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**Sunday 27 November 2022 to Sunday 4 December 2022**

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Sunday 27 November 2022

# Are you ready?

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:44).**

Read Matthew 24:36–44

This Christmas, are you expecting a visitor? Perhaps it is some of your family that visit every year. Maybe it is someone you haven’t seen for a while, especially with so much lost travel over the past few years due to COVID. How do you feel thinking about the upcoming visit? Are you excited about what you might do with your visitors or how you will spend your moments together? Does this fill you with joy, peace and gratitude? Are you ready for them, prepared for their arrival?

People get excited about an upcoming arrival of a friend or family member. There is a joy deep inside when you think of that time that will be spent, the rich conversations you will have and the moments of just being with each other. Better still is when you know you are ready for that visitor, having prepared all that needs to be prepared so the visit will be a blessing.

So are you ready for Jesus? For when he comes at an hour that we don’t expect? Are you excited about Jesus’ return, or is there a little work you still need to do to be ready for him?

The hardest thing when preparing for a visitor is that you seem to have to think of so much, especially if you have an eye for detail. Yet with Jesus, how can you be sure you have covered everything for his return? You don’t have to get new bedding or enough food for his return. You probably won’t have to worry about getting new clothes to greet him either. So, are you really, honestly, ready?

The most wonderful gift we have now is Jesus. He lives in us, and we live in him by his word. So, because we believe in him and live in him, we are ready for him no matter what time of day or year he comes. We are prepared and ready to receive the one who is coming, Jesus Christ. If we had to try to get ourselves ready and free ourselves from sin, death and the power of the devil, we would never be prepared for Jesus. If we had to earn grace and the love of God, quite honestly, we would never be ready either … there would always be something left to do. What great joy there is in knowing that, simply by believing, you are ready for your Lord Jesus to come again.

**Dear Jesus, you have bought me with the blood you shed for my sins and won eternal life for me in your name. Thank you for making me ready to receive and welcome you when you return, for you live in me by faith. Give me eyes of faith to see you every day in your word and my life. Amen.**

Pastor Mark Gierus is currently serving in Brisbane, Queensland, as a Lutheran college pastor. He has two beautiful girls aged six and nine and enjoys hiking with them, looking after their pets as a family and going on road trips. Mark prays that God will continue to bless you as you grow in him and come to know him more and more through his life-giving eternal word.

Monday 28 November 2022

# Our human hearts

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him (Isaiah 1:4b).**

Read Isaiah 1:1–9

This doesn’t sound like us, does it? We are surely not like the people of old, people chosen by God and called to follow him. Are we not a forward-thinking, have-it-all-together (at least it seems so on social media), and totally inclusive society which voices opinions boldly? Who voices the truth – well, our truth – boldly?

Are we okay to be people of the world entitled to be the owner of our lives and able to treat people how we want to treat them, not how we would treat ourselves?

In a world where we say we want the truth, why is it that we don’t want to hear it? The truth God spoke through the prophet Isaiah gives us insight into human nature. We, God’s chosen people – yes, just like the Israelites, we also are chosen by God to be his people – are corrupt to the core. We put ourselves first. We would rather put ourselves first, put others down, take a little more than we need and live by the flesh. Let us be honest – our hearts are sick, full of self and sinful desires. We tell ourselves that we are not as bad as others or don’t really sin, yet, sadly, we cannot save ourselves.

But the great news in all of this is that God had a plan a long time ago to heal our sinful, broken, diseased human hearts. Jesus. God sent his only Son, Jesus, to be the Saviour of the world. He sent Jesus to suffer and die on the cross so that we might have life – eternal life and life lived by faith now. Jesus rescues us from our sinful, corrupt hearts and recreates us daily through his word. He gives us new hearts to love not for ourselves but to love others out of God’s love in us. The truth now is, in Jesus, you are new, no longer the old human but rather a saint washed in the blood of Jesus, and through the birth, death and resurrection of our Lord, we have peace.

**Lord, thank you for washing me clean with the blood you shed for my sin. Thank you that you have changed my heart, making me whole again. Jesus, let me live for you as I live for others, sharing your love with them. Guide me each day by your holy presence, and show me those who are broken today needing your grace. May I bring your love to them in your name. Amen.**

Tuesday 29 November 2022

# All settled

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool (Isaiah 1:18b).**

Read Isaiah 1:10–20

How are you with God right now in your life? Is it time to settle some matters with God? For today, he speaks to you. He says, ‘Come now, let us settle the matter’.

What matter is God talking about? When you hear those words, what do you think? What do you understand and believe about God? He wants to settle the matter of sin in all of us.

Do you feel ashamed when you ponder what God has seen you do? Or are you defiant, standing firm and saying there is no sin in your life? Do you turn to run or look to another god to help you?

The most amazing thing about our God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – is that he doesn’t want to destroy you; he wants to save you.

You may know the verse John 3:16 by heart. But do you know what John 3:17 says? ‘For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.’

God’s heart is one of deep love and long suffering when his chosen people, including you and me, sin. When we suffer because of sin – our own and others’ – he suffers with us. He is patient and had a plan when sin first came into the world through Adam and Eve.

Now to settle the matter of sin. God sent Jesus to die in our place. To become sin for all so whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. Jesus came to save sinners, not to point the finger at you and say you failed, have missed out, or have no hope. No – Jesus says, ‘Come to me, and I will give you rest. I have forgiven you all your sins, and I will give you peace the world cannot give. Today, I give you hope and a future in me’.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Know that the matter is settled between God and you. In Jesus, you are washed clean, and when God looks at you, he doesn’t see your sin. He sees Jesus in you. You are forgiven.

**O God, you are a loving God. You turn no-one away. Thank you for settling the matter of sin once and for all on the cross by Jesus, your only Son. My guilt, shame and sins have all been removed, and you have made me your child. Help me walk each day as your forgiven child in your eternal love. Amen.**

Wednesday 30 November 2022

# Are you listening?

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths (Isaiah 2:3b).**

Read Isaiah 2:1–4

Are you a good listener? There is the temptation, especially when you are busy, to not listen very well or perhaps at all. We also want to do the teaching bit to others, especially when they don’t quite see things the way we do. Yet when it comes to listening and learning through listening, many of us struggle.

God wants us to learn from him – to learn his ways and walk in his Word, Jesus Christ. In a world hungry for spirituality, let us live out our Christian spirituality or a life in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Let us come to our Heavenly Father through Jesus, hearing his word. As we hear the word of our Lord, we come to know him. He teaches us his ways, not so that we can look down on others with our spiritual wisdom, but so that we can build others up in the love of God. Our call is to go into the world to make disciples of all nations. As we go, it is Jesus who goes with us. He is a light shining in us and through us to those we come in contact with, whether by word or deed.

God loves us and wants to teach us his ways so we can walk in his path. We follow Jesus to the cross, not on a path of glory but humility, patience, kindness, gentleness and love. At the cross, we are reminded again of what Jesus has won for us. In Jesus, we are forgiven, so now, by faith, there is no condemnation. In Jesus, we have been put in a right relationship with our Heavenly Father. In Jesus, we have salvation – we are saved from sin, eternal death and the power of the devil.

When the devil says to you, ‘See your shame, guilt and failure. See how you are not worthy of God’s love. See how you could never get it right’, it is then that Jesus speaks for us and in us. ‘You are loved, you are valuable, you have hope, you are forgiven, and you are mine.’

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, leads us on the path of righteousness for his name’s sake. So, listen to the soft voice of the Lord when he says, ‘Follow me, and I will lead you and guide you. You are mine’.

**God of grace, you want to teach me your ways, so I may walk in your truth forever. Help me to follow your living Word, Jesus. Remind me that you want the best for me and that everything you teach me will not always be easy, but help me trust you as I follow where you lead me. I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Thursday 1 December 2022

# Who do you trust?

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils. Why hold them in esteem? (Isaiah 2:22).**

Read Isaiah 2:5–22

Have you ever really taken some time to think about who influences you? We have influencers in society, and their job is to influence others. This language we hear describing people and what they do wasn’t used until recently. Yes, people have always influenced others in society, even in biblical times, but what does it mean when we have people in our world who are influencers?

Do you take the time to wonder how many decisions you make each day simply because others have influenced you to think a certain way? Do you find yourself trusting some of those influencers more and more?

The most dangerous thing about listening to an influencer is that they hope to influence others to like something or spend money on something that might be a little bit more expensive. They even influence others to act or speak a certain way. But life is surely more than being influenced by other humans who can make us believe a lie as the truth.

God does not lie nor try to influence our decisions. He doesn’t say, ‘Stop swearing, or I will destroy you’. Instead, God gently, through his Spirit, calls to you through his word. He speaks the truth, for his word is truth. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life – the Word of God incarnate.

As we head toward the season of Christmas, whose voice is the loudest in your life? What are the influencers saying about Christmas?

Will they say it is all commercial or all about feel-good things? Maybe they might say the same as the angels to the shepherds. ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.’

Let us never forget the reason for Christmas or Easter. Let us remember that God kept his promise and sent a Messiah, the Saviour of the world, so that no matter what people say, the truth remains that God loves so much that he gave himself up for us all.

**Dear Jesus, you are the truth. Help us hear your voice among the many voices of our time. Thank you for dying for me so that I might have life and that I might have it to the full. Let me never be ashamed of the truth that you set me free from sin and that you have called me to follow you where you lead me. In your name, I pray. Amen.**

Friday 2 December 2022

# What is your song?

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? (Isaiah 5:4a)**

Read Isaiah 5:1–7

How much proof do you need before you believe someone’s words? Do you trust your friend when they share something with you, or do you doubt what they say and go about trying to find out what the truth is?

When it comes to Jesus, do you believe his words in your life? ‘I lay down my life for you. I forgive you. I love you.’ Are these words easy to believe? The word of God today gives us an insight into his heart. ‘What more could have been done for my people?’

Today, Isaiah shares with us a song of sadness. He sings of the heart of God as God looks at his vineyard, the people of Israel.

What more could God have done for his people? He calls them together. Over and over again, God forgives them. Then we are told that God rejoices over them as he restores them again in a right relationship with himself over and over.

What song do you sing about God to others? Is it one of joy and hope in God’s promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, or is it one of hopelessness?

In Jesus, there is always hope. In Jesus, you will find peace. Even if your song is one of hopelessness, pain and sorrow, today, Jesus will put a new song in your heart. Ask him. Let him hold you, carry you and comfort you.

What more could God have done for his people who turned away from him? Nothing. You see, God has done everything already. God didn’t hold back but gave himself fully through Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. It has all been done, and Jesus says so on the cross, where he won the victory for us. He said it is complete, it is done, and it is finished. All the work of God is complete because we now have eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, and salvation in Jesus.

You don’t have to decide you want to be saved by Jesus from sin, hopelessness and brokenness. No, it has been done for you – simply believe it and receive the gift Jesus is. In him, you will find peace, for God has done everything in Jesus. This Christmas season, know of the peace from the baby Jesus who has come into the world. Sing a new song of joy, peace, love and hope in him.

**O Heavenly Father, you gave up everything for me. You could do no more, for all is done. Help me to believe and receive the beautiful gift of grace, love and mercy wrapped up in your Son at his birth and by his death on the cross. Thank you that I am part of your plan to live forever with you because you first loved me. Amen.**

Saturday 3 December 2022

# Praise

by Pastor Mark Gierus

**Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory (Psalm 72:18,19).**

Read Psalm 72:1–7,18,19

So, at the end of this week, we find ourselves one day closer to home.

How was your week? Have you much to be grateful for? Perhaps you have had one of those weeks that you might prefer to just forget about, yet the more you try to ignore it, the heavier your heart becomes. Maybe you are ready for 2023 to hurry up and begin, as it might mean a better time for you. Whatever sort of week you have had, join in with King Solomon and say, ‘Praise be to the Lord God who alone does marvellous deeds. Praise his glorious name forever’.

In all of King Solomon’s wealth and power, he knew it was not his, but all he had came from God. He knew that it was God who was to be honoured and praised – yes, because God is God and because he has done marvellous things.

When you find yourself lost, caught in sin, struggling to know the truth of who you are anymore, or facing health challenges, life challenges, or a loved one suffering, it is easy to wonder what marvellous thing it is that God has actually done. It is easy to even forget that God is God. It is even easier to stop thinking of God with any sort of praise.

We often forget when our eyes are on the things that trouble us that God has done and continues to do marvellous things. God has sent his only Son, Jesus, to rescue you and all who believe in him from sin, death and the power of the devil. Jesus shed his blood at Calvary so that you might have eternal life simply by believing in the one God has sent, Jesus.

You might say that is great, and you can praise God for that but wonder how it helps you now. Jesus says to you, ‘I am with you always’. He says, ‘I know what suffering is. Let me carry you, for I will give you rest from your burden'. He says, ‘Learn from me because I care’. Know that God in Jesus will never leave nor forsake you, and you will find rest in his everlasting arms. In your trouble and in your joy, call on God’s name. That is praise simply by calling on him. Praise be to the Lord God, now and forever.

**Heavenly Father, change my heart when I don’t see what marvellous things you have done and continue to do in me and through me. Refresh my soul with your Spirit and show me anew the blessings you give me daily. Open my mouth so I may sing of your goodness and praise you all the days of my life. Amen.**

Sunday 4 December 2022

# Our helplessness is not a problem for God

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight (Matthew 3:3b).**

Read Matthew 3:1–12

Do you ever find it difficult to confess the ‘I am a poor helpless sinner’ line at church? Does it hurt your ego or your old self (as we Lutherans say), maybe just a little? Does it ever make you think about how lost we are when apart from God?

Today’s reading reminds us that it is not a bad thing to find ourselves lost and aware that we are sinners. Every one of us holds on to sins that we think are ‘most important’ to our lives. We even do this without being aware of it. Every time we set any gift of God above him, our love of those things becomes a sin. Fortunately for us, being a ‘helpless sinner’ is a prerequisite for receiving God’s mercy. And don’t we need God’s abundant mercy and grace?

We, like the people of Israel, are so lost that we even need God’s help to know how bad our situation really is. And so, as John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord to make the path straight for Christ to meet us, the Holy Spirit helps us too. With the help of the Holy Spirit and through God’s proclaimed word, we can know that we are sinners in need of divine intervention. This should be easier for us as Lutherans, realising that we are simultaneously saints. By baptism, we are already grafted into God’s family, and nothing can separate us from God’s love. Yet, we still sin, and that reality can sometimes overwhelm us. So, for us as redeemed sinners, as we return to repent of our sins Sunday by Sunday, we can be encouraged because our spirit is constantly renewed. As our hearts and eyes are turned from our own will and desires, we release the control that the old self has over us, and room is made for God to enter and continue his will and work in our lives.

This Advent season, take a moment to meditate on the gift of being restored to God through repentance. Ask him to send the Holy Spirit to prepare the path to Christ in your life and help to release the sins that have kept you company. May God also help you share the blessing of this release with others as you return to serve in your family, church and community vocations.

**Merciful Father, thank you for sending John the Baptist to show your people that we cannot come to Jesus without your help. Lord, have mercy on me, a poor helpless sinner, and send me your Holy Spirit to help me realise my own sins and place them at the foot of the cross. Lord, restore the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. By Christ’s blood, Amen.**

Kimberley Pfeiffer is married to Pastor Joshua, and they have four children. Kimberley served in various capacities in the LCA Churchwide Office before moving to the USA at the beginning of 2022 for Joshua to complete his PhD studies. In God’s provision, Kimberley has been given the opportunity to study a Master of Arts (Theology) degree at Concordia Theological Seminary, St Louis, which she says she is enjoying very much.