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**Sunday 20 August 2023 to Sunday 27 August 2023**

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Sunday 20 August 2023

**Passing on the gospel**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon’ (Matthew 15:22).***

Read Matthew 15:(10–20) 21–28

While I got baptised as a baby, I had no significant Christian influence in my upbringing.  There were a couple of times when I had some brief exposure to church, but it was never encouraged in my home growing up.

In my late 20s, I was serving in the army with a young family of my own. One of my colleagues shared the hope he had in Jesus with me. The timing was right, and I was hungry to learn more about Jesus and how he could satisfy a hunger I never really understood.

As we read of the Canaanite woman, her faith in Jesus is extraordinary. So often, we crave the whole meal, with trimmings and dessert, but this unnamed woman was satisfied with the crumbs that fell from the table. In doing so, she asked not for herself but for her daughter to be healed.

What stands behind her request is that someone else – who never appears in the story – told this caring mum that Jesus was someone she could put her trust in. Jesus has the power to heal and save. Go and see him for what you most need.

Jesus will always be the hero of this story, and the faithful woman who had the courage to ask him for help will be the one through whom her daughter’s needs were brought to him. But behind all the characters is the one who shared the good news with a neighbour.

It’s unlikely my army friend could have anticipated the start of a journey that led to my serving as a parish pastor. We don’t know the circumstances behind the person who shared their faith with the Canaanite woman, but it led to a young girl getting healed and a story that has encouraged countless people.

You may never understand how sharing the good news of Jesus Christ’s saving grace will impact the lives of others.  You can be confident that God’s Word goes out and does not return empty but achieves the purpose for which he sends it.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for those who have shared the hope they have in Jesus Christ. Give me the courage to share what has already been given to me. Amen.***

*Mathew is married to Sonja, and they are in the process of moving from the Barossa Valley in South Australia to Tabor in Western Victoria. They are blessed to have two adult sons, one married, but, as yet, no grandchildren. Mathew enjoys gardening, cycling, writing letters, and sharing adventures with Sonja.*

Monday 21 August 2023

**Where do you put your trust?**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17).***

Read [1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+10%3A14+%E2%80%93+11%3A1&version=NRSVUE)

I have barracked for the Mighty Richmond Tigers since I first moved to Victoria, aged 10, in 1977. It is hard to imagine, but many other people support other football teams, codes, or even interests other than sports. That’s the freedom we have as individuals. Differences like this help create a diverse and interesting community.

We may have the freedom to follow and express our different preferences in our daily lives, but St Paul is very clear about where we must put our trust. We are to flee from idolatry. Martin Luther described what it means to have a god or idol: ‘A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress’.

Our senses are bombarded constantly with messages that imply our lives would be so much better and more fulfilling if only we used this product or if we followed this advice or avoided these foods. Put your trust in this product to give you less grey hair, lose weight, gain financial security, or be a little bit happier – the devil is trying to shift our attention from Christ alone to anything else that captures our interest, even if it is for a moment.

In most instances, the products or experiences offered are harmless in themselves. Things that support healthy and growing relationships can be received as good gifts from the one true God. This puts everything in the correct order, whereby we put our trust in God alone and receive from him all the experiences that make us unique in our own way.

Binding us together is the one body and blood of Jesus Christ. Joined together through receiving Jesus’ body and blood is where we experience true unity. This unity is an exclusive gift, however. We are called to put our trust in Jesus Christ alone. Paul warns that we cannot drink from both the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

Whoever you barrack for, or whatever your interests may be, enjoy these as God’s gifts to you. But put your trust in the Triune God, who is the giver of all that is good, especially this gift of eternal life.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for binding us into the true unity of Jesus through his body and blood. Help us value the gifts you provide, using them to build up relationships with those around us. Amen.***

Tuesday 22 August 2023

**Keeping up traditions**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you (1 Corinthians 11:2).***

Read [1 Corinthians 11:2–22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+11%3A2%E2%80%9322&version=NRSVUE)

Like many families, we would observe certain traditions when we gathered for Christmas. The whole family would begin to assemble in the days leading up to Christmas Day. There were different events we would attend, dishes prepared for various meals, and games that would be played. There was a real sense of organisation, and everyone knew the role they were to play.

More often than not, someone would bring additional friends along to join in the festivities. They were made to feel welcome, and we would give them something to do so they, too, were part of the celebrations, making each Christmas special and different, yet also the same.

There was an order to the way we did things. Some of our traditions would not have made sense to others, but we always enjoyed this time together. Paul describes the ordering of worship to be observed in the congregation in Corinth in the first century. Such ordering helps people to fit in, and most importantly, it puts the Triune God at the centre stage of Christian worship.

In an increasingly secular society, many of the traditions and routines we observe during our worship services will seem odd or outdated. Yet through our services, we gather before God, who gives himself to us. He serves us by revealing himself through the word given through the Bible readings and the sermon.

The most amazing of all is that Jesus comes to us as individuals through the Lord’s Supper. Paul reveals how quickly this can become abused. The early church in Corinth fell into the trap of filling their bellies before their hearts. Paul guides the early Christian church back onto the path God laid before them, shifting their focus from satisfying their own desires to receiving Christ himself, which, in turn, strengthens them for faithful service towards others.

Traditions are a good thing, for they draw a group of people together into a common story in which everyone has a part. The best of traditions are those that stand the test of time and are passed on to those who are new to the journey. May you be blessed as you continue in your local worship and share these traditions with those you invite to join the celebration.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for the traditions that have been taught and passed on to me. Give me the courage to invite others to share in the blessings that come through these traditions. Amen.***

Wednesday 23 August 2023

**Proclaiming the Lord**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).***

Read [1 Corinthians 11:23–34](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+11%3A23%E2%80%9334&version=NRSVUE)

When I started attending services in the Lutheran Church in my late 20s, the first words I remembered were the Words of Institution. Each Sunday, the pastor would speak these same words. There was a reverence and a majesty to them. Before too long, I would silently follow along with the pastor, receiving these words, even before I was confirmed and able to join in with the other congregation members, shuffling forward to receive the wafer and the wine, the body and blood of our Lord.

There is nothing ordinary about the gift of Holy Communion. In this extraordinary meal, Jesus gives us his body and blood to eat and drink. After consuming these ordinary elements, the extraordinary thing is that Christ is now inside us, making us holy and setting us aside for his work as we serve others. We carry Christ with us, and now we shine his light wherever and whenever we serve.

Every time we join fellow Christians in eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim Jesus’ death. What follows is his resurrection to new life. Death, resurrection and eternal life are proclaimed through the eating and drinking of Jesus’ body and blood. It is proclaimed to those who are gathered together, strengthening us in our faith journey, all as part of the one body of Christ.

Our proclamation also extends to our family, friends and community. It says we continue believing in what Jesus has done for us and all people. The new life, won through Jesus’ death on the cross 2000 years ago outside of Jerusalem, continues to be delivered to us by the Holy Spirit, bringing to us the real presence of Jesus Christ.

The Words of Institution is not a magic incantation, but it is the means by which we continue to proclaim our trust in Jesus’ death and resurrection to new life. Together with the elements, they bring us forgiveness of our sins, strength for the life we live now, and the promise of eternal life.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus’ death on the cross, by whom we are saved. Help us proclaim Jesus’ death and resurrection to new life to those with ears to hear. Amen.***

Thursday 24 August 2023

**Jesus is Lord**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).***

Read [1 Corinthians 12:1–11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A1%E2%80%9311&version=NRSVUE)

Often, we can read God’s word from a self-centred viewpoint rather than a Christ-centred one. This means we look to see how we fit into the picture before understanding how Christ is at the centre of God’s word. This can easily lead to errors or distortions.

When reading St Paul’s writing about spiritual gifts, if we put ourselves at the centre of the picture, we begin to consider what wonderful gifts God may have given to us. We can easily start to consider the gifts God has given to other people. Then we fall onto the slippery slope of imagining which is more important or valuable for our work as followers of Jesus.

Paul starts from a different perspective, however. He reminds the Corinthians that they used to follow mute idols that were no help in any form. Against such old beliefs, Paul encourages them with the obvious truth that those who now believe in God, now filled with the Holy Spirit, will never say that Jesus is cursed. To emphasise his point, he switches it around so that no one can truly say ‘Jesus is Lord’ unless they have the Holy Spirit.

This means that for all Christians, the first and foremost gift given is that of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit creates, sustains and guards the faith given to you. Every time you confess faith in Jesus, you are reassured that the Holy Spirit is at work in you.

Paul follows this giving of the Holy Spirit with several examples of gifts of service that could be lived out by individual Christians, each aimed at building up the whole church. The recurring theme is that there is one Spirit, one Lord, and the same God who empowers these gifts to faithful people. No matter what they might be, these gifts should be used for the common good.

God values us for who we are rather than what we might do. Some people might be given particular gifts for a particular service, but that says nothing about their standing before God. As you confess your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, trust that you have been filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will guard your inheritance to eternal life.

***Heavenly Father, I confess faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, so I may confess Jesus before my family, friends and neighbours. If it is your will, bless me with spiritual gifts to build relationships that nurture the faith journey of others. Amen.***

Friday 25 August 2023

**Everyone has a role**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many (1 Corinthians 12:14).***

Read [1 Corinthians 12:12–26](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A12%E2%80%9326&version=NRSVUE)

St Paul uses the imagery of a human body – something we can all relate to. Every single part of our body has a role, even the bits that surgeons can remove without causing too many problems. (Just what are tonsils or adenoids useful for?) Different body parts seem to get used more often, and there are usually some parts we like more than others. It doesn’t matter what part it is: if anything is missing, the whole body suffers from its loss.

It is over 35 years since I did my army training. From the very first day, it was drilled into every recruit that you are part of a team. The whole team suffered if anyone failed in their role, was injured or unreliable. That sounds tough, and, at times, it was. But the opposite was also true. If the team succeeded at any given task, the whole team celebrated. Every individual was valued and important. Everyone had a role to perform. But we all worked together to make the entire unit successful.

The Christian body is called the church, and unlike the denominational bodies we construct, the true Christian church is that which the Holy Spirit calls and gathers into the one body of Jesus Christ, who remains the head. As St Paul wrote earlier in this chapter, every Christian is given the gift of the Holy Spirit. God may also give us different skills and abilities to serve as part of the body of Jesus here on earth.

Can you play music to support the worship of your local congregation? Are you good at welcoming people? Maybe you are good at explaining God’s word to those exploring the Christian faith. You could be one of those precious people who get into the menial tasks nobody really likes to do, but you recognise that they still need to be done. What you do is never as important as where you put your trust. Do you trust Jesus to lead the church as our head? Then that is enough for whatever work God has given you to do to be valued and important.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for calling and equipping me as part of the body of Jesus. Please give me strength, courage and endurance for the work you have given me. Help me support others so we build up the one body of Jesus together, serving the world today. Amen.***

Saturday 26 August 2023

**Praying for an answer**

by Pastor Mathew Ker

***On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul (Psalm 138:3).***

Read [Psalm 138](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+138&version=NRSVUE)

Do you find it easy to pray? There are times when praying seems to come effortlessly. Often, it seems to be more like hard work. If you find it difficult sometimes, don’t be surprised because the devil is doing all he can to prevent you from calling on God’s name in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks. When we stop listening or reading God’s word, the conversation between God and us dries up and praying becomes even more difficult.

Psalm 138 is attributed to King David. We are given an opportunity to listen in on a conversation between David and God. David thanks God with his whole heart. There is no chasing after false gods or idols. Whatever praise is to be sung, David gives it to God alone.

The reason for David’s thanks starts with God’s dwelling place on earth, his temple. Here, God connects with his people, receiving their offerings and giving blessings. Through all of the highs and lows of God’s people, lived out in the highs and lows of King David, the Lord has proven his steadfast love and faithfulness.

We may neglect going to church from time to time. We may be fickle in loving God wholeheartedly. We may be tempted to put our trust in our jobs, families or bank accounts, but through it all, God remains faithful towards us.

There were many times King David got into all sorts of trouble. Sometimes it was through the evil intentions of others; often, it seemed to be David’s own doing. The truly saving grace for David is that whenever he got into trouble, he called upon the name of the Lord as a first response, not a last resort.

Whether you are going through a time of great blessing or tremendous trials, be quick to give thanks to God or ask him for the help you need or the help you ask for those around you. God will answer your prayers. Through such an ongoing connection with God, your soul will be strengthened, and your faith in Christ alone will be increased.

***Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times I have been slow to call upon your name. Bless and equip me as I look to serve others. Provide for those whom I know to be in need. Amen.***

Sunday 27 August 2023

**Question one**

by Emma Strelan

***‘But what about you?' he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ (Matthew 16:15).***

Read [Matthew 16:13–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A13%E2%80%9320&version=NRSVUE)

Exams have two types of questions. The first kind requires you to regurgitate things you’ve read and learned by rote. The second type is the kind students usually complain about because they must apply their knowledge. They have to go deeper. This question usually starts with something like, ‘In your own words, describe …’

In today’s passage, Jesus gives his disciples an exam in two stages. Firstly, he asks, ‘Who do [other] people say the Son of Man is?’ Easy. They’ve heard what others say; there are no tough deliberations to be made: some say he’s John the Baptist, and others say Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Ten out of ten, full marks.

But then Jesus gets to part two – ‘Who do you say I am?’

And, suddenly, without much warning, Jesus asks the singularly most important question in the gospels. The question the gospels themselves pose in the very act of being written: ‘Given all that you’ve seen and heard, who is Jesus to you?’

And the answer differs. For some people, Jesus is just a ‘John the Baptist figure’ – a crusty old dude standing at a distance, shouting at them to repent their sins. Or maybe he’s a wise prophet figure like Jeremiah with some cool sayings, but now he’s just a part of ancient history.

Maybe if Peter were around today and Jesus asked him, ‘Who do you say I am?’, he would have spouted off one of the many creeds we have to explain Jesus: the Logos, word-made-flesh, second person of the Trinity, God’s only Son, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made … and so on. That’s why we’ve formulated creeds, right? – so we can have a theologically sound answer to the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’

But Jesus wants to know the difference between the general knowledge we can recite because others have taught us and the deep knowledge that has personally made its way into our hearts and actually brings about transformation.

And our answer to this question has major consequences. Peter is the very proof of that.

So, welcome to the exam today. The first question is: In your own words, who is Jesus to you?

Your time starts now.

***Lord God, thank you for challenging us to have a personal relationship with you. Please help us to examine who you are to us, not just in an intellectual way but in a way that truly transforms our hearts. Amen.***

*Emma lives in Adelaide and is studying a Master of Divinity at Tabor College. She also works as a freelance videographer, filming weddings, events and factual videos. She’s currently trying to work out how these two passions can fit together. Emma has a heart for youth camping ministry and for effectively communicating Christian concepts to the younger generations. Despite being in her early 20s, she’s a self-confessed grandma who loves reading, gardening, embroidery, cardigans and drinking tea.*