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**Sunday 24 April 2022 to Sunday 1 May 2022**

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Sunday 24 April 2022

# Doubt

by Rachael Stelzer

**The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord (John 20:20).**

Read John 20:19–31

Thomas has been known as the doubter for centuries. Earlier, he was called ‘inquisitive Thomas’, but the more recent label has stuck. How unfortunate for this giant of the faith.

Earlier in John’s Gospel, it was Thomas who encouraged his fellow disciples, ‘Let us follow Jesus [to Jerusalem], that we may die with him’ (John 11:16). And Thomas spoke up when Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for his friends, saying, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ (John 14:5). Thomas was ready to accompany Jesus all the way, even to death. And, as everyone knew, death was the end. If even Thomas, the companion of Jesus, could experience some doubt about his continued life, couldn’t anyone?

And John had recorded earlier instances of people needing to see before they believed. Nathanael had a cynical response after being told about Jesus, ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ He had to see for himself before he would confess Jesus to be the Son of God. And the Samaritan villagers told the woman from the well that they believed in Jesus, not because of her testimony but because they had seen him for themselves. Mary Magdalene even struggled to recognise Jesus in the garden.

And just after Thomas saw him, Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe’. Was this an indictment on poor old Thomas, whose mind had just been blown, whose life had just changed forever because he had seen the resurrected Jesus?

Or was it an invitation to you – a disciple of Christ – and to me? We who have not seen and yet believe? Did Jesus include us in the ranks of his disciples? John concludes this passage by reminding us that he wrote these events down ‘that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name’ (verse 31).

**Risen Lord Jesus, among the ranks of your followers, you graciously include me. I haven’t seen you, yet I have seen your work in my life and my world. How blessed I am by your gift of faith. In this Easter season, remind me of the life I have in your name. Amen.**

Monday 25 April 2022

# What is your new name?

by Rachael Stelzer

**Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome’ (Genesis 32:28).**

Read Genesis 32:22–32

For a second time, Jacob is alone in the wilderness at night. The first time, he dreamed of a staircase to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, and he built an altar there, calling it Bethel, the house of God.

Now ‘a man’ wrestles with Jacob all night. And as dawn breaks, this man – or more accurately, God in human form – tells Jacob that dawn is coming, and Jacob should let him go. (How loving of God to protect Jacob from seeing God and dying.) But Jacob refuses to let him go without a blessing. It seems that this wrestling match has concluded on Jacob’s terms.

And so God renames him. He is no longer Jacob, the usurper, the one who cheated his brother. That’s history. In fact, he is returning to his brother to be reconciled. No – he is Israel, the one who struggles with God and prevails. And he is affected – in this case, a limp, but he also has a new name, new title, new purpose.

What is the name you carry? What labels are dangling around your neck? Is it time to allow God to remove the old baggage, guilt and habits of mind?

What is your new name? What will people read and hear in your life if you face the struggle with the One who made you and loves you beyond all you can imagine? One thing is certain – you will walk away changed.

***Dear Lord, you could have had Jacob pinned in a second. But in the struggle, he saw a new vision of himself, and you blessed him and gave him a new name. And he walked away changed. I want that, too, Lord. I know it could hurt. But it could also set me free. Amen.***

Tuesday 26 April 2022

# Kingdom of peace

by Rachael Stelzer

**No-one living in Zion will say, ‘I am ill’; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven (Isaiah 33:24).**

Read Isaiah 33:13–24

The people of Israel in Isaiah’s time saw the Assyrians defeated and driven out of Jerusalem. They recognised that this was God’s work, and now the people asked themselves: who could survive in this new Zion? The answer was the righteous and those who were honest, upright and unable to be corrupted. Then Isaiah’s focus moved to the reign of the Messiah-King, during which wide rivers would flow through the desert country of Israel – but not strategic corridors for fleets of enemy ships. The ships would sit with masts down and sails slack. The people would wonder where the foreign tax collectors and agents were. And most importantly, God would restore the health and spiritual health of the people.

In this time of global conflict, when countries are lining up in military alliances, we too yearn for a kingdom of peace, wellbeing and forgiveness. A kingdom that is beyond national lines and brings about lasting peace. Let us pray for this peace.

**Prince of Peace, we lift to you the nations of the world that suffer because of war. We dare to lift them to your throne of grace, and we ask that you intervene to bring an end to war. We look forward to the day when you will personally wipe every tear from our eyes. Amen.**

Wednesday 27 April 2022

# Salvation comes from the Lord

by Rachael Stelzer

**What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord’ (Jonah 2:9).**

Read Jonah 2:1–10

Picture it. In the depths of the Mediterranean, a huge fish moves slowly through the water. As our view pans in closer and the fish surfaces, we hear a muffled chanting coming from the fish ...?

In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.
From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry …

Jonah sits in a fish’s stomach. Not exactly a pleasant environment, but on the bright side, he isn’t dead, which he absolutely expected to be right now. So he is singing a song of praise.

And it’s a beautiful psalm of praise that recounts exactly what happened to Jonah. I strongly encourage you to read the whole thing. It’s one of the most overlooked sections of the Jonah story. My favourite line is very evocative:

The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

But Jonah recognises that God saved him from death in the water through the supernatural intervention of the large fish, and perhaps he also recognises that if God can save him, then God can save Nineveh too. And Jonah vows, ‘I will say: Salvation comes from the Lord’. And he does.

**Dear Lord, Jonah wasn’t perfect, but he did lift his song of praise to you for your grace in sparing his life. May I sing your praises, with my words and with my life, for your grace and goodness to me. I will say: Salvation comes from the Lord. Amen.**

Thursday 28 April 2022

# All figured out

by Rachael Stelzer

**For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7).**

Read 2 Timothy 1:5–10

Paul writes to his dear companion and ‘son in the faith’, Timothy. This is a farewell testament, a reminder of what is truly important at a time of conclusion. Paul makes a point of reminding Timothy of the influence of his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, on his own life and faith and says, ‘For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God’.

Paul encourages Timothy to not be afraid, for that is not the result of the Spirit’s indwelling but to join him in suffering for the gospel. Paul adds:

He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9,10).

The joy of this news? It’s not about us. Praise be to God, who graciously saved and called us before the beginning of time and sent Jesus to bring immortality to light!

**Dear Jesus, you had it all figured out – before the universe began. You already loved me! You already had a plan for me! Your Spirit was moving! Move in me, Lord, and fan into flame the gift of God in me. Amen.**

Friday 29 April 2022

# Blood and water testimony

by Rachael Stelzer

**Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12).**

Read 1 John 5:4–12

At the end of John’s first letter to the churches, he sets up a courtroom drama. On trial? Jesus’ humanity. Some had been saying that Jesus was fully God but not fully human and that his death was not a ‘real’ death. The jury? The faithful, who had heard the prosecution and now watched the elderly apostle lay out his case for Jesus, the Son of God.

Witnesses include the water and the blood and also the Spirit. In John 19, at Jesus’ crucifixion, he gave up his spirit with a loud cry. The soldiers plunged a spear into his side, and blood and water poured out. In the following verse, the narrator (John) adds, ‘He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth’. Some scholars consider this as the ‘blood and water’ testimony to which John refers in his letter.

But if that isn’t good enough for the jury, John adds, ‘we accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater …’, and what is God’s testimony? ‘God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son’ (verse 11).

And this eternal life is not some distant, future, pie-in-the-sky wish. Eternal life begins right now for the believer.

Crossing back to John 17:3, Jesus prayed to God: ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’.

Eternal life! It’s now! And it’s available to you and to me. What do we require to attain it? The Son. Whoever has the Son has life.

**Dear Jesus, the water, the blood, the Spirit and the Father. All of them testify to you. Fully God and fully human. Eternal life is ours because you are alive. We praise and thank you for your love and sacrifice. Amen.**

Saturday 30 April 2022

# Singing your praises

by Rachael Stelzer

**You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent (Psalm 30:11,12).**

Read Psalm 30

Psalm 30 provides a beautiful picture of the God who spared the author of the psalm from falling into a pit and healed and restored them. It is an honest picture of the ups and downs of life and a relationship that withstands both the positives and negatives. And the author recognises God’s actions in bringing them out of the difficulties of life.

In our society, where the ‘self-made person’ is revered and individualism is prized, what a refreshing picture of life in relationship with our loving creator. May you be blessed with the vision to recognise God’s hand in your circumstances and give praise and thanks to the One whose anger lasts only a moment but whose favour lasts a lifetime.

**Dear Lord, when things are good, help me praise and acknowledge you. When things are bad, help me be honest and turn to you with confidence that you will be with me. I place myself in your hands. Amen.**

Sunday 1 May 2022

# Feed my lambs

by Neil Bergmann

**Peter said to Jesus, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’ (John 21:15).**

Read John 21:1–19

Jesus’ death and resurrection confirm for all of us that we are saved, redeemed and reconciled forever to God’s favour – not because we are good enough, not because we believe enough, not because we understand enough, but because Jesus is enough.

We know what we have been saved from – sin, death and the power of the devil. But what have we been saved for? Given that we can be absolutely confident in God’s promise of salvation, and we know we can do nothing more to secure eternal life, how do we respond to that impossibly generous and totally undeserved gift?

Today’s reading – and indeed, much of Scripture – gives us guidance on how we might live in response to God’s love. Just as Peter denied Jesus three times, Peter declares his love for Jesus three times here. Jesus responds by telling Peter how he can live out that love – feed my lambs, tend my sheep and feed my sheep.

If Jesus died for all, then all are part of his flock, and each of us is called to feed and tend that flock. We show our love for God by loving our neighbours. Each of us will be called to exercise that love differently. For some of us, it will be literally feeding those without enough to eat or caring for those society has forgotten. For others, it will be providing spiritual food through proclaiming the gospel, praying for others and giving encouragement and comfort.

Not just as individuals but also as communities of faith, Jesus asks us, ‘do you love me?’  We respond as Peter did, ‘Yes. Lord, you know that I love you’. As individuals and also as communities of faith, we need to pray for God’s guidance on how to live out that love in our neighbourhoods.

***Lord, you know that I love you because you first loved me. Guide me to understand how you are calling me to be part of your mission to feed your lambs. Amen.***