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**Sunday 3 March 2024 to**

**Sunday 10 March 2024**

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Sunday 3 March 2024

**Come and you will see**

by Giesa Panpan

***He said to them, ‘Come and you will see’ (John 1:39a).***

Read [John 1:35–42](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A35-42&version=NRSVUE)

In the Melanesian communal perspective, an invitation from someone means two things: participation and celebration. Invitations are made only for significant occasions, with specific tasks assigned to engage both host and guests. When everyone is participating from the time of preparation to celebration, the event becomes successful and satisfying.

The passage for this meditation tells us about two disciples who began to follow Jesus for their own reasons. But then Jesus asked them, ‘What do you want?’ Their answer was far from profound, but Jesus gave them a simple invitation, ‘Come and see’.

That invitation is an invitation for a journey with Jesus. It is not a simple journey to undergo only spiritual experiences, but an invitation to respond to Jesus’ call throughout the whole of life. From the enthusiasm of youth to the maturity of old age, the discipleship of Jesus makes obedience to the master’s call the central priority – a special journey of discipleship formation.

When Jesus began to call his disciples, they already knew what kind of person he was (John 1:35–41). They already knew he was inviting them for a purpose, and they were willing to follow him even though they did not understand the meaning of the invitation. Jesus told Peter and John to leave their fishing business and ‘fish for men’ – to help others come to Jesus. Jesus was calling them away from their productive trades to be productive spiritually. It is a call to journey into a complete transformation of life witnessing to the gospel. The gospel is like a net, lifting people from dark waters into the light of day and transforming their lives.

This invitation begins with asking ourselves, ‘What am I seeking?’ To follow Christ for our own purposes would be asking Christ to follow us – to align with us, to support us and advance our cause, not his. Christ’s invitation is a journey of radical transformation that affects our job, our lifestyle, our values, our goals, or aspects of our beliefs. Although it took time for Jesus’ call and his message to get through, the disciples followed.

In the same way, we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus. As we journey through this Lenten season, take a moment to pause and reflect. What are you really seeking? Will you commit to seeking Jesus and continuing to journey with him?

***Heavenly Father, bless the work of the ELC-PNG Ministerial Training Department as they train leaders to serve those in their care with a holistic approach, ensuring they know their identity, accept themselves as a gift from their Creator and love and respect their neighbours. Amen.***

*The devotions for the coming week are taken from LCA International Mission’s 2024 ‘40 Days – a Lent Devotional and Prayer Guide’ and are written by mission partners around the world. This year the devotions have been written by members of our partner churches focusing on the theme ‘40 days with the Storyteller’. LCA International Mission invites you to pray for God’s global mission and churches beyond our borders. You can download an electronic copy of the ‘40 Days’ guide at the* [*LCA International Mission website*](https://lcamission.org.au/join-gods-mission/pray/) *or request a printed copy by emailing*[*lcaim@lca.org.au*](mailto:lcaim@lca.org.au) *or phoning 08 8267 7317.*

*Giesa Panpan is the Ministerial Training Department Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG).*

Monday 4 March 2024

**What is your purpose?**

by Khun Pim

***Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink (Matthew 25:34a).***

Read [Luke 16:19–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A19-31&version=NRSVUE)

When I read the text about the rich man and Lazarus in the gospel of Luke, it made me think about a story that happened at a small village in a rural area of Thailand. It was about 30 years ago, when I was young.

The village had only 20 families, no electricity, no water system, and no social media. Moreover, the village was on the Laos border where the communist area was. When fighting happened, it was a risky area for the people. The Thai government had a rescue point in that area to protect people in the village and the region. I remember that a soldier from the rescue point came to my house every day to help with food and pharmacy.

This story helps me to think that we can have peace, warm hearts and love when we give our hands to help people who are suffering in their life. The story of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us how to use wealth, talent and time to rescue and protect the poor and those who suffer in the world. But even more than that, it reminds us of the importance of placing our trust in Jesus for forgiveness and life.

The text also reminds us to think about the purpose of life when we are in the world. We should seek the heavenly treasure from our Father that is never lost. We should find and share faith, love, peace and hope to all people.

***Loving God, strengthen and comfort the Lua evangelists serving district 5 in Nan, as they make disciples through teaching and ministering to those living in the communities in Northern Thailand. Father of peace, love and fellowship, give us a blessing on our hearts, to see, hear and listen to the voices of people who are in pain, worry, fear and depression. Lord, have mercy on us. Amen***

*Khun Pim is a Lua evangelist for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand.*

Tuesday 5 March 2024

**Surrender**

by Emile Nkurunziza

***Your will be done (Matthew 26:42b).***

Read [Matthew 26:36-42](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+26%3A36-42&version=NRSVUE)

Could you surrender everything you love and submit completely to God’s will?

Christ’s will was undoubtedly good, yet he surrendered this in order that God’s will be carried out. In his sinless human nature, before he was beaten and tortured, Jesus knew how he was going to be treated. He knew that his body would bear the wrath of God against the sins of the world. When, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he, therefore, asked his father if there was any way out (to remove the cup) but added, 'Not what I want but what you want' (Matthew 26:39). The cup was not taken away from Jesus, but he was given strength to take it and drink it until it was empty.

It is from Christ’s example that we too are transformed to live. Just like Jesus, there may be things that we want to do or do not want to do which are not or are God’s will. Our own sinful will, never free of evil, is at war with God’s will. It is therefore imperative that if God’s will is to prevail, we must look upon God as so gracious and us so genuinely accepted by him, that we allow his graciousness to overflow from us.

Confessing our sin and inclination to selfishness, we cannot know or do God’s will by our own strength. We therefore need to ardently and earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit will give us help and mercy, forgiving our shortcomings and transforming our hearts so that we can discern what God’s will is for us. And then to submit to his will.

Jesus’ example teaches us to pray that God’s will be done because as we do so, we are asking for God’s direction in our lives. For when we follow him with gladness, he will lead us in a life of joy and hope and a life without fear.

***Holy Spirit, draw us close to the Father, confessing our sins and surrendering to his will for our lives. Bless Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Burundi, as they strengthen their relationship with Lutheran churches in nearby countries and, in doing so, are a beacon of light for Christ. Amen***

*Emile Nkurunziza is the Bishop of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, Burundi.*

Wednesday 6 March 2024

**Build on a strong foundation**

by Rovasoa Harivony Razafindrabe

***Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock (Luke 6:47,48a).***

Read [Luke 6:47–49](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%206&version=NRSVUE)

In this parable, Jesus uses something that is very important in a human’s life – a house and the way to build it. A house means independence, safety from dangers, readiness to face life …

In this text, Jesus compares building a physical house to a spiritual house. From John 14:3, we know that Jesus has already built a place for us believers and wherever he is, we will be with him. The house he is talking about in this text is our spiritual life. Let us look to how a wise person builds a house.

We have three steps to follow here:

1. The first step is to come to Jesus Christ. Human beings do not know how to come to Jesus by themselves. It is a calling and a choice put in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is why there are missionaries and evangelists who work as a bell, reminding people about God’s calling. This step is the work of evangelism.
2. The second step is to hear his words. If there are people talking around us, we can hear them whether we want to or not. We can choose to listen to the conversation or not; we can place importance on it or not. But if we are interested in something and we want to hear it clearly, we have to turn off the other sounds around us and pay attention. There are many people who come to Jesus but are they really interested in his words? Do they place importance on it? Do they know how to listen to his words? This step refers to the edification work.
3. The third step is to do. Here, there is a decision to make; it is not a passive action but an active step. It is the step of doing and practising the words. There are many people who make a decision about their life and leave bad habits to adopt a new life. Some even have to leave their family, culture, house, village and even their country to show respect to the words. This step refers to spiritual maturity.

These are the steps to take for a wise person to build his spiritual house, his safe and independent spiritual life. The one who has a strong foundation will resist all obstacles and they will not use God’s word to fit their own ideas and their own convictions but instead be shaped by God’s word and have his forgiveness and love as the foundation for all they do.

***Jesus, our true foundation, we pray for the Malagasy Lutheran Church, as they send missionaries into Asia, Europe and North America, bringing the news of true gospel of Jesus, his forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Help us to build our lives on you, the Living Word, and send us out to share the good news with others. Amen***

*Rovasoa Harivony Razafindrabe is a doctor and missionary for the Malagasy Lutheran Church, Madagascar.*

Thursday 7 March 2024

**Building with the gospel**

by Marey Sundaraj

***The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened (Matthew 13:33).***

Read [Matthew 13:33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A33&version=NRSVUE)

‘Pau’ is a Chinese bun that is enjoyed by everyone in Malaysia for breakfast or tea time. The dough is made with flour, yeast, salt, sugar, vegetable oil, water and baking powder. After kneading, the dough is left to stand for one to two hours, giving time for the yeast to work through the dough and bring it to rise. Then the dough is punched down, the preferred filling is added into the pau, and it is then steamed for consumption. This is how just a small portion of yeast is used and spreads throughout the whole dough, fermenting in such a short time.

Our God, who loves us and is all-knowing, sent Jesus Christ so that through his death and resurrection, we be brought into the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven started small, built through the ministry of the prophets and the disciples, with Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19). The good news of Christ is that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, which brings salvation to all whom God calls. The gospel impacts the world as does the yeast in dough. The yeast is in small quantity, yet it impacts and works through the large amount of dough.

As Isaiah 55:11 says, ‘So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it’. So, it is with the preaching of the gospel. When the gospel is shared, it works in the heart of each person, bringing them into repentance and faith in Christ’s saving grace. The joy of the Holy Spirit and the gift of salvation prompts us to carry the gospel into the world through words and action. This we see in the lives of the apostles and early church believers, which resulted in the extension of the kingdom of heaven throughout the world. The yeast in the parable, which is the gospel message, secretly and irresistibly has transforming power, hence we as God’s people need to go into the world to preach the gospel. God’s will is that the church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will continue to work for the extension of God’s kingdom. Let us arise and build. All praise and honour to God!

What do I do with the gospel message that has been entrusted to me?

***Christ Jesus, bless the work of the Lutheran Study Centre, Malaysia, as they serve students who are training to be pastors in the Lutheran churches in Malaysia. Amen.***

*Marey Sundaraj is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia.*

Friday 8 March 2024

**Dwelling in humility**

by Eleven Sihotang

***I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, but the one who humbles themselves will be exalted (Luke 18:14).***

Read [Luke 18:9–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+18%3A9-14&version=NRSVUE)

A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stands and prays, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income’. But the tax collector stands far off, not brave enough to look up to heaven. He beats his breast, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, a sinner’.

There are similarities between the Pharisee and the tax collector. The two men go to the temple with the same purpose – to pray. However, the content of their prayer differentiates them. The Pharisee is proud that he is righteous before God for all his good deeds. He compares himself with others, including the tax collector. His words and how he behaves really hurt the heart of the tax collector. The tax collector bows his head and confesses himself as a sinner. He asks mercy from God. He feels unworthy before God. The short sentence from the tax collector comes from the bottom of his heart, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'.

We can see and meet people who pray like the Pharisee. There are people who name themselves as religious, counting the good deeds they do, for example, attending worship every Sunday, donating money to support the church, and feeding the poor. By those things, they consider they are more righteous than others. Some people announce their good deeds via social media, expecting praise and recognition, thinking their reputation becomes better. They assume the good deeds will determine their salvation.

How can I be right with God? Is it through good deeds? Do I work out salvation for myself?

From the parable, we learn that there is hope for sinners. The very short prayer of the tax collector got an extraordinary response, 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted'. Be humble before God. Believers are justified by faith and by Christ alone. During the weeks of Lent, we are invited to come to the presence of God. So come to the presence of God and say 'Lord have mercy on me, a sinner'.

***Lord have mercy on us sinners. We pray for the women who are training through the Sekolah Tinggi Diakones HKBP, as they become part of the creation of a Christian community that is faithful, professional, moral and adheres to the principle of serving wholeheartedly. Help us to do likewise, serving you with humility and repentance. Amen.***

*Eleven Sihotang is the Director of the Sekolah Tinggi Diakones Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, Indonesia.*

Saturday 9 March 2024

**A pearl of great price**

by Kyosuke Sugioka

***Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45,46).***

Read [Matthew 13:45,46](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A45-46&version=NRSVUE)

Born into a Christian home, I have walked with Jesus from the beginning. Unlike distant treasures, Jesus has been with me and has been a close companion for as long as I can remember.

So, for me, I read in this parable that the merchant is the kingdom of heaven. If this merchant represents the kingdom, i.e. Jesus, what does the pearl mean? The answer is obvious: each of us.

But here, in contrast to the previous thought, the question looms large of whether I am really a pearl of great price. It is difficult to see myself that way. I am acutely aware of my weakness and inability to show my true self to others. As a weak believer, I am not able to be proud that my faith is worthy of salvation.

Sometimes I feel that I am not needed by anyone. But isn't this exactly why Christ was crucified for our sins? Jesus endured the physical pain and mental anguish resulting from our sin. Just before his crucifixion, in his last moments, he cried out to the pain of feeling abandoned by everyone, by his disciples and by God, which resonates with us.

But God never abandoned Jesus. Having conquered death, the wages of our sin, Jesus ascended to heaven in glory. To God, Jesus was undoubtedly a pearl of great price, and each one of us must also be a pearl of great price. There will definitely come a moment when we are compelled to feel that way. That is when I realise how valuable I am to God and how valuable Jesus is to my life today.

For me, that moment comes when I am travelling in a foreign land, and in a new encounter. It is when I fall into difficulties that I have no control over that I see the presence of God. This God who does not abandon me, but arranges for someone to show me the way. When I had nothing to eat, my visa expired and I lost my way in the midst of a global pandemic, there was nothing I could do except pray and ask. Still, there were people who comforted me and showed me a new path. I have lived my life with the help of those who are close to me. Through them, I have been reaffirmed of the greatness of God.

Now, how on earth can we as pearls respond to the merchant (God) who considers us expensive and wants to get us? I can only wait. I can only be found. I can only pray and seek. I can only live today, relying on God who says, ‘That's good enough’.

***King of Heaven, thank you that when you look at us poor, helpless sinners, you see a pearl of great price, thanks to Jesus' saving work on the cross. Strengthen and encourage the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church in Japan, as they cherish the spirit of the reformation, worship God based on the words of the Bible, and walk a life of faith while praising God. Amen.***

*Kyosuke Sugioka is a member of the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church in Japan.*

Sunday 10 March 2024

**The light has come**

by Kathy Matuschka

***This is the verdict: light has come into the world (John 3:19a).***

Read [John 3:14–21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A14-21&version=NRSVUE)

Today’s reading includes the well-known text, John 3:16. Did you learn John 3:16 as a child? If you did, I hope you have happy memories of teachers who not only told you about God's love in Jesus but reflected this love by the way they cared for you.

John 3:16 grounds us as we journey in Lent toward Jesus’ death and resurrection. It reminds us of the big picture: that God in love – through Jesus – has rescued us and all humanity from sin. We need not fear the darkness in ourselves and our world because the light *has* come into the world.

Zooming in a little, our readings this week invite us to focus on Jesus’ *earthly* ministry and how Jesus shone God's love into people’s everyday lives.

As our text above says, light has come into the world. But the verse goes on to say: ‘ ... but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil’. As people who are simultaneously sinners and saints, each of us is familiar with both darkness and light within ourselves. As St Paul says, we do not do the good we want to do, but rather the evil we don’t want to do (Romans 7:14–20).

Take comfort. Jesus assures us that the light *has* come into the world. Through our baptism and God’s ongoing work in us, the light *has* come into our hearts. No matter how things look, no matter how you feel from day to day, light *has* come into the world.

***Dear God, your healing and restoring light has come into the world. Your light reminds my heart that there now is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because of your light, I have hope that what I see now is not the end of the story – your story. May your light flow freely through me to those I meet today. Amen.***

*Kathy Matuschka lives in Brisbane with her husband, Mark, and worships at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Rochedale. This year, Kathy’s ministry journey led her to The Wesley Hospital in Brisbane, where she now serves as a chaplain.*