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**Sunday 5 September 2021 to Sunday 12 September 2021**

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Sunday 5 September 2021

# Too good not to tell

by Maria Rudolph

**People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak’ (Mark 7:37).**

Read Mark 7:24–37

Some things are just too good to keep under wraps. Think of the amazement of the woman at the well in John’s Gospel in chapter 4. She meets Jesus and drops her water jars then and there to run back to the village to tell everyone about him. It wasn’t just his teaching about God but what he had done to her that blew her mind – he revealed intricate knowledge of her life.

The people in today’s story are overwhelmed with amazement at what Jesus does, too. Only a short while ago, none of the people in this non-Jewish region of the Decapolis were interested in Jesus or the one true God at all.

Do you know who these people are? There used to be a demon-possessed man living among the tombs by the seaside there, shunned from society, for he was not in control of his mind nor his violent outbursts against others and himself. Jesus drove a legion of demons out of this man and restored him. The transformation was so amazing that the people of that region couldn’t help noticing and being awed by this Jewish rabbi, Jesus. The healed man himself and the witnesses of this healing obviously brought a crowd to believe in the powers of Jesus.

By the time Jesus returns there, people bring a deaf and mute man before him, expecting restoration. Jesus heals the man. The people’s amazement grows. Despite Jesus asking the people to stay quiet, this was too good to keep under wraps.

Of course, the good news of Jesus isn’t meant to be kept under wraps by us. At the end of Jesus’ earthy ministry, he tells his disciples, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you’. When you become aware of God’s constant transformative power in your own life and the lives of people around you, the good news of Jesus becomes too good to keep under wraps. How could you include God in the conversations you have with people today?

**Loving God, you amaze me time and again with your timing, provision and transformative powers. I am in awe of all you have done and continue to do for me. And I am in awe of the work of your Holy Spirit, whom I can see at work around me. Help me find the words to talk about you with the people I come in contact with today. Thank you for letting me be your light to the world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Monday 6 September 2021

# A good reminder

by Maria Rudolph

**I will open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (Isaiah 42:7).**

Read Isaiah 42:1–8

I wonder if you feel weary today, a bit dry and uninspired, maybe? Or are you bursting with excitement, ready for whatever comes your way? I know for myself, I can generally do with some extra encouragement to spur me on, to refocus my wandering mind back on what is important and where my help comes from, back unto Jesus. It’s not a coincidence Scripture repeats God’s promises and loving reassurance of hope again and again. It’s not enough for us or for any generation of people to only hear it once – or even ten times. We need to listen to the same words from God over and over. And these life-giving words from God are true for each one of us not just as a once-off, but over and over, God’s compassions are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22,23).

God has always known our need for redemption through Christ. Hundreds of years before the Messiah was born as a human being, the prophet Isaiah foretold his coming. We know through the gospels that Jesus actually healed the blind and set people free from demons that held them in dark captivity. And yet, Jesus himself knew and taught this was only a foretaste of God’s kingdom, and literal healing was only a small glimpse of the complete eternal healing. Everyone who puts their trust in Jesus Christ will be fully restored.

Often, we might not feel so healed; we might not see ourselves as set free from captivity and do not sense that we are released from darkness. We have a compassionate and faithful God of consistency, and our emotions and feelings are not the best gauges. Whether you feel ‘on fire for Jesus’ today, worn out, or something in between, allow God to come to you anew today, full of the same promises and hope that are always true for you. He fills you abundantly with his Holy Spirit and lavishes his love on you and through you, whether you can feel it or not. God’s got you, as he reminds you a little further on in Isaiah’s prophecy: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine’ (Isaiah 43:1).

**Come, Holy Spirit, and fill me anew with the living water of your eternal word with the joy of knowing my salvation through Christ. Thank you for healing my blindness by fixing my eyes on you, setting me free from the captivity of sin and releasing me from darkness by being the Light of the World. And thank you for being patient and reminding me over and over of your goodness so that I, in turn, can be a Christ-light to others through you who gives me strength. In Jesus’ name. Amen.** Tuesday 7 September 2021

# God has chosen me

by Maria Rudolph

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor (Isaiah 61:1).**

Read Isaiah 61:1–4

‘God has chosen me, God has chosen me, to bring good news to the poor. God has chosen me, God has chosen me, to bring new sight to those searching for light …’

Do you know this song by Bernadette Farrell? Google it if you don’t! It popped straight into my head when I read the first verses of today’s Isaiah passage. Do you sometimes find while you read a section of Scripture, you are reminded of a song or a hymn?

The Holy Spirit uses music to turn our minds to Jesus throughout the day. It’s this same Holy Spirit who was upon Jesus as he became the preacher of the good news, the healer of the broken-hearted, and as he released people from the prison of darkness. The Gospels contain eyewitness accounts of exactly that: a new covenant has been made between God and us people. The word ‘gospel’ is Old English and means ‘god spel’, literally ‘good news’.

Jesus Christ has come to heal and restore people, not just physically, but also to heal and restore us spiritually so we can walk confidently with God our loving Father, knowing we are forgiven. Jesus came to preach the kingdom of God, but he never intended for this to be exclusively his job. He had to ascend into heaven so that the Helper, the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, could come and be with and within the followers of Jesus – and that includes you!

The Holy Spirit makes sure the gospel is preached to the ends of the earth – literally because as we are sitting here reading this, we are a long way from Israel, where it all started! You know that all good things come from Jesus – now allow the Holy Spirit to work through you.

There is so much spiritual poverty all around us and a great famine for the word of God. Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:3). Those who are poor and starving are eager to be filled with the good news. Go and seize the day as you share Jesus through your words and deeds.

**Lord Jesus, thank you for binding up my broken heart time and again and for setting me free from the captivity of darkness and sin. I put all my hope and trust in the good news concerning you. Now help me to not just store this goodness up in my heart, but make me your vessel through whom you proclaim your gospel to the people around me through my words and my actions. Amen.**

Wednesday 8 September 2021

# One true hope

by Maria Rudolph

**But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me (Micah 7:7).**

Read Micah 7:7–12

Often, I have heard Christian people say, ‘Family is the most important thing’. We are certainly taught to honour our father and mother (Exodus 20:12) and be humble and gentle to all people (Ephesians 4:2), not least the members of our own family.

But relationships with others is somewhat out of our control. They can never give us complete satisfaction and fulfilment, no matter how much we pursue positive relationships with others.

Sometimes things go wrong. As we are reminded by the prophet Micah (7:6), ‘a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies are the members of his own household’. And the prophet Isaiah even reminds us, ‘Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!’

Although our closest friends and family may forsake us at some point in our lives, God never will. God can always be trusted; he is always constant. God is always close to you – in times of joy and in times of need.

God is, in fact, the most important thing and should come before all other things in our lives. When we have God as our number one, all other things will fall into place. It doesn’t mean the hardships will stop and everything works out for the better. But when we look to God above all else, we know where our help comes from. We can put things in perspective, and we can have confidence in him.

Have you been challenged in family relationships?

**Loving God, thank you for your constant, unfailing love. Help me put my trust in you completely. Help me be forgiving and loving with people who hurt me, particularly my own family members. Help me to love in the way you love me, unconditionally and loving even the unworthy and unlovable. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Thursday 9 September 2021

# I am willing

by Maria Rudolph

**A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said (Matthew 8:2,3).**

Read Matthew 8:1–4,14–17

We know that Jesus can heal with a simple word or touch of his hand. On one recorded occasion, it was even enough for a woman to touch the edge of Jesus’ cloak, and she was healed from a long-term condition (Matthew 9:20–22). The healing powers of Jesus were so awesome that large crowds flocked to him, and the sick and possessed came forward or were brought to him by others because people had faith in the healing powers of Jesus.

What about today? Do you hold that the age of physical healing is over and God doesn’t work in that way anymore? Is the failure to witness physical healing in your loved ones a reason you may be angry or cynical towards God? After all, Jesus is the great healer of many in the gospels. A word or a touch would be enough to make it happen. And yet, sickness and death are still all around us.

Sickness and death were indeed all around Jesus as well. Do you think that from a large crowd of over 5000 people who were fed, only a handful had physical ailments? In an age without medicine and much diagnostic knowledge like we have today, most people would have suffered some kind of condition, and life expectancy would have been low compared to Australia in 2021.  There was sickness and dying all around Jesus, and while he is recorded to have healed many, he certainly didn’t heal each ailment nor resurrected every dead person, although he certainly could have.

It is beyond us to know why some people are healed and some are not, why some people even today receive the gift of healing in the name of Jesus. Consider the words of Jesus in John 3:3, ‘This happened so that the work of God might be displayed’. We will never know why physical restoration and healing happens in one instance and not another, but we can be sure that we are completely healed spiritually when we put our trust in God. But just like the people who experienced Jesus’ healing power, let us never give up hope that physical healing is still a possibility at any point. Are you willing to trust Jesus beyond human reason?

**Our great Physician, you heal and restore people deeply and completely. Your Holy Spirit has made me new and continues to restore my soul again and again. Help me to trust in your physical healing powers too and never give up hope in the endless acts of mercy you are able to outpour on us. Help us to trust and follow you whether we receive obvious answers to our prayers or not. Reassure us that you hear us and are working for the good of those who love you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Friday 10 September 2021

# Labour pains

by Maria Rudolph

**The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (Romans 8:26).**

Read Romans 8:18–30

After the birth of my first child, I was pretty pleased with myself for birthing rather quietly – or so I thought. I was assured by my amused husband, however, that I had been anything but quiet! So, by the time I was in labour with my second child, I paid particular attention to my own noise level. I was stunned as I became aware I was making sounds I’d never previously heard anyone make.

Such is the intensity of childbirth. You might have your own story about labour pains. Whether you were going through them yourself, having your hand almost squeezed off at the wrist because of them or whether you are rolling your eyes and squirm at the mere mention of them. You don’t have to be an expert on giving birth to understand the intensity of labour pains.

We are all birthing something in our lives at various times. Your life in Christ is not free from pain and downright agony. Jesus hasn’t made that a secret. He says, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me’ (Luke 9:23). If you believe walking with Jesus is easy, you are like the woman who thinks she can give birth quietly.

So, when we are going through the pain, is the Holy Spirit the epidural or the midwife? Does he numb the pain or help us give birth to something new? The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, the Spirit of Jesus.

Paul reminds us today that he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for us under God’s will. The Holy Spirit helps us birth Jesus in our lives again and again. We become a new creation again daily as we shed the old Adam and put on Christ. Putting on Christ and following him isn’t something we manage alone.

We are reminded in John’s Gospel that Jesus prays for our protection (John 17:11,15). And we are assured that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us also. And does it surprise you that this causes agony for the Holy Spirit as he groans in ways words cannot express? In our own weakness and agony to follow God’s will, it is God, the Holy Spirit himself, who experiences pain in his constant intercession for us. We do not have a distant God who remains impersonal. Our God knows and cares for you. He is for you, as Paul reminds us in Romans (8:31), and if God is for us, who can be against us? In fact, Paul concludes, there is nothing in all creation that will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).

**Holy Spirit, come; fill me anew this day. Thank you for constantly interceding for me to remain in Christ. Help me cling to Jesus and follow him wherever he takes me as you reveal the path ahead. Give me the courage to step out in faith again and again as you birth new things in my life and your church, to the glory of God. Give me your strength to deny myself, take up my cross daily, and follow you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Saturday 11 September 2021

# Never stuck with God

by Maria Rudolph

**Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you (Psalm 116:7).**

Read Psalm 116:1–9

Have you ever been stuck in an absolute pickle? A situation so hopeless there seemed no easy way out? Once I decided to go for a five-hour hike on a 40-degree day in a remote national park with barely any shade and didn’t think it was necessary to take water. God blessed me with a wise friend that day and, somehow, we both survived the hike on the contents of her 1.5-litre bottle. Can you think of a dire situation in your own life?

Jonah prayed when he was swallowed up by a big 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. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord’ (Jonah 2:2,7,9).

His words are so similar to what we read in Psalm 116 today! It’s a reoccurring, often repeated story in many parts of the Bible: God is faithful, the people rebel against God or don’t think they need him, God is still faithful, people break away from God more and more until they get into terrible calamity, and God’s faithfulness sees them through to the end, even if they inflict all kinds of bruises on themselves in the process.

If only we could put our trust in God in the first place. That’s easier said than done, isn’t it? Jesus says to not worry about the next day because this day has enough worries of itself (Matthew 6:34). And we are reminded to cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Yet, we worry, fret, doubt and question the foundations of our lives and faith over and over again. This is why we have so many repetitions in the Bible of what we are hearing in Psalm 116 today, important reminders of the hope we have. We need them today, tomorrow and the next day. Rest assured, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. And be sure that the Lord works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

**Loving God, I bring before you all my worries and all my concerns. I place them at the foot of your cross, knowing I can entrust my today and tomorrow into your hands because they are yours anyway. You are the Good Shepherd who looks after each sheep, leading and guiding me through life for the glory of your name. Help me focus only on you and your goodness today and offer myself as your vessel to do with as you please. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Sunday 12 September 2021

# In over our heads

by Tom Brennen

**Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him (Mark 8:32).**

Read Mark 8:27–38​

When were you last ‘in over your head’?

I vividly remember the first lesson I ever taught as a teacher many years ago. My class of well-groomed youngsters greeted me politely and waited for the lesson to begin. The room was warm, and the excitement of a new school year was in the air. And like many graduate teachers, I would soon learn what it really meant to be a teacher.

The late nights of marking, the helicopter parents, the minor behavioural issues that come with working with teenagers and so on made me realise that my teacher training had not fully prepared me for the rewarding but very challenging day-to-day work of teaching. As my first parent-teacher interview night approached, I had great anxiety. I feared that parents would clearly see I had absolutely no idea what I was doing and that I was well ‘over my head’.

In this Gospel reading, we see Peter declare that Jesus is the Messiah, only to be rebuked by Jesus soon after for not getting what that really meant. Peter was in over his head here. Just as I was an inexperienced and young teacher, so Peter was an inexperienced and young Christian. He forgot – or perhaps failed to grasp – exactly what the fullness of Jesus’ ministry meant.

At the beginning of our faith as new believers, we find ourselves well over our heads – unable to fully grasp what it is to live the Christian life. Those who have years of faith behind us can still be like Peter and the first disciples, failing to grasp all of what it is to be a Christian and follower of Christ.

Christ says, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’.

As we take on the cross of Christ, we must commit ourselves to learn and grow in knowing what this means for us each and every day. Our sinful nature means Jesus will sadly have reason to turn to us and say as he did to Peter, ‘You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things’.

As we step out on our journey, let us diligently seek God’s grace, wisdom and guidance as we grow in the knowledge of what it is to take our own cross and follow Christ rather than the world or our selfish desires.

**Lord, may we approach your throne with humility and the knowledge that you are the author and perfecter of our faith. Help us grow in knowing what it is to take up the cross of Christ and follow you. Amen.**