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**Sunday 23 May to Sunday 30 May 2021**

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Sunday 23 May 2021

# God uses sights and sounds to get attention

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**And suddenly from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2).**

Read Acts 2:1–21

In mid-April 2021, my state of Western Australia experienced severe weather when Cyclone Seroja hit.

It was a deadly tropical cyclone that brought historic flooding and landslides to portions of southern Indonesia and East Timor and later went on to impact Western Australia's Mid West region. People who had never experienced a cyclone told of sheltering in their homes and being terrified by the sound outside of the powerful winds. The cyclone wreaked havoc and caused massive destruction and, sadly, well over a hundred fatalities in parts of Indonesia.

When wind and rain combine, the last thing we would expect is for a fire to survive. Water quenches the flames, and they are extinguished.

Wind without rain can indeed fan a small spark into a bushfire, which we’ve also seen so often in Australia. The power of the wind is an amazing energy source that, when harvested, can also produce electricity that we can use to benefit our way of life in so many ways.

We know what the normal effects of wind combined with other things can do.

To get Jerusalem’s attention that first Pentecost morning, the sound of a mighty wind was heard. The amazing sight of small tongues of fire could be seen. Speaking in strange languages connected with many nationalities of people.

God used the sights and sounds to get people’s attention long enough for Peter to bring God’s word to the masses.

The Holy Spirit was unleashed into the world and is still doing what it does best – leading people to hear about Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

What has God used to get your attention to be drawn closer to Jesus?

**Come, Holy Spirit. Come and pour yourself anew into my life so that I may be drawn closer to Jesus and be used to help in the work of God’s kingdom. Amen.**

Monday 24 May 2021

# The Lord wants to delight in you

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**‘No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate … for the Lord will take delight in you’ (Isaiah 62:4).**

Read Isaiah 62:1–12

There’s a popular TV show called ‘The Block’, in which teams compete to help renovate houses and ultimately have them auctioned to make the biggest profit and win. Sometimes these properties are derelict, abandoned apartment blocks with no-one willing to spend their time, money or effort to restore them. They are a bargain waiting for the right person (or TV show) to come along and have national TV coverage watching the process. The results are often quite spectacular, with huge money paid for them.

God did similarly with Israel and their destroyed national city of Jerusalem. After years of disobedience by worshipping other gods, turning a blind eye to corruption, oppressing the poor and neglecting the harsh warnings of being annihilated as a result, God acted through invading armies, leaving their nation and city in ruins.

Thankfully the story doesn’t end there. God still loved what he had created for his chosen people, and so he promised to rebuild and restore the city and rejuvenate the land. Well may we be thankful that we didn’t live back in those times and experience the destruction that Jerusalem did.

God does something similar with us at times. He hasn’t finished restoring his kingdom wherever it might be found on earth. Our sinful human nature quickly reveals how we, too, can ignore warnings from God’s word and his prophetic mouthpieces in our culture as we fail to protect the innocent, the unborn, the sick and the vulnerable. There are signs around our world that society will deteriorate and virtually destroy itself as a result. Yet God continues to pour out his Spirit and breathe new life into what seems to lie in ruins – people’s lives, a once healthy church, a broken relationship. Whether it’s people or buildings, God wants to bless and grow his kingdom to be used for his purposes so that he can ‘take delight in you’.

What have you noticed lying in ruins or severely broken that you could pray for God to restore?

**God of power and might, restore to me the joy of my salvation and create in me a clean heart. Use me to help restore broken relationships and once strong communities so that you may be glorified and your name be praised as people delight in you. Amen.**

Tuesday 25 May 2021

# Pray for a revival

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**‘Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh … Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Joel 2:28a,32a).**

Read Joel 2:28–32a

There are situations around the world right now that need for a lot to happen to return to ‘normal’ – whatever that means. Trade wars, cyber-attacks, the COVID pandemic death toll continuing to climb, the severe civil unrest that doesn’t seem to be slowing down at all, media attacks on politicians, trial by talkback radio. The list could go on. And we could lament and wish for the ‘good old days’. You know the ones. Those were the days when everyone went to church and believed in God. When there was no sport on Sunday, and most jobs were nine to five. Years ago, when we knew every person in our town, village or street. The era when we could send the children out to play for hours without worrying what might happen to them. Was there ever such a time? Really?

But what would we most like to return to now? Freedom of travel? No lockdowns or threat of face masks? No social media, so we’re not continually bombarded with an unknown person’s opinion that shatters another person’s self-esteem? This list could go on also.

It seems that times of humanity living through some good times for a season and then experiencing the bad times is an age-old cycle dating back throughout history. Where’s God in all this? I sometimes wonder what God must be thinking as he reflects on the ability of people to ruin a good thing. I don’t dwell there for too long because it’s too disheartening. All that sin. All that failure, depravity, stupidity, unleashed evil, destruction, cowardice, greed. This list could go on too.

What does this lead God to do? Our God of new beginnings speaks words of renewal and new life. ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people.’ God is promising to unleash the most powerful ‘force’ in the universe onto a tiny planet called Earth and bring salvation, healing, restoration and hope. You and I live here. We call it home – for now. But we know and believe there’s better coming because that same Spirit has led us to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Let the revival begin anew.

What would you list as the most important things you want God to revive, renew or change for the better?

**Lord God Almighty, pour out your Holy Spirit afresh into the hearts of the world’s leaders, those in positions of influence and power so that your will can be done in and through them. Please help me be consistent in lifting them to your throne of grace so that you may be honoured and your eternal banquet room filled to overflowing. Amen.**

Wednesday 26 May 2021

# The bold and the ordinary

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realised that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognised them as companions of Jesus (Acts 4:13).**

Read Acts 4:5–21

There’s something wonderful about the ability of the underdog – the average, ordinary person to rise to the occasion and do something great at just the right time. For instance, we can see it in tennis when the lower-ranked player outperforms a more highly fancied and experienced player. Suddenly, they become noticed, and all eyes are on them to find out more about their background and coach.

Talent shows are all about such people too. Unknown singers, dancers and performers come out of the woodwork to show the world what they’re capable of when given a chance. Generally, people warm to them and comment on how well they performed, or what a great speaker they are, and even how far they could go in life given the right kind of opportunities.

What many of these people have in common, whether it be sportspeople, entertainers, or even just the ordinary person rising to the occasion, is that most of them have someone behind them with whom they have spent a lot of time. It could be a parent, a sports coach, a colleague, a friend or a mentor. The common thread is usually that someone with skill, patience, ability or vision has seen something special in them and is prepared to invest their time and energy to develop their potential. Mostly this happens out of sight over a few years until they think their prodigy is ready to have a go ‘on the big stage’.

I can’t help but reflect on the way Jesus did this with his disciples. He called a group of ordinary people into his circle of influence and prepared them for their godly task of being witnesses for God’s kingdom. Suddenly Peter and John, ordinary fishermen, were doing greater things than the rulers and elders of the people were ever capable of. The crowds responded as the church grew to about five thousand (verse 4), while the church leaders questioned their pedigree as theologians felt threatened by their rise in public popularity.

How beautiful to think that God continues to prepare ordinary people (quite often non-theologically trained at a more highly credentialed establishment) to do amazing things for him.

Ordinary people who spend time with Jesus (verse 13) and are filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 8) get immortalised in the Bible and throughout church history to become recognised as mighty agents in God’s kingdom.

Enter here every Christian who has been baptised and spent time in God’s word. God has a way of raising to the fore those who are willing and open to being used throughout their life in situations where their time with Jesus has prepared them for service and acts of love.

Can you identify someone whom God has used in mighty ways who has ‘slipped under the radar’ until their moment to shine for Jesus arrived?

**Heavenly Father, please help me not to take pride in my theological training if it means I overlook the mighty ways you are using ‘ordinary’ people to serve in your kingdom. Thank you for parents, children’s ministry leaders, mentors and friends who have identified and encouraged gifts that you want to be developed for your purposes. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Thursday 27 May 2021

# Timid for too long

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness (Acts 4:29).**

Read Acts 4:23–31

Fear stops a lot of good things from happening. Sometimes that fear is justified as it can instil a cautious approach that recognises danger or unnecessary risk. Think of playing sport without the proper training or at a level that is way beyond the ability of the participant. Think of driving a vehicle on public roads in peak hour traffic without ever having driven before. Think of giving a knife to a two-year-old to prepare their own snack. Yes, these might be extreme situations because we know what is likely to happen if we just let the situation unfold. Different people will also have differing opinions on what is an unnecessary risk and avoiding danger.

Jesus’ disciples could well have taken the same approach when they were commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). If they thought about it for too long and didn’t trust Jesus and his promises to be with them always to the very end of the age, they might well have remembered what happened to John the Baptist, who was beheaded for speaking God’s word into Herod’s life (Mark 6:14–29).

Fear and risk aversion could well have held them back from reaching their potential as God’s servants, helping the early church to emerge in a hostile and ungodly culture. (Sound familiar?)

A couple of years down the track, Peter and John were better equipped following their intensive training with Jesus. They saw firsthand how Jesus went about his ministry, despite knowing the dangers that ultimately cost Jesus’ life in obedience to carry out his Heavenly Father’s will here on earth.

Prison and a severe telling off by the authorities were just the beginning of them facing the risks for their Master. However, their response is worth noting: ‘They raised their voices together in prayer to God’ (verse 24). They praised God for who he is and what he has done through the power of the Holy Spirit and recounted the things God had done previously despite opposition (verse 27).

On reflection, they also modelled a prayer that we, too, need to pray more often, ‘Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus’. This prayer adds another dimension to the prayer Jesus has given us, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ and ‘Deliver us from evil’.

Prayer to our Almighty God in the face of opposition places the task before the One, who, in turn, will enable us to face any fear or opposition with his blessing. What’s stopping you now from doing likewise?

Can you identify any fears you might have in stepping out of your comfort zone and trusting God?

**Lord Jesus, please forgive my misplaced fear of not trusting you in the face of opposition. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon me and all your servants so we can be used in small and great ways to help further your kingdom here on earth. Amen.**

Friday 28 May 2021

# A variation of the ‘green-eyed monster’

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**[Simon] boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, ‘This man is rightly called the Great Power of God’ (Acts 8:9b,10).**

Read Acts 8:14–25

There’s not much difference here between greed and envy (coveting) for Simon the Sorcerer. Both make the list of the seven deadly sins. Both can have very subtle ways of showing themselves.

Martin Luther’s commentary on the last two commandments teaches how wicked human nature is and how pure we should be from all the desires of the flesh and desires for this world’s goods. But that means to struggle and labour as long as we live here below. He said that God concluded the Ten Commandments with ‘Thou shalt not covet’ (envy) because if we kept that command, we would keep all the others. The reason people lie, steal, commit adultery and even kill is usually because of envy. We want something others have.

There’s a phenomenon known in church circles called ‘ministry envy’. (Be assured, envy occurs in business, sport, families and politics, too.) It can happen in all areas of Christianity – from clergy to lay people, young to senior, male and female alike. People look over the fence at what other churches, pastors and groups are doing and fall into the trap of comparison to the point where they begin to grumble about what their church isn’t doing and how other churches seem to be going better than theirs.

From that point on, it’s easy to see the slippery slope of discontent that blames others for the decline. It can also lead to schemes to get rid of the perceived problem and replace it with their solution. Whatever money can buy, they offer (like Simon did). The use of political lobbying at meetings is common. Safe Church policies can mean nothing when subtle bullying isn’t stopped. Common is the threat of leaving and taking their money with them.

Coveting (envy) can be seen here by Simon the Sorcerer’s thinking that he could buy the power of the Holy Spirit because he was so impressed with what he had seen it do through the apostles.

Three quick lessons on envy quickly help to restore perspective and call us to repentance. They can help us trust God for all that we are and need.

1. Envy forgets God’s goodness poured out in the past.

Where would you be without God’s provision?

2. Envy overlooks God’s goodness and blessings provided in the present.

The happy life is finding satisfaction in what God has provided for you today – because it is always enough. We find this especially in the gift of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and with our sins forgiven.

3. Envy ignores God’s goodness promised for the future.

Nothing will compare with what’s in store for us in heaven.

What are you envious of, and what sort of hold has it got on your life? Repent if necessary!

**Merciful Father, help me recognise your goodness in my life. Please give me a thankful heart, and empower me to be content in all areas of life as you provide for me. Amen.**

Saturday 29 May 2021

# Trying to put God in perspective

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength (Psalm 29:1).**

Read Psalm 29

Australia is approximately 3860 kilometres long from its most northerly point to its most southerly point in Tasmania and is almost 4000 kilometres wide, from east to west. The Lambert Centre of Australia is approximately 200 kilometres south of Alice Springs and off the main highway. I haven’t been there yet, but I did try to imagine what it would be like to direct Australia’s weather each day from such a central vantage point. I gave up because of the vast size of our great nation. I can barely see 30 kilometres off our local beach and certainly not beyond the hills that surround Perth.

I then checked out the NASA site and some images of Australia taken from the International Space Station. There are awesome pictures of all parts of our continent from a rare vantage point thousands of kilometres into space. Satellite pictures from the Bureau of Meteorology also reveal similar beauty in nature that we can’t see from our personal space here on earth.

Our Creator God is in control of all that space and infinitely more. With all its complexities, our planet is but one of billions throughout the universe that God not only created but oversees.

King David wrote Psalm 29 as one of his attempts to put into words what really is impossible to define. The power and majesty of God, his glory and strength revealed in nature as examples of who he is and what he can do. David speaks of the voice of the Lord being powerful and majestic, striking with flashes of lightning (verse 7) and able to shake the desert (verse 8), twisting trees and stripping forests bare (verse 9).

Quite rightly, our psalmist speaks of the Lord being enthroned as king forever. We humans will come and go. Our time here on earth is measured in decades, normally, not centuries or millennium. God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. And yet God desires to get personal with each one of us – with you! ‘The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace’ (verse 11).

As tiny as we are in the big scheme of our landmass in Australia, and as infinitesimal as we are in the universe, God still knows you by name. Through baptism, he even makes us his children. Through Jesus, his Son, God forgives us for our sins. He even gives of himself in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he creates faith in us that will carry us through this life and into his holy presence eternally in heaven.

Try putting all that into perspective. How great is our God!

Take a walk and ponder the beauty of God’s creation and the enormity of his love for you.

**God of Wonder and Might, help me cry ‘glory’ to your name forever. Place in my heart a song of praise each day. Let me sing of the joy of my salvation found in your Son Jesus. Help me honour you with all that I have today and always as your Holy Spirit leads me. Amen.**

Sunday 30 May 2021

# Being born again

by Norma Koehne

**Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again’ (John 3:5).**

Read John 3:1–8

When we think about birth, we often concentrate on the mother giving birth and the pain and hardship that she goes through. I would like to think about the child being born. Luckily, we don’t remember what this was like, but think for a moment of being pushed by those powerful muscles, pushed out into a cold world with bright lights and loud noises. No wonder a newborn baby cries. It is separated from the warmth of the mother’s womb, the reassuring sound of her heartbeat.

What a contrast when we are born again as children of God. A gentle splash of the waters of baptism and words spoken. As Jesus says, ‘Very truly I tell you, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit’. Rather than being separated, we are embraced by the love and all the blessings our Heavenly Father gives us, including the forgiveness won for us by his Son and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to walk with us and guide us. There are some wonderful images of the closeness of God to his children. In the psalms and Matthew 23:37, we have the image of God as a hen, gathering its chicks under its wings, keeping them safe and warm. Or we have the image in Isaiah 49:16, ‘I have engraved you on the palms of my hands’. How much closer can we be to God, etched into his very skin?

Praise God that we become his children through such a gentle birth.

**Loving Father, I often forget how much you love me and how close you want to be to me. Thank you for your overwhelming love. May I rejoice in your abiding presence. Amen.**