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**Sunday 5 April to Sunday 12 April**

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Palm Sunday 5 April 2020

**Your King is with you**

by Pastor Tim Ebbs

**‘Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey’ (Matthew 21:5).**

Read Matthew 21:1–11

In this very different time we have the privilege of being God’s witnesses to so many in our community who are anxious, uncertain, and may even be panicking, fearful for their health, their loved ones, their jobs, their homes, their future.

This virus has shown us the very real limitations we all have – that life is not ours to control. It shows our common frailty as human beings, and our utter dependence on a saving power and help outside of ourselves.

That power and help rode in to Jerusalem to be nailed to a cross. Palm Sunday reminds us that although we are in isolation, God did not isolate himself from us. Palm Sunday reminds us that God sent his saving help from the highest heaven: Jesus, true God, Son of the Father from all eternity, born for us, the one from Nazareth of Galilee. So we have such good news to hear for ourselves and to share with others.

In the person of Christ, God has already come into a perishing world to be its Saviour, and his saving help is bigger and far more powerful than anything – even Coronavirus, and even death itself. For through his own death Jesus has brought life to the world. Through his shed blood God has forgiven you all your sins, so that nothing will ever be able to separate you from the love of God or his saving help in Christ Jesus.

Your King is with you until the very end of the age, and through his holy word he still comes to you in gentleness to bestow divine peace. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

***Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your saving help for the world from the highest heaven – the Blessed One, our Lord Jesus Christ. Keep us safe in your care, close to your word, and strong in faith, so that we can joyfully proclaim the hope we have to others and sing your praise forever. Amen.***

Monday 6 April 2020

**Precious**

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial’ (John 12:7).**

Read John 12:1–12

Each of the gospel writers tells a story of a woman, her perfume and her hair. In John’s account, the identity of the woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and we are told that she has saved her perfume for this day.

This reminds me that when I was young, I tended to save gifts I considered precious. I’d put them aside so that they wouldn’t be broken, so that I would still have them when it was the right time for using them, or because I didn’t trust myself to use them wisely yet. (More than once, I saved my Easter chocolates so long that they turned white!)

When Jesus, her friend, teacher and her brother’s healer arrived, Mary knew that the time was right to use her precious perfume. She poured it out in an extravagant gesture that simultaneously honoured Jesus and shamed herself.

As we follow Jesus this week, perhaps there will be some Mary moments for each of us. Are you feeling the urge to do something unprecedented with the gifts and inclinations the Holy Spirit has planted within you? Then go for it! At other times this week we’ll honour Jesus by continuing to serve just as we always do (like Martha) or by reclining with Jesus (as Lazarus does in this story).

Whatever this week will hold, we know that Jesus honours each of us with his presence in our homes, because we too are his dear friends through the power of his cross.

**Dear Jesus, with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, we also honour you in our homes and in our hearts. Lead us this holy week and grant us the wisdom and courage to follow. Amen.**

Tuesday 7 April 2020

**In plain sight**

by Pastor Matt Bishop

**‘Sir … we would like to see Jesus!’ (John 12:21b).**

Read John 12:20–36

How are you going to see Jesus this Holy Week? Will you be joining the new virus-facilitated phenomenon of binge-watching worship from Lutheran congregations across Australia and New Zealand as it gets linked, streamed and downloaded to your lounge chair? Or maybe you have set aside some additional quiet time with your favourite devotions books and sacred music.

‘We would like to see Jesus’ is a fitting request for Holy Week. It was first uttered by some Greeks who were in Jerusalem to attend the same Passover at which Jesus would become the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world.  It is the same request that been made ever since by seekers, believers and even (especially) sceptics.

At its heart is seemingly a desire to see something of God’s glory. Perhaps it’s God’s power, healing, majesty, joy or comfort.

Yet God tells us that his glory is most seen, quite simply, in Jesus. The Father’s booming voice says, ‘I have glorified [my name] and will glorify it again’ (John 12:28). God was saying that his glory had been on show in the ministry of Jesus and would be seen again in Jesus’ death and resurrection to follow.

But it’s not just the knowledge of Jesus in history that matters here, as important as that is. To really see Jesus is to receive by faith the benefits of his work. Enter the Holy Spirit!

This Easter, as we read the Passion narrative, receive from the great theologians of the ages and sing our favourite Easter songs, we can be sure the Spirit will be doing the Spirit’s central work of taking what is Christ’s and making it known to us (John 16:14,15) – big-ticket items, like bearing our burdens, banishing shame, lifting guilt and handing us life. And out of these promises, equipping us for service of Christ and his world – service where you might be surprised to see Jesus, but should expect to. For Jesus says, ‘Where I am, my servant also will be’ (John 12:26b).

***Lord Jesus, thank you that in your death and resurrection you are in plain sight for us. Just as you have served us, bring our selfishness to die like the kernel of wheat so that many seeds of service for you and the world can spring up. Through your Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.***

Wednesday 8 April 2020

**Betrayal**

by Sal Huckel

**‘As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered him’ (John 13:27).**

Read John 13:21–32

Many of us have experienced betrayal at some time by someone close and dear to us. Have you ever shared the deepest parts of yourself, only for that trusted person to turn on you and become an enemy?

Reflecting on our own experiences can bring us closer to the cross, closer to Jesus’ Passion. But even as we think about our own experiences of betrayal, we can read today’s text and still not be able to comprehend the magnitude of Jesus’ betrayal by Judas.

There is something here for us though. Because Jesus was betrayed so painfully by Judas, we can be sure that he knows the dreadful pain and shame we feel from the betrayal of our friend or loved one. He has been there. We can take our pain and brokenness to the cross in the confidence that Jesus knows it and feels it. He lived it before we did. He lives it with us now. As we heard recently in the story of Lazarus, Jesus wept. He wept because he knew the pain. Every human emotion we experience, Jesus knows it.

Sometimes a betrayal might end in reconciliation. Sometimes, though, as with Judas, a betrayal will end with no reconciliation on this earth and we are left to wonder how it fits into God’s kingdom. One day we might have the answer, and many others. For now, though, we need to trust God’s divine plan for our lives, with the assurance that he knows our every care and worry. After all, he has walked it all before us.

**Lord Jesus, just as the disciples had no idea what was playing out before them, so we have many things going on in our lives that we cannot understand. Help us to trust that you have the full picture, and our times are in your hands. Where there is betrayal, we pray you will bring repentance and reconciliation. Where we are not able to experience those things, we pray by the power of the Holy Spirit that we will be able to trust your sovereign will for our lives and leave our burdens at the cross. It is comforting to know that you share our pain, and you weep with us. Amen.**

Maundy Thursday 9 April 2020

**A command**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

**‘You also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you’ (John 13:14b,15).**

Read John 13:1–20

What is the job you would least like to do? Perhaps it’s vacuuming or dusting. Or you might be particularly disengaged from cleaning the toilet. Imagine, though, taking out the basin of water and washing the feet of your friends.

Maybe you’ve done this before as part of a worship service. There is a true sense of discomfort and embarrassment. Feet are generally dirty. Toenails aren’t always kept well. Let’s not get started on what grows …

Now imagine that the Son of God is wrapping a towel around his waist and without asking begins to wash your feet. Are you uncomfortable? Is it about your feet, or the fact that Jesus the Christ is doing the washing?

There is no social distancing whatever in this command.

Embedded in this first Maundy (‘Maundy’ means ‘command’) Thursday is the directive that followers of Jesus are all part of foot-washing. There are no ‘designated foot-washers’; all of them must do this so that they might experience the true grace, mercy and power of Jesus.

Who is this Jesus who looks beyond our dirt and the places we’ve been?

Who is this Jesus who washes us clean, not only with the waters of baptism but also with the blood from his veins?

Who is this Jesus who calls you and me into this mission?

What does washing the feet of others mean for you?

***Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus, who spared no indignity to offer us salvation through his cleansing blood. Open our hearts and minds for opportunities to care for others so that they might experience his grace and mercy. Amen.***

Good Friday 10 April 2020

**We were there**

by Pastor Robin Stelzer

**‘He was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace’ (Isaiah 53:5).**

Read Isaiah 53:1–6

I have seen many deaths – from infant polio children to the last heartbeat of a suicide. But nothing could be more disturbing than this death. There is reason to avoid the movie The Passion of the Christ – too raw to inflict the memory files of many of us. No other death reveals such brutality, cruelty or hatred in our human heart. There is a dark insanity at work in our nature.

Yet the record of Jesus Christ with merciful love for us holds the event of the cross as paramount and unavoidable. History screams from this Friday 2000 years ago. To turn our eyes away is to shrug off a far worse virus than anything medical science has ever faced. Today we stand before the awful cross.  Here the life of Christ was tortured from him; he whose love blazed brighter than any other in the pages of history. This was no story gone wrong. This was his plan, why he came.

This day is most illustrated by art, written by literature, dramatised, filmed, sung, orchestrated, worn as gold, raised on steeples. Yet I dare not watch as a bystander. I take my terrible place here. I am the mother broken, the disciple betraying, the healed one confused, the crowd shouting, the pastors mocking, the soldier nailing. I am here in my dark insanity of evil, my sin.

Here I meet Jesus of the cross. How I hate this! How it disturbs me. Yet this is my only hope, my virus cure.

We were there. Thank God, for this day is our only hope.

**Lord, take me to the scene which I flee. Let me see in your suffering the truth about my plague. Let me be brought to my lowest before you, whom I have crucified. Take me to this place of darkness, humbled for my only hope, the vaccine of new life. This day is not for my misery, but to end my misery, my fear, my guilt. Ready me for the dawn to come, the Son-rise of your love for us all. Make us your instruments of Good News, your cross for us. Amen.**

Saturday 11 April 2020

**The second day**

by Linda Macqueen

**‘I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope’ (Psalm 130:5).**

Read Psalm 130

There is the day Jesus died, the first day. Good Friday.

There is the day Jesus rose from the dead, the third day. Easter Sunday.

And there is the second day. The pause.

Many of us forget to pause. We who have known since we were toddlers how the Easter story ends can rush too quickly from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, and we can miss the lesson, the lament, of the second day.

On the second day, Jesus is dead. His followers’ lives are turned on their heads – the shock, the desperate despair, the brutal agonising betrayal: ‘Why did he lie to us? We are fools – how could we have believed that he loved us?’ And the fear – the consuming, gut-churning fear.

Where are you, God? Why have you abandoned us?

Nothing. Not a sound from God, no comforting Spirit breeze, no whisper of peace. From the God who commanded storms to be quiet and demons to flee … now only cold, empty silence as the disciples huddle together in the dark behind locked doors.

The second day.

For the disciples, the third day, resurrection day, came quickly. Jesus rose from death and in one glorious life-changing moment their despair and fear turned to joy upon joy! For you, for me, though, the second day can last weeks, months, years, maybe a lifetime. Pain, depression, hopelessness, fear, darkness – so deep, so relentless that we can barely believe anymore that our resurrection day will ever come. Faith trembles. Hope fades.

But your resurrection will come. God has promised it. He might be silent but he is with you. God cannot break his promises, and he has promised that he will never leave you or abandon you. He walks softly with you in your darkest night, his Presence closer than your breathing, carrying you in his arms to your resurrection day.

For as surely as night follows day, so day follows the night. One day soon you will hear the pre-dawn cackle of kookaburras, as your resurrection day awakens.

Until it does, wait and pray. Pray and wait. Your resurrection day will come.

**Lord my God, the second day is hard. It is hard to keep believing in you when I can see no hint of the end, no light on the horizon. Thank you for holding me during those times when I can no longer hold on to you. Amen.**

Easter Sunday 12 April 2020

**He sees you**

by Jane Mueller

**‘She thought he was the gardener … “Mary!” Jesus said’ (John 20:15,16).**

Read John 20:1–18

Chemicals in the brain that cause emotional responses are generally absorbed in about six seconds. When we give in to overwhelming emotions – confusion, anxiety, anger, terror, grief – these chemicals can take up to four hours to dissipate. Neuroscientists call this the amygdala hijack. During the amygdala hijack, we can become inward-looking and irrational, and lose sight of what’s happening around us. It’s not until we shift our thinking to the prefrontal cortex – the logical part of the brain – that we are better equipped to assess and respond to a situation.

I wonder if Mary Magdalene was experiencing the amygdala hijack when she initially turned to leave Jesus’ empty tomb. Not only had she lost her Teacher, Friend and Lord to an unfair trial and barbaric execution, but she witnessed first-hand that Jesus’ body was not where it should have been. Throw into the mix a chat with a couple of angels. Mary had experienced a tumultuous and unnerving few days.

Overcome with grief upon grief, despite knowing and loving Jesus, Mary mistook him for the gardener. There he was, standing right in front of her, but she didn’t recognise him.

How often are we so swept up in our emotions that we fail to see Jesus standing right in front of us? How often do we default to panic or hysteria, neglecting to trust that Jesus is at work in our circumstances and that he had a plan all along? Could it be that, on a grand spiritual scale, the human condition leaves us in a constant state of amygdala hijack? Maybe at times it’s our disbelief that God will truly follow through on his promises. After all, his promises are unfathomable to the human mind.

The highlight of Mary’s story is that, even though she didn’t immediately recognise Jesus, he recognised her.

Mary’s story is my story. Even when I don’t see the Resurrected Lord Jesus because of my human doubts, frailties and insecurities, he sees me.

This is your story, too.

He sees you.

**Jesus, you are risen. You are risen indeed! You see me and you call my name. You are my constant Companion and you never leave me. When I feel distanced from you and can’t see you, open my eyes to your presence. All glory, praise and honour are yours, my Risen King. Amen.**