‘Lord, increase our faith’ so that we are not misled by doubts, fears, selfishness and lovelessness. And we also pray that God would move us now, as weak as our faith may be, to place ourselves at his disposal and let his power work in our lives for the sake of others.

Because of God’s work in our lives, we can say right now: ‘Lord, fill me with your power, and use me as I am and where I am to bring glory to you always’.

**Lord God, thank you for the faith you have enabled us to have in your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Increase our faith in him so that we can reflect his love and grace in our lives. Transform and renew us daily into the people you still want us to become. Amen.**

*Mark Lieschke is a retired pastor living on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. He served in parishes in Adelaide, Palmerston North and Marton (both in New Zealand) and Wagga Wagga (school and congregation) before being elected as bishop of the New South Wales District of the LCANZ. He and his wife Meredith have four children (two of which live in Canada) and two grandchildren. Mark enjoys spending time with family and friends, travelling, walking on the beach and resting.*

Monday 3 October 2022

# Walking with God

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**And he [Noah] walked with God (Genesis 6:9b).**

Read Genesis 6:8–7:5

In the 2007 comedy film Evan Almighty, Steve Carell plays a modern-day version of Noah. There are some similarities to the original Noah narrative, but the whole focus in the movie is very different to the biblical account.

One similarity that does come through in the film, though, is the obedience of Evan (Noah), as he responds to God’s command to build an ark. And no matter what kind of opposition he faced from family, friends and community, he persevered and completed what God told him to do.

Noah (the real one), no doubt, faced opposition and ridicule too. We are not told how long it took him to build the ark, but commentators suggest it could have been anything up to 75 years. Even a tenth of that would have been a long time! Can you imagine what kind of opposition he may have faced? But he was faithful to the will and command of God.

Genesis 6:9b gives a clue to how he could have remained faithful: ‘He walked with God’. We are told that he found favour with God. He was righteous and blameless. This description of Noah does not mean that he was sinless but that he was in a close relationship with his Heavenly Father.

The source of his obedience and faithfulness was his walking with God. He was in God’s company and received guidance, direction, patience and strength – right in the middle of struggle and opposition.

We, too, have the honour and privilege of walking with God. We have been brought into God’s company through Jesus Christ. We have divine guidance, direction, patience and strength as we walk through difficult times – especially through the valley of the shadow of death.

And in and through Jesus Christ, we can grow in our faithfulness to our calling, obedience in our response to God’s Word, and more intimate in our relationship with our Lord.

**Lord Jesus, thank you that you enable us to walk with our Heavenly Father. Help us look to him for patience, direction and strength so that when we face difficulties and opposition in our lives, we can continue to remain faithful to our calling and obedient in our response to his word. Amen.**

Tuesday 4 October 2022

# Praying for God’s will to be done

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Have faith in God (Mark 11:22).**

Read Mark 11:12–14,20–25

You can do anything with hard work and perseverance … name it, and it will happen … say it, and the universe will align with you. While many people may believe those things, they’re not part of Jesus’ teaching at all. He says something quite different.

In response to Peter’s comment about the fig tree that Jesus cursed, Jesus simply says to him, ‘Have faith in God’. And when we are tempted to think that we can be influential in changing things and making this world a better place to live in through our own efforts, Jesus says, ‘Have faith in God’.

That’s what – or, more correctly, that’s who – makes a difference. As Christians who put our faith in God, we need no longer look for things that fill us and make us comfortable and important. We are already full and can be content in Christ. Our faith in God helps us to understand and accept that we don’t have to be the centre of the universe and that our desires are not the most important things. Faith in God can help us adjust to what God wants and not what we want.

We can ask him what his desire is for ourselves and for others. We can look to see what it is that he wants us to be doing, striving for, and persevering with. We can be open to him challenging and empowering us to do difficult things – moving mountains even. Mountains like granting forgiveness to others, letting go of our bitterness and being content with who we are and what we have.

Faith, trust and confidence in God mean that mountains can be removed. Faith trusts that God can do some miraculous things and that he will have the ultimate say. That means we can live in peace and be confident that he is in control even when things around us seem to be in turmoil.

**Lord, I pray I might use words to reflect your love and character. I pray that I won’t treat you like a slot machine or an ATM, but rather, I would align with your will so that I will speak in a way that will glorify you. Amen.**

Wednesday 5 October 2022

# Blessed to be a blessing

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you (John 13:15).**

Read John 13:2–17

If I knew I was going to die in a week, I imagine I wouldn’t just waste the time away. I’d think that I’d take care of some really important things. I’d probably prioritise my time and use it in the most effective way I could.

On the night before Jesus died, he knew his time was coming to an end. Death was only a few hours away for him. So, he did what was most important to him. He spent time with his friends.

St John takes four chapters to record what Jesus said to his disciples. He taught, encouraged, comforted, made promises, warned, gave them hope, and prayed for them.

And he began all this by serving them – getting on his knees and washing their feet.

What a great example for our lives and service as God’s people. What better model could we have than that of Jesus, serving; the Lord and King of the universe, getting down on his knees and washing people’s feet.

We can all learn a lesson from that. We can all be challenged to live and serve in that way, putting others before ourselves in importance, giving of ourselves in self-sacrifice, and putting ourselves out for the sake of others.

But if all that Jesus left us was an example to follow, then we’d have a model to imitate but not a Saviour to pick us up when we fail him.

We need more than a model person to follow. We need more than a set of rules to follow. We need more than a person who gives us instructions and shows us how we should live.

We need Jesus to come and wash our feet. And he does. He comes to serve us, touch our lives, wash us clean, renew and refresh us, forgive us, heal us, and equip and inspire us for service in his kingdom.

He comes to us so that we can be absolutely confident about his love for us, his promises to us and his presence with us.

**Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have come to minister to us. We stand in awe of your humble, gracious acts of service. Fill us with your Spirit so that we can reflect your love in our lives. Renew us each day, and give us joy in living for you. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.**

Thursday 6 October 2022

# Christian behaviour

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans (Colossians 3:23).**

Read Colossians 3:18–4:1

St Paul has been described as a misogynist or as a racist who, if alive today, would have upheld slave trading. Both caricatures fail to understand Paul. He was not a social revolutionary but an apostle of the gospel. He knew that the way to change less-than-ideal elements of the prevailing culture was not about attempting to enforce God’s ways politically. Rather, genuine and lasting change would come through the inward transformation of individual hearts.

The gospel provides this through its gift of the Spirit and a new heart. Like invisible leaven inside a batch of dough, the gospel works quietly within, bringing about healing and transforming lives. It changes people, enabling them to cultivate God’s just and benevolent ways.

As Christians, the lives we live flow out of who we are in Christ and what we have from him. We live a certain way because we are the chosen people of God, holy and dearly loved. We bear with each other in love, forgiveness and patience because this is how God has dealt with us.

We grow in our relationships with others and in our desire to serve them, as Christ’s presence becomes more and more of a reality in our lives. As his influence becomes stronger within us, we, in turn, become better equipped to respect, serve and honour those around us – especially within our family relationships.

No sphere of our daily living is not impacted by the good news of Jesus Christ. As followers of Christ, on display to the world, we’re privileged to be able to reflect the love of Jesus in all that we say and do. We live within every relationship in response to how our Lord and Saviour has loved us.

**Lord Jesus, help me today to view every relationship through the lens of my relationship with you. Help me keep you and my relationship with you in view so that I might honour you and love the people with whom I live and work. Amen.**

Friday 7 October 2022

# Alive in Christ

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness (1 Peter 2:24).**

Read 1 Peter 2:21–3:7

The life and death of Jesus offer an impossible example to follow. How could we ever hope to follow in his steps? He committed no sin. We can’t take a step without sinning.

And the world hated him for it. So did the religious leaders. They conspired together to have Jesus put to death. And how did he respond? ‘When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly’ (1 Peter 2:23).

This is an example of where we fail miserably. The first thing we can want to do when people speak evil of us is to shoot an insult right back at them. When we feel like we’re under attack, we can go into fight or flight mode.

Jesus suffered silently and willingly. He did not fight the injustice that was done to him. Instead, he looked to the one who judges justly – his Father in heaven.

We could certainly learn from this example, especially in a world that is not friendly to our faith. From the stories that occupy the mass media to our own social circles, hardly a day goes by without some insult to our faith. But rather than focus on the injustice of the world, we can look to the Father, whose justice swallows up all injustice.

But when we fail in following this example – as with every one of our failures – we know that Jesus’ patient endurance, suffering, and sinless life were all for us. ‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness’ (1 Peter 2:24).

‘By his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have turned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls’ (1 Peter 2:25,26). The Son’s silent suffering is for our healing; his sinless life is for our salvation.

**In my suffering, Lord, be my peace. In my weakness, be my power. And when the storms of life shall cease, O Jesus, in that final hour, be my rod, staff and guide. And draw me safely to your side! Amen.**

Saturday 8 October 2022

# Today is the first day of the rest of your life

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them (Psalm 111:2).**

Read Psalm 111

We have a great amount of uncertainty about the length of our existence here on Earth, and we don’t know what lies ahead of us that we have to face before we die. But we do have the certainty of God’s grace right now.

No matter what the future holds for us, we can be confident that God will lead us into it, remain at our side as we experience it, and remind us over and over again that nothing will happen, and there’s nothing we can do that will ever make him stop loving us.

Or, as the psalmist said: the Lord is gracious and compassionate; he remembers his covenant; the works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are steadfast forever and ever; holy and awesome is his name.

So even though we have uncertainty about how long we will live here, we can live each day as a brand-new opportunity to rejoice in what God has given us, to say thank you to him, and in response to his grace, offer service to those about us.

We can make plans and decisions for the future. We can look forward to many different experiences, good and bad, through which God can continue to teach us to trust in him, so he can mould and shape us into the kind of people he still wants us to become.

We can recommit ourselves to action. And we can pledge our support to the work of God’s church willingly and joyfully – even though it may cost us a great deal.

When God is in control, we can live every day as if it were our last, and we can live every day as if it were our first.

Today, and all the tomorrows that God may give us, can be a time of renewal and refreshment as he showers his love, forgiveness, mercy and peace all over us.

**Lord God, thank you that in and through your Son Jesus Christ, we have hope and confidence about your presence, power and promises as we live here on this Earth. Renew us each day in our faith in you, and keep us active and joyful in our service so that we can share our joy in our relationship with you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Sunday 9 October 2022

# Rejected to accepted

by Sonia Hulme

**Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no-one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? (Luke 17:17,18)**

Read Luke 17:11–19

In our house, we have a rule. When dinner is over, everyone who ate should stick around and help clean up. That’s how we show gratitude to the cook. It’s amazing, then, how many nights the cook can identify with Jesus’ question in today’s story of the healing of the ten lepers. In our family, it translates to ‘Were not all seven fed? Where are the other six??’. Yes, despite the rule and without us noticing, children seem to slip away and must be retrieved from all over the house to wash, dry and put away the mess of the day. The very act of coming back shows gratitude, especially if they do it without being forced (we’re still working on that!).

The leper who returned to give thanks after receiving miraculous healing from Jesus was an outsider on not one but two counts. Firstly, he was from Samaria. According to the Jews, he was not included in God’s family. Secondly, he had an illness that resulted in complete social rejection. So, he really did know about life on the edge of society, and his gratitude is correspondingly heartfelt.

Over and over, Jesus specialises in going to the margins, to the outsider and drawing them in, including them, making them whole. In response, those who have been healed of much, forgiven much and loved much respond with great gratitude. I, too, was an outsider before Jesus came to me. Perhaps I still feel on the edge, rejected by others, invisible, unlovely in my own – or others’ – eyes. I am exactly the one he comes to touch and heal and love. He is not afraid of my wounds, sins, and shame. He embraces me, makes me whole and delights in my grateful response. My gratitude is a gift to him and a witness to the world of just how much he has done for me. I truly am a recipient of amazing grace!

**Before you came along, I, too, was an outsider in your kingdom. Help me look with eyes of compassion on those who are still lingering on the edge of your love. Let my gratitude show itself in my love for those who are unwelcome because they are different. Amen.**

Sonia lives in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide with her husband and five children. She works part-time in a support role at Good Shepherd Lutheran School and as a spiritual director, helping people discern God at work in their lives.