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**Sunday 9 May to Sunday 16 May 2021**

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Sunday 9 May 2021

# Simple, yet difficult

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Love one another (John 15:17).**

Read John 15:9–17

Simple, eh? How many philosophers, songwriters, poets and authors have echoed the Bible’s words: love one another, with the implication that all will be well. Perhaps the cartoonist Leunig captures it best in his cartoon where he states, ‘Love one another and you will be happy; it’s as simple and as difficult as that. There is no other way’.

So, yes, it is simple as that, but it is also very difficult. We all know and have experienced that in our everyday living with our family and friends, not to even mention the loving enemies part. Simple as, yet difficult as.

It would be great if I, and if you, could love one another and all life’s problems disappeared. But it doesn’t work like that, and Jesus knows it better than anyone. Perhaps that’s why before he tells us to love one another, he spells out that the Father loves him, and he remains in the Father’s love.

Just the same Jesus loves us, and we can remain in his love. Then we can love another. It’s not through our own strength or ability; it’s because we, you, I, are first loved unconditionally.

Living in that love allows us to love ourselves and love others. This enables us to look beyond those things that distract from loving. Sharing in the joy that Jesus offers and promises (verse 11) allows us to continue to love when it seems humanly impossible. For me (and that person), replacing negative thoughts about someone with the love of Jesus has changed the way I think, act and speak. It’s this love won for us and given to us by Jesus that allows us to love one another. It’s as simple and as difficult as that!

***Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me as your Father loves you. Help me to live in this love. And through your presence and with your help, help me to love all those I encounter. Amen.***

Monday 10 May 2021

# Who is the Helper in your life?

by Pastor Peter Bean

**I will send you the Helper from the Father (John 15:26).**

Read John 15:18–27

If you glance at various versions of the Bible, you will read many descriptive words in this verse. The Helper is variously translated as comforter, advocate, counsellor, friend, spirit. So I guess we have a choice as to how we imagine, or more correctly, realise, the Holy Spirit living in us.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit of God is all of these things listed above, or at least has characteristics of a helper, comforter, advocate, counsellor, friend and spirit. That makes some sense to me because then the Holy Spirit is not just a helper, comforter, advocate, counsellor, friend or spirit but is all-encompassing – God living in us!

We know Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20) through the Holy Spirit. We receive Christ through the Holy Spirit whenever we come to communion. We are constantly reassured through the forgiveness of sins that Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit. So, this all-encompassing support from God is ours.

This leads me to ask whether we do well to turn the title question around. Just as in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus turned the question from ‘Who is my neighbour?’ to ‘To whom can I be a neighbour?’ (Luke 10:29,36). Perhaps, in addition to asking, ‘Who is the helper in your life?’, we can ask, ‘To whom can I be a helper?’ (comforter, advocate, counsellor, friend?). If Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit – and I give thanks for that – how can I support, encourage, advise, listen and be with those in need? We have it in us to do so. Let’s look for opportunities.

**Thank you, Holy Spirit of God, for living in me and filling me with Christ-like qualities. Strengthen me, encourage me and embolden me to be the helper, comforter, advocate, counsellor and friend that my neighbour needs. Amen.**

Tuesday 11 May 2021

# Sadness becoming joy

by Pastor Peter Bean

**You will be sad, but your sadness will become joy (John 16:20).**

Read John 16:16–24

Reality lets us know we all experience sadness, or sorrow, at some stage, in various ways and dimensions. What I consider sadness, someone else may not. What you consider sadness may be – and probably is – unique to you. And that’s okay. I want to honour everyone’s sadness, at whatever level, whoever it involves.

Sadness is common. Yet sadness is unique. Jesus knows that. He talks about a woman’s sadness, or pain, as she gives birth. I know little about that, but I do know about the joy that occurs once the baby is born. I don’t know about your sadness, but Jesus does.

Some people say it is helpful to sit with your sadness. Part of living in modern society urges us towards the quick fix, but sitting with your sadness is like honouring it. It’s acknowledging that it is there, and it is part of you, as uncomfortable as that may be. And in time, the sadness will change to courage, patience, hope or joy. Like with the woman who has given birth.

So, sadness is and will be part of our lives. We can’t avoid it. But Jesus knows our sadness. Among other things, he says he will be with us always (Matthew 28), and there’s nothing that we can’t handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jesus has been tempted (experienced sorrow) as we have (Hebrews 4:15). In Revelation 21, there is the promise of a new heaven and new earth, where there will be no more death, sadness, crying or pain. Then our sadness will truly turn into joy!

**Thank you, Lord, that you are with us at all times. Please help us to bear our sadness as we look to the joy we have in you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Wednesday 12 May 2021

# The world and all its troubles!

by Pastor Peter Bean

**In this world, you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world (John 16:33b).**

Read John 16:25–33

What does the world mean to you? Is it about a good job, successful relationships, moving ahead, a happy family? Perhaps you consider it but a short stay before eternity. Perhaps you hope for an easy life and no troubles. Yet, Jesus tells us plainly: in this world, you will have troubles!

So what does God think of this world? Quite a bit, it seems. God looked at everything he had made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:31). God loved the world enough to send the Son into it (John 1 and 3). Christ was involved in the creation of all things (Colossians 1), and this includes the world and all in it.

So why would Jesus say we will have troubles in this world? In this perfect, blessed and holy creation? Perhaps it’s the ‘we’, or ‘you’, part of it. The human side of things. The desire to have more and get more, pushing aside others in our quest to do so (perhaps not literally, but still). The almost innate need to put me first, and in doing so, to hinder or hurt others. Our consumption habits show that here in Australia, we used up our share of the earth’s resources for the year by 22 March. Mmm, the human side of things seems to equal troubles!

So what do we do? Wrong question! But also the right one! Under our own steam, we can’t get rid of our troubles. Yet we can’t just continue the way we are going and say God is in charge – no problems. Yes, God is in charge, and Jesus reassures us that he has defeated the world. But the craziness of God is that he chooses to work through us. That’s why Christ lives in us. That’s why the Holy Spirit empowers us – to trust in God but also live and act as his people, to whom the world is precious like it is to God.

Perhaps reflecting on the world as God’s creation, as very good, as a gift, as ‘all things made through Christ and for Christ’ (Colossians 1:16) might encourage us to look at the world differently. Yes, there are troubles, and we will experience troubles, but we can recognise through God’s grace that we are part of the problem and part of the solution. As Jesus has defeated the world, we live in and under his care.

**Defeater of the world, help us not to be overcome by the troubles we experience in this world. Rather, help us turn to you, be reformed and renewed as your people who live under your care. Amen.**

Thursday 13 May 2021

# When are you blessed?

by Pastor Peter Bean

**[Jesus] raised his hands and blessed them (Luke 24:50).**

Read Luke 24:44–53

Just before he leaves them, Jesus blesses the disciples. It was appropriate to occur at this time – the last time he will physically see them, at the end of his physical ministry on earth.

But hasn’t Jesus been blessing them all along? Just before this action, Jesus recounts the gospel story: Scripture (ie Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament) being fulfilled, Christ dying and rising, the Holy Spirit coming into their lives. What a blessing.

And how about the miracles, healings and parables they’ve heard (and the explanations!) and the people whose lives have been changed? All these events they’ve witnessed – a blessing.

And their own lives – pulled apart, rearranged, changed forever – a blessing. So even though Jesus raises his hands and blesses them at the end of his physical ministry on earth, he has been blessing them all along.

We are verbally blessed at the end of every worship service when the pastor or worship leader raises his or her hands and blesses us. And it is appropriate that we are sent out into our daily lives, our working or studying week blessed.

But is that the only time we are blessed? Aren’t we blessed whenever we hear the gospel in a Bible reading, sermon, at a home devotion, during a group Bible study? Blessings all along.

And what about the answers to prayers (which might have been a yes or a no!), the fellowship we have experienced with neighbours, friends and family and the food we’ve eaten, and the people we’ve met who have shared stories with us? More and more blessings.

And think about your own life – pulled apart, re-arranged, changed forever – through all the events and history that is your own. There are blessings too numerous to list.

So it is good we are blessed at the end of a worship service, but remember, we are blessed all along.

When and how are you blessed?

**Thank you, Lord, for the reassurance of the words of the blessing. Help us to be aware of our daily blessings and to live in your grace each day. Amen.**

Friday 14 May 2021

# Life, now!

by Pastor Peter Bean

**But Elijah said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as you live, I won’t leave you’ (2 Kings 2:2,4,6).**

Read 2 Kings 2:1–12

Yes, Elisha repeats these words to Elijah three times in a very short time! Do they remind you of anything else in the Bible?

Possibly the words in Ruth 1, which are often used as a wedding text: ‘Where you go, I will go; where you live, I will live’. But you will more than likely know Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus and then Jesus’ threefold restoration of Peter in John 18 and 21.

So what does Elijah mean by these words, since shortly after speaking them, he leaves this earth and Elisha? Perhaps he is quite prophetic in the true sense of the word. Perhaps he understands that the kingdom of God lives within us and around us, as Jesus makes clear in his teachings.

When we farewell a person who has visited us, or someone we love who is dying, we say goodbye. Goodbye is a derivative of ‘God be with you’. So we are not saying, ‘I won’t ever see you again’. We are actually saying, ‘Until next time, may God care for you and look after you’. In one sense, we are saying, ‘You are not really leaving us, and I am not leaving you’.

Because as the Lord lives, so do we. In Christ, we have life. We have life abundantly; we have life now; we have eternal life now. Count the number of times Jesus says in John’s gospel, ‘the one who believes has eternal life’. Not will have! Not in some far distant place called heaven! Not pie in the sky! But if you believe, you have life now.

Perhaps Elisha already had this teaching of Jesus implanted in his heart, preparing him to be a prophet, preparing him to continue Elijah’s work. Perhaps Elisha knew something we can also know: as the Lord lives, and as you live, Jesus won’t leave you. You have life in him now, and you have life in him forever.

***Thank you, Jesus, for your promise of life – both here and in eternity. Thank you that through your love and gift, it is one continuous blessing. Amen.***

Saturday 15 May 2021

# Be strong like a tree

by Pastor Peter Bean

**They are strong like a tree planted by a river (Psalm 1:3).**

Read Psalm 1

Several years ago, I travelled from Adelaide to Wagga Wagga. I stayed overnight at Moulamein, NSW, about halfway. At Moulamein on the Edward River is a gumtree known as the Big Tree. Its girth is almost 12 metres, the biggest in the Riverina. It is still going strong, even though it is estimated to be between 500 and 1000 years old.

Imagine the birds it has hosted in that time – the lizards, insects and invertebrates. It has supported and given life to many creatures in nature. It has allowed them to live and be successful, to use the words of the psalm. Obviously, it has also brought much pleasure to the humans who have visited it.

Similarly, there is a large gumtree in a park behind where I live with its girth about five metres – who knows how old it is. It is planted below a dam, so it has a plentiful water supply. Again, many insects, birds and reptiles enhance their life from this tree. As well as this, the neighbourhood children love climbing it, swinging from its branches and playing underneath it (so do a few adults!). It has enriched the lives of many people and animals.

You could say these two trees have been successful in everything they do (verse 3) – as have many other river red gums in our country.

We are encouraged to be like these trees! Strong, producing fruit, succeeding in what we do. Obviously, we are not going to live to be 500 years old. But we can give life to others, enhance their lives by providing support in all sorts of forms: a word of encouragement, nutrition through Scripture or food and water, listening to those without a voice, and attempting to understand their situations, praying for them, seeking justice when justice is not present.

The river we are planted near is God’s love for us, expressed through Jesus’ death and resurrection, with the resultant gift of forgiveness and new life. If we continue to dip our toes in these waters of grace and mercy, we too can bear fruit and have leaves that provide sustenance. Then God can make what we do successful. Be strong like a tree.

**Thanks, God of nature and creator of all things, for your gift of large trees and all the benefits they provide. Help us to learn from them and fill our lives with your grace and mercy so we can be successful for you. Amen.**

Sunday 16 May 2021

# In the world but not of it

by Sal Huckel

**My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one (John 17:15).**

Read John 17:6–19

Today we read the section of Jesus’ prayer to his father for the disciples. We will look at some other sections of Jesus’ prayer later in the week. Perhaps we don’t often focus on this prayer dialogue, or even many others of Jesus’ prayers, such as the prayer for his friend Lazarus. We talk about the prayer Jesus taught us – but what stands out to us from reading this prayer of Jesus himself? What a privilege to be able to listen in on this intercession!

We learn of Jesus’ mission to the disciples now being complete – they have accepted his teaching. He is on his way to the cross after his final words to the disciples before his arrest. Jesus knows what is coming next for him on this earth – but he also knows what is coming next for his disciples. He glorifies the Father and prays for protection on his disciples, praying to the Father for their safety in his name. From all we have learned about prayer from Jesus himself, we know that there is an absolute certainty that his prayer to his Holy Father will be answered.

Jesus says that the disciples are not any more ‘of the world’ than he is! Jesus does not pray for the absence of suffering – but he prays for protection from the evil one. We sometimes use the words ‘in the world but not of it’ to describe ourselves or encourage others who suﬀer when following Jesus is ridiculed or challenged. We do well to remember this. Jesus will protect us from the evil one. But he isn’t necessarily going to ‘airlift’ us out of troubled situations. Current times demonstrate this all too clearly. But we are his children; he prays for us, and he is with us. We may need to remember that we are indeed not of this world, and we must resist temptation when it comes upon us. Or do we need to remember that we are supposed to be in this world? How can we share the truth of Jesus if we remain in a holy huddle, staying out of the world?

Who can you lift before the Lord today?

**Father God, help us to must remember who we are, who we belong to, and that we are sanctified by the truth through Jesus’ death on the cross. Help us follow Jesus’ example to pray for others, just as Jesus did, even when we are facing our own troubles. Help us to put others’ needs before our own – a great indicator that we are in this world but not of it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**