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**Sunday 3 July 2022 to Sunday 10 July 2022**

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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.

Monday 4 July 2022

# Singing mountains and clapping trees

by Tatiana Overduin

**The mountains before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).**

Read Isaiah 55:10–13

Have you ever heard mountains singing? Or what about trees clapping their hands? The reading today provides us with a remarkable image. Nature is an important and wonderful part of our lives. We are aware of the mountains ‘shaking’ when the tectonic plates move daily on the earth’s surface – but singing? The author Peter Wohlleben claims in his book, The Hidden Life of Trees, that trees communicate with each other. They ‘speak’ through their complex root systems, share water and nutrients through this extraordinary network, and the ‘mother tree’ protects the saplings that grow around her, even sending signals about drought and disease.

God has called humankind to protect the earth. When bombs tear craters into the ground, destroying forests, when we pollute and abuse the earth’s resources, one can hardly expect it to sing or the trees to clap in response. In Romans 8:22, God’s holy word informs us that the earth groans; all creation suffers in the bondage of decay since sin entered the world. We also read in this passage that human suffering is neither ignored nor dismissed. Pain is real, and human beings suffer together with all creation.

If we read the following verses, we can recognise this text as eschatological: meaning it points to end times, when God-centred gladness of the redeemed will glorify God’s holy name forever. Then we will find pure joy amid the suffering of all creation. Therefore, with hope, we wait in anticipation for the day when suffering will finally end, and all creation will be made right through Christ’s return. Then we will hear the mountains actually singing glory to God and the trees applauding God’s handiwork. Oh, what a happy day that will be! What a time of indescribable joy!

So, while we continue and care for all creation and each other, awaiting our resurrection, we are provided with a most excellent way to trust in God’s promises of peace – despite the evil destroying our precious earth and the suffering of his faithful people. ‘If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also rejoice in the likeness of his resurrection’ (Romans 6:5).

**Dear Father God, creator of the earth, instil in us an unshakable trust. Holy Spirit, open our mouths to sing praises of glory to you and let us clap our hands in applause to you, Jesus, for all you have done to save us through the perfect work of the cross. Amen.**

Tuesday 5 July 2022

# Ears go hears

by Tatiana Overduin

**Whoever has ears, let them hear (Matthew 13:9).**

Read Matthew 13:1–9,18–23

I have ears. I can hear – most of the time. People have ears; ears are for hearing, are they not? Shouldn’t all people then be hearing Jesus’ message?

When my children were very young, as a parent, I would have a little rhyme to remind them to listen: ‘Ears go hears’. As a middle school teacher, I’ve been known to still repeat this saying as a way for the younger students to remember. Children are renowned for not hearing instructions, not listening or not engaging with what is being said to them. But as the adult, it is my duty to teach them in a way they will hear, remember and act in the best possible response to what I’m trying to communicate.

We are God’s children, and we, too, know that we often do not hear God’s direction to us. In 1 John 3:1, the Scripture comforts us with spiritual instruction that ‘the Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God’. In verse 7 in the same chapter, we hear that we are not to let anyone ‘lead us the wrong way’ – not down the garden path, on the rocky ground or among prickly thorns.

We teach our children for their benefit and blessing to enable them to live a safe and secure life. In the same way, God teaches us through his word for the specific direction that throughout our lives, we may experience a bountiful ‘crop’ when we nurture faith in him.

But even in the ‘good garden soil’, there are bugs and pests, plant diseases, scorching sun and heavy storms that can damage and ruin. Despite our efforts to grow ‘good seed’ in ‘good soil’, we recognise that sin always disrupts our spiritual growth in God. The devil, the world and our sinful self – all are relentless. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

So what exactly does Jesus want us to hear in this text from Matthew? We are told that Jesus spoke of many things to his disciples. There is no doubt he taught that which we have heard from the beginning: we are to forgive and love one another and love others not merely with words that are heard, but also by our actions and true caring.

**God of love, we pray that you open our ears, so we can hear your word, understand it and enact it daily in our lives. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift, who is Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Wednesday 6 July 2022

# Listen to Jesus

by Tatiana Overduin

**Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me (Luke 10:16).**

Read Luke 10:13–16

In yesterday’s reading from Matthew, we audited ‘hearing ears’. Today we are instructed by Jesus to ‘listen’. This text for today actually fills in the gap from Sunday’s reading when we received Jesus’ instruction to his disciples before they were sent out.

We, too, are Jesus’ disciples. In John 13:35, Jesus says, ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’. Who is a disciple of Christ? It is all who God calls, and it comes with a requirement. In Mark 8:34, we read that Jesus ‘called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”’. This is a powerful image of discipleship for Christians, especially when we proclaim the message of the cross.

Jesus physically took up his cross and suffered a most excruciating death for the sake of his Father’s kingdom. It was his sacrifice to us. Being a disciple of Christ requires we listen to Jesus’ teachings and will involve us speaking and sharing the gospel message. Doing so will inevitably mean suffering rejection.

There is an anecdote of a weary Christian who pleads with God to take away the cross they must carry. It goes like this:

‘It’s too heavy. I can’t bear it anymore!’ the Christian implored.

God, being full of compassion, responded, ‘Very well then. Place it down and go find one here before you that you are prepared to carry’.

The tired Christian searched and searched and finally found a perfect fit. ‘This one.’ they said. ‘This one fits. Since I must carry a cross, I’ll have this one.’

God looked with pity on them and replied, ‘My dear child. This was the cross that you lay down. But take heart, I will help you carry it’.

Each one of us who follows Jesus has our own inimitable cross in life that we must bear. And it most likely will include being rejected because of Jesus’ name’s sake (Acts 9:16). Alone it can be too much. But with God’s help, we can endure to the end.

**Loving God, help us carry our own cross for your name’s sake. Help us not fear proclaiming your wondrous deeds, even when we suffer rejection. Help us listen to you and lead others to your cross of love. We pray in your holy name. Amen.**

Thursday 7 July 2022

# Save me, Lord

by Tatiana Overduin

**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:14).**

Read Romans 10:13–18

I have this verse as my phone screensaver. It has provided me reassurance time and time again when I have felt fearful, undecided or overwhelmed. I can trust that if I call on the name of the Lord, he will come to my aid. I believe in God’s faithful promise to me.

This week we have reflected on ‘hearing’ God’s word through the parables, ‘listening’ to Jesus’ teaching, and ‘speaking’ when we share God’s message with others. And so, we are encouraged through today’s text to continue in all these things, adding the essential ingredient of faith.

Jesus instructs us to hear, listen, speak and believe. In verse 14, we read, ‘How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?’ To believe and to have faith in our Triune God is a gift.

The practical physical attributes of hearing, listening and speaking are now complemented by the ability to believe: with the gift of faith established in the heart. In Romans 10:10, this is made clear, ‘For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved’.

Open our ears to hear your word,
May we listen to the sweetest bird
All creation praises …
Open our lips to join the song
With all creation, sing along
All creation praises …
Open our hearts to receive your gift
Bring forgiveness to heal the rift
All creation praises …

**Merciful God, we thank you for giving us ears, eyes, mouths, feet, hands and hearts to praise, love and serve you. Thank you that we can turn to you every day and call on you to help and save us. May all that is within us praise your holy name. To God be all honour and glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Friday 8 July 2022

# Before his eyes

by Tatiana Overduin

**Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13).**

Read Hebrews 4:9–13

Nothing in creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything we think, feel and do is known to God. He knows our thoughts, empathises with our emotions and observes our actions. Nothing is hidden. So, to stand before him is daunting because we know that we are sinful human beings in need of a Saviour. Yet we need not be ‘stuck in our shame, sadness or solitude’. God has provided a most excellent way to live in this broken world.

Defiance to God and rebellion against his word construct a barrier between us, and only a heart of repentance can restore healing to a damaged relationship with him and others. Psalm 139:8 recites, ‘If I go up to heaven, you are there: if I go to the grave, you are there’. Today’s text informs us that all of creation is under the same obligation. The winds and the waves obeyed him (Matthew 8:27).

In our reflections for this week, we have learned that God has asked us to have ears that are open to his guidance and mouths that are prepared to proclaim his saving message and praise his holy name. We observed that his eyes are upon all creation, even in our most inner being, right down to each cell. He is our God, who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases, crowns us with love and compassion, renews our strength, is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger and abounds in unfathomable love. What, then, can we do to repay his goodness and mercy?

His desire for us is to daily repent of our sins and place our complete confidence in him. In Greek, St John’s Gospel repeats the word pisteuo 98 times! God wants us ‘to believe’! He wants us to hear his word through powerful preaching and listen and respond in obedience with open mouths of praise, which in turn, opens our hearts to faith.

All have gone astray like sheep. God has rescued every one of us from precarious peril, swooped us up into his tender arms, comforted, forgiven and led us safely back to the flock. And when we recognise him, we return with gratitude in faith.

**Loving Creator God, speak to us daily through your holy word, so we can ponder your wonderful gift and hear your calling without doubt or fear. Let us daily hear and listen to your voice. Let us mind our thoughts, feelings and actions, so we can respond in love to you and our neighbours through reading and meditating on your word. Teach us to believe in your promises every day, so we need not be ashamed but grow in faith to stand atoned before you. Amen.**

Saturday 9 July 2022

# God’s mercy and love

by Tatiana Overduin

**In you, Lord my God, I put my trust (Psalm 25:1).**

Read Psalm 25:1–10

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. Each day, we can faithfully turn to God, depending on his word to empower and save us. For it is through the power of his word that we can trust.

I trust in you: do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. It is through trusting in God’s word and believing in his redeeming love for us that we stand triumphant.

No-one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Despite our sins, God cleanses us, and our shame is washed away.

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Through your word, we are established in your ways. Not by the ways of the world, instruction of our minds and hearts or journeys of our lives.

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. It is through God’s word that we are taught, placing every moment, every breath we take, into his saving grace. All day long, we can continue to hope.

Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. God does not punish us as we deserve but grants us his abounding mercy and love by his grace.

Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love, remember me, for you, Lord, are good. All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory; therefore, we can appeal for his mercy through the cross in reverence to him.

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways. How are we to hear? How can we know we are sinners unless he teaches us through his saving word? Then alone, we can thrive within the goodness and correction of his ways.

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. Humility is a gift given by the Holy Spirit. May we request this gift for our daily lives.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful towards those who keep the demands of his covenant. A covenant is a promise. Loving and faithful are God’s ways; in this, we believe.

**God of overflowing love and grace, thank you for your holy word. Thank you for providing us with the richness that the psalms offer, showing a spectrum of human emotion, suffering and sorrow, a symphony of joyous song – truly offering us a masterclass in human adversity! Fill our hearts with faith and love towards you and one another. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Sunday 10 July 2022

# Just another day on the road. Why?

by Darren Pope

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27).**

Read Luke 10:25–37

Windows up, air conditioner on and car karaoke tunes pumping to make the repetitious commute as painless as possible. Kaboom! At the lights up ahead, the sound of screeching brakes, smashing glass and ripping metal is horrific and offensive to every ear. Shocked silence. Stillness. Now what?

The moments after a road crash magnify the best and worst of human nature. Strangers put their commute on pause and pull over, and a heightened sense of purpose prevails. Checks of drivers and passengers happen quickly, emergency services are called, and so often, professionals with the capacity to care move quietly into action as responsibility for traffic management is taken care of by random tradies. Annoyed by the inconvenience, others slowly pass by, shake their heads, stickybeak, or get on the socials to stream and comment. Help arrives, care is given, wrecks are cleared, and the daily rhythm returns. Just another day on the road!

The Samaritan took a huge risk to stop, help and be generous! Through the lens of ancient cultural bias, other travellers were highly likely to assume that the Samaritan was the bad guy and stopped only long enough to steal from the stranger on the road. He risked judgement and punishment to render selfless help. So, why risk it? Extreme emergencies crystalise character, yet, gentle and humble acts of loving and serving latently permeate our daily lives, going unseen, unsaid and unknown. What motivates small or significant selfless acts? What’s our collective, ‘Why’?

Empathy and vocation are strong advocates for action. Deeply understanding needs allows sensitivity in our response. Wisdom is what guides decision-making as people serve their neighbours and the community. A crucial element is our capacity to listen, to ensure that we understand the specific needs of a particular neighbour at any given moment. As we listen, we stand beside our neighbour rather than assuming a position of superiority, thinking we know what the neighbour needs in advance. By asking, we serve through ‘doing with’ rather than ‘doing for’.

Grace sets us free to listen and ‘do with’ because of what our loving Lord has already ‘done for’ us on the cross and because he first loved us. God made us to be social, to be thoughtful, to notice, to ask, to listen in empathy. God designed us to actively live in community and share the road with family, friends and strangers every day. It’s not just another day on the road. God’s unconditional gift of love to us and a deep calling of the heart lead our response. That’s our vocation. That’s our ‘why’!

**Lord of love, thank you for knowing me deeply and coming to me again in unconditional love today. You know the speed bumps in my day ahead. Guide my interactions, my listening and my words. Thank you for being on the road and doing life with me. Amen.**

As a life-long learner, Darren has a heart to share the gospel through Lutheran education. He treasures time with family, is a mad VW Kombi fan, and loves to swim.