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**Sunday 4 April to Sunday 11 April**

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Sunday 4 April 2021

# Who are you looking for?

by Georgie Schuster

**He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ (John 20:15).**

Read John 20:1–18

We can only imagine the whirlwind of emotions that buffeted Mary’s mind and heart. Horror, despair, numbness, exhaustion. Now, enveloped in darkness, she makes her way to the tomb to do what needed to be done. Things had happened so quickly, and there hadn’t been time for Jesus’ body to be properly prepared for burial.

And now the stone is removed? Along with his body? Panic and confusion! Peter and John come and go. But where is Jesus? All she wants to know is the whereabouts of Jesus’ body. How could she fulfil the requirements for a proper burial? How could she grieve? And then someone asks, ‘Who is it you are looking for?’

Isn’t it blatantly obvious?

The one who had shown kindness to her when others had abandoned her. The one who had freed her from torment. The one who had spent time with her. The one who had lived, loved and served; the one whose life had been so abruptly and cruelly snuffed out. Then, as Jesus calls her name … a dawning realisation.

Instincts kick in as she goes to cling to the one she loves. But Jesus quickly redirects her to what really needs to be done. Tell the others, ‘I’m going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’.

What emotions would have flooded through her she ran towards the disciples? Her understanding of who Jesus is was expanding, breaking an inferior mould like an Easter egg. I don’t know whether it was in those moments, or in the days to come, that she came to understand Jesus as Saviour. That there was so much more to him than she had known. But I would have loved to be there when she burst forth with the news, ‘I have seen the LORD!’

**Dear Father, we praise you for Jesus’ victory over the grave and all that means for us. Help us to share this life-changing news with others. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**

Monday 5 April 2021

# Most unexpected

by Georgie Schuster

**From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me (Isaiah 45:6).**

Read Isaiah 45:5–8

Imagine for a moment that you are among the exiles living in captivity in Babylon. You had been born there, and this is the only life you had known. You’ve grown up listening to the stories of family and elders of the land they were taken from. Home. There’s an ache in your heart and a longing to be there in your own land, like the stories of the temple where your ancestors used to worship God. But it is all far removed. The temple in ruins, like your hope.

And then something most unexpected happens.

Cyrus, a foreign emperor, comes along and conquers Babylon, effectively putting an end to the years of captivity. He decrees that the temple back in Jerusalem needs to be rebuilt and the Jewish people need to go back there to get the job done.

Leaders conquering territory is nothing new. But here’s the kicker. Cyrus had no allegiance to Israel and didn’t grow up believing in God. Something else to note: this was all foretold in the book of Isaiah around 200 years before it happened!

There are times that we like to think we are masters of our own destinies and that we know how things are supposed to work. But things often have a habit of coming along to shake us from that illusion. God raised up the most unexpected person to serve him and his people all those years ago. Cyrus was the chosen one. Can you imagine the stories that would have circulated among the people of Israel as they walked home? Can you imagine the stories of the people in the surrounding lands? Indeed, there was a loving God at work behind the scenes – just as he is today.

**Dear Heavenly Father, help us to remember that our lives are in your loving hands. When we can’t see a way through, you direct our paths. There is none besides you. Thank you. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.**

Tuesday 6 April 2021

# Makeover

by Georgie Schuster

**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).**

Read Ezekiel 36:24–28

We all get to weather storms in life. And they tend to leave marks in one way or another. So how do we protect or try to insulate ourselves from getting hurt? One way is to ‘toughen up’. Sometimes we start putting up barriers around our vulnerability. We separate emotionally from others, which forms a wall. Then, often before we realise it, our hearts have hardened. We can find that the wall of protection has become our prison. We may be safe from potential threats, but something significant is missing. Loneliness creeps in, and the desire for authentic connection with others seems out of reach. God didn’t design us to have hearts of stone. He created us to have hearts of flesh.

In the Bible reading, God is breathing life and hope back into his people. His promises include:

* gathering them to himself
* cleansing them from past mistakes
* swapping out their hard hearts with hearts of flesh
* filling them with his Spirit
* repairing their relationship with him
* giving them a fresh start.

These promises are for us, too. Jesus paid the price for our restored relationship with God at Easter. We can receive healing in Jesus’ name. Our new hearts can receive and give love. We are empowered as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. This makeover is more than skin deep. It’s life-changing!

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for renewed hope. Thank you for taking our hearts of stone and giving us hearts of flesh and then pouring your love into them. Thank you for new life and new possibilities! In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.**

Wednesday 7 April 2021

# For all

by Georgie Schuster

**‘Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent’ (Acts 13:26).**

Read Acts 13:16a,26–33

Here, Paul is given an invitation to speak a word of encouragement to the people. The gathering included both Jews and Gentile believers. And Paul didn’t mince his words.

He called out his people's inability to recognise the promised Messiah and the way they had him executed. He shared how this had been foretold by the prophets. He made it known that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he was seen over the course of many days by several people. Paul encouraged the crowd as he declared the good news, the message of salvation: ‘What God promised our ancestors, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.’

Did the Jews wince as they heard of their failings? Or did a light shine inside them as all the puzzle pieces from the prophets they had heard growing up suddenly began to fit together and make sense? How did the Gentile believers receive this news? Did they look sideways at those they stood beside and think judgemental thoughts? ‘You had all these clues and you didn’t get it?’ Or did their hearts start to warm inside as they rejoiced that God had sent Jesus to save them?

God’s plan of salvation was difficult to fathom. It caught, well, everyone off guard. But it levelled the field. Jesus paid the price for all of our sins, for Jews, Gentiles, you and me. He rose victorious, and we have new life in him!

Like those people long ago, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent!

**Dear Father, fill us with courage. Help us encourage others with hope as we share the good news of Easter and what it means to everyone! In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.**

Thursday 8 April 2021

# Chosen

by Georgie Schuster

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession (1 Peter 2:9a).**

Read 1 Peter 2:1–10

We all like to be chosen for something, don’t we? From being picked in childhood games, sports teams, workplace teams and friendships, to even becoming a marriage partner. You name it! Being chosen means that we are recognised, valued and special. We have been noticed and invited to contribute. Someone thinks that we are worth it.

In today’s reading, Peter reminds us of our identity and purpose – two vital keys in life. We’ve been rescued from darkness, established and loved. We belong to someone who cherishes us and declares us ‘special’. We are a valued member of a new family where we all have important roles to play.

When we stop and take this in for a moment, how can we not respond with gratefulness and praise to the one who went to extreme lengths to give us this status? And how can we not extend this invitation to others?

Do you have a moment now?

**Dear Heavenly Father, some days I take this all for granted. Thank you for choosing me, giving me hope, securing my identity in you and giving my life purpose. I love you. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Friday 9 April 2021

# Really clean

by Georgie Schuster

**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (1 Peter 3:18a).**

Read 1 Peter 3:18–22

Jesus paid a heavy price for our sin. In order to bring us back to God, it cost him his life. Of course, death could not hold him, and he rose victorious. He is now at God’s right hand with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

But how does this impact my life?

I’m clean, really clean. I’m not talking about the outward grime that might accumulate throughout a day’s work and is then washed away in the shower, but the inside grime.

The barrier of sin that separated me from God is gone. The gunk of my failings and the guilt and shame that pollutes my soul and stops me from coming to my Father, like a frightened child who knows they’ve done wrong, is removed ... washed away. Jesus paid the price.

Now, I’m clean. I can run to Father God knowing our relationship is restored. I’m free to rejoice and dance in his presence as he sings over me. He delights in me, and I can flourish in his love. I can give thanks and sing praises to him. I’m clean, you see!

***Dear God, thank you for your love. Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for making me clean. Help me to live my life today with this in my heart and my mind. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.***

Saturday 10 April 2021

# Unity

by Georgie Schuster

**How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)**

Read Psalm 133

I could just leave today’s devotion as verse one. Because it kinda says it all.

The psalm continues with an image that perhaps is not one that we might readily relate to today. Have a read!

So, I will ask you, what image or feeling come to mind when you read verse one?

I can think of what it’s not. It’s not like going into a room with others and there is tension in the air. A knot quickly forms in your stomach as you feel people all pulling in different directions. You just don’t want to be there!

But what is the opposite? God’s people living together in unity is like breathing fresh air, deeply. It’s exciting as people share their ideas respectfully and listen to and value each other. It is people connected through the same foundation and moving together in response to God’s love, loving him and loving others. It’s a landscape filling with ever-increasing hope, peace, light and love.

‘For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore’ (Psalm 133:3b).

I’ll ask again: what image or feeling comes to mind when you read verse one? Share your thoughts with someone today!

**Dear God, please help us to live in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Holy Spirit, please lead and guide us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**

Sunday 11 April 2021

# What’s on your breath?

by Reid Matthias

**Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you’. After saying this, he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:21,22).**

Read John 20:19–31

You can tell a lot about a person by how their breath smells, can’t you? What they’ve eaten, whether they’ve cleaned their teeth. Are they coffee drinkers, or have they recently consumed Doritos? To get a sense of what’s on their breath, you have to get close. Really, uncomfortably close.

After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples huddled in a room wondering about the resurrection sighting of their Lord. They were afraid of the Jews, and perhaps even afraid that Jesus would return only as a ghost. The disciples felt surprised when Jesus made an appearance in their midst.

First, Jesus calmed them down – ‘Peace be with you’. Then he proved his resurrected reality: the physical, holes in his hands and feet, and the reality of being alive, breath. Only living things breathe.

But what does his ‘breath’ smell like? What is the aroma of his words?

Peace.

Sending.

Forgiveness.

The first words of the risen Saviour are of freedom from fear. Go on your way, faithful ones. Share the good news that no-one has to be afraid ever again. Death no longer has the final say. I’m sending you into a world gripped by the virus of fear, which replicates so easily in the cultured medium of a death-denying society. I’m sending you into this infected society to vaccinate it through forgiveness. Eradicating this fear will be a long, drawn-out process, and some will resist it, but true life comes from it.

Just as Jesus gave the disciples peace and purpose through his words, so he gives you peace and purpose.

What does your breath smell like?

**Holy Spirit, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be a reflection of your peace and forgiveness in my life. Amen.**