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**Sunday 18 April to Sunday 25 April**

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Sunday 18 April 2021

# The One

by Rachael Stelzer

**Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).**

Read Luke 24:36b–48

The disciples huddled in a closed room, confused and afraid. They had heard strange stories, first from the women and then from an out-of-breath Cleopas, of appearances by their teacher, whom they had seen taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb. And, suddenly, he was there in their midst. The One. The teacher. The master. And in their shock, panic and emotion, they cried out in fear. ‘It’s a ghost!’

What happened next could have come from a TV sitcom, complete with canned laughter. Jesus did everything he could to convince these overwhelmed people that he was alive, real and with them. He told them to look at his hands and side, to recognise the scars they had watched him receive. Then when that didn’t work for some, he asked them to bring him some food, to prove through normal human digestion that he wasn’t a ghost with food falling through him. What a hysterical picture he must have seemed! The disciples knew Jesus as one who loved to share food with them. Then he taught them, as he always had, of the importance of his role on earth, now with the benefit of hindsight and perspective. And they recognised his voice and teaching, and it all began to make sense.

Jesus went to such lengths to change his disciples’ fear and confusion to joy and confidence. And Jesus still transforms his followers today.

What fears, panic and confusion do we go through? What stories have we heard? And do we recognise the One, the teacher, the master, for who he really is when he stands among us?

Jesus still lovingly shows us who he is. Through his word, people and church, Jesus teaches us, laughs with us, calms us and speaks to us, despite the many other voices that clamour for our attention. May we continue to learn from him, to recognise his voice and ways, and know the confidence and joy of the risen King.

**Risen Lord Jesus, open my eyes to see you. Open my ears to hear you. And open my mind to learn from you. Amen.**

Monday 19 April 2021

# God will forgive us – and here’s why

by Rachael Stelzer

**You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).**

Read Micah 7:14–20

The prophet Micah carried a negative message from God to the people of Israel. He told them that they had been unjust, unfair and turned their backs on God. Micah prophesied about the defeat of Israel at the hands of conquering powers and the restoration of Israel.

Today’s passage is the very final word in this book. In it, Micah speaks to God as an individual man. He personifies the people of Israel as they come to terms with what is in store for them. Micah reminds the Lord that after their time of exile, the Lord will show them compassion once more. And Micah confidently lists two reasons why this will happen.

The first reason is God’s character. Micah asks, ‘Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy’.

The second reason that God will be compassionate to his people is the covenant that he made with Abraham and Jacob. Micah reminds God that God will be faithful to the covenant promises he made to the fathers of Israel.

This is our God – a God who does not stay angry forever but delights to show mercy and is faithful to his promises. Our God’s love and compassion is more powerful than our sins and transgressions. Thanks be to our compassionate, powerful and faithful God!

**We praise you, our God, for who you are and for your commitment to the promises you made to Abraham and Jacob – promises to bring from their descendants the Saviour of the world. We know this Saviour and his compassion, mercy and power. Thank you, Lord Jesus!**

Tuesday 20 April 2021

# Testimony

by Rachael Stelzer

**I have testimony weightier than that of John (John 5:36).**

Read John 5:31–40

Jesus was in trouble with the priests and teachers of the law. He had healed a crippled man on the Sabbath day, which, while not expressly forbidden by Mosaic law, went against the traditions of the religious leaders. They even told the healed man off for carrying his mat, an action that constituted work, according to their traditions.

For this formerly crippled man, Jesus’ authority was obvious – he had healed him, and he told him to pick up his mat and walk, so that was good enough for him. But not for the teachers of the law. And Jesus had further outraged them by speaking about God as his own father. They persecuted and even tried to kill him. And so, Jesus began to lay out for them the case for the defence.

‘If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.’ Obviously, they could not just believe the one who told them he was the son of God. He would say that. Who else would they believe?

‘You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved.John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.’

But Jesus continued.

‘I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish – the very works that I am doing – testify that the Father has sent me.And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me.’

Jesus’ meaning? ‘If you don’t believe me, and if you don’t believe John, believe the miracles. Believe the water turned to wine, the healings, the feeding of 5000, the raising of Lazarus. And listen to my Father’s words. All these show that I am from the Father and that I am who I say I am – the Son of God.’

Jesus goes on to criticise the religious leaders for their inability to listen to God and for their petty legalism. If they knew and listened to God, and if they sought out a relationship with God over rule-following, then they would recognise Jesus as God’s son.

All of me wants to stand on Jesus’ side and say, ‘Yeah, Lord! You tell those self-satisfied religious types!’

But a little nagging part of me realises that I sometimes prioritise the rules over relationships. I do the right thing when I could do the best thing. I can stand right in front of the Son of God and get things completely wrong.

Thanks be to Jesus, who forgives and restores me and seeks a relationship with me rather than my obedience to rules. What a loving and gracious God we serve!

**Lord Jesus, I come to you, the Saviour of the world. Keep my eyes fixed on you. Help me read your word and see you on every page. Help me to learn from you and love like you. Amen.**

Wednesday 21 April 2021

# The parade

by Rachael Stelzer

**And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).**

Read Colossians 2:6–15

In the ancient world, the winner did something very important at the end of the battle. They paraded the losing monarch and military commanders through the streets of their capital, as part of their grand parade as the conquering hero. They bound them in chains and presented them to their people as proof of their power and as a public spectacle. The people would laugh, spit and jeer at the losing leaders and generally cheer on their victorious forces.

During Good Friday, Jesus was paraded around the capital of Israel in chains. He was mocked, spit upon and jeered. He was humiliated and tortured and made a public spectacle. But he was not defeated.

Now, in the glow of Easter dawn, Jesus is the conquering hero. He is now the one parading the bad guys through the streets and making a public spectacle of them.

And who are they? Pilate? Herod? The chief priests and teachers of the law? The Pharisees? Judas?

No. God knew that these people had parts to play in his passion, but they weren’t the enemy in this global battle. Jesus disarmed ‘the powers and authorities’, the spiritual forces that kept his people enslaved to sin, and defeated them at the cross. This instrument of torture and defeat was Jesus’ secret symbol of power and victory.

Praise to our conquering hero who defeated sin and death for us!

**Thank you, risen Saviour, for parading the spiritual forces that kept us bound in sin. You have made a public mockery of the powers and authorities of this world, for you are more powerful than sin and death. We praise you for your love. We glorify you as our victorious King. Amen.**

Thursday 22 April 2021

# Chief of sinners

by Rachael Stelzer

**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst (1 Timothy 1:15b).**

Read 1 Timothy 1:12–17

William McComb was a teacher, bookseller and writer who lived in Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries. He wrote the hymn Chief of Sinners, based on this verse among others:

Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me.
Died that I might live on high,
Lived that I might never die.
As the branch is to the vine,
I am His and He is mine.

Paul knew that his history as a persecutor and killer of Christians made him the least likely candidate for Jesus’ mercy. That is exactly why he was chosen to receive grace. Jesus’ patience was thrown into greater focus by the sheer unworthiness of Paul to receive it. And Paul was humble enough to realise this.

I find this such a comfort, and yet we try to appear worthy of Jesus’ mercy all too often. We try to be seen as ‘good people’ with our lives all together. We often want to be worthy in our own right, as if our church were a showcase for the brilliant and righteous, rather than a hospital for the spiritually sick.

But when Paul was struggling with a physical ailment and asked God to take it away, God responded, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). If I am impressive in my own right, how can people recognise Jesus’ grace in me?

What a joy and relief it is to say with Paul, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst’. And to sing with William McComb, ‘Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me’.

**O my Saviour, help affordBy Your Spirit and Your Word!When my wayward heart would stray,Keep me in the narrow way;Grace in time of need supplyWhile I live and when I die**.

Friday 23 April 2021

# Mentoring

by Rachael Stelzer

**And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).**

Read 2 Timothy 2:1–8

Paul sits in a Roman dungeon in chains. He is suffering persecution at the hands of Nero. He can feel that his life is coming to an end. This is the time for his last will and testament. This is his chance to say what is really important. And his thoughts turn to his son in the faith, Timothy.

Paul has been with Timothy at many important times in his faith and life. Timothy has learned so much from Paul. What can Paul say to encourage Timothy in his ongoing ministry?

Paul writes, ‘You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus’. Be strong in arguments? No. Be strong in military might or physical power? No. Be strong in grace.

And Paul encourages Timothy to pass on what he has learned and teach it to those who can teach others. Paul uses metaphors for Timothy’s ongoing work. He is a soldier, trying to please his commanding officer. He is an athlete, competing according to the rules. He is a farmer, who works hard for his share of the crops.

Psalm 145:4 says, ‘One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts’.

As an educator, and more recently as a school chaplain, one of my greatest joys is to talk with students about God and tell them of the wonders of God’s love in their own language. And I have been sharing these things for so long that occasionally I have the great joy to hear an adult in their 20s or 30s recite back to me something I told them years ago. I may have forgotten, but they have not.

We all have mentors, and we can all be mentors. Can you think of a mentor, a Paul figure, who has imparted wisdom to you? Do you act as a mentor to one or more Timothys, loving and encouraging them in the ways of God? And if you have not considered yourself a mentor in the past, could you commit to intentionally encouraging others, in your church, family or workplace? Small groups are a wonderful forum for this encouragement, but they are certainly not the only place that mentoring can take place.

May God bless you as you share his grace with those around you.

**Heavenly Father, please inspire me with gratitude to those who have mentored me. Please help me to look for those I can mentor, encourage and teach, as one generation commends your works to another. Amen.**

Saturday 24 April 2021

# Jesus’ little lamb

by Rachael Stelzer

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:4).**

Read Psalm 23

Many of us have grown up with prints or tapestries depicting Jesus, the Good Shepherd, walking along a valley with rocky outcrops on either side and a lamb on his shoulders.

As a city kid, I know the lamb as a symbol of gentleness and innocence. I also rather imagine that to those who are more familiar with agriculture than I am, a lamb is a symbol of loud, hungry bleating with a propensity to fall down rocks, get stuck in bushes and generally cause headaches for the poor grunt who has to look after it.

Perhaps no other psalm is as well-known as Psalm 23. A psalm of trust, peace and abundance. It is often read at funerals, as its quiet confidence is a beautiful picture in times of grief. It invokes deep memories for many people of important ceremonies and people in their Christian lives.

Please take a few minutes to sit with this beautiful and iconic psalm. Read it slowly to yourself. Breathe deeply as you concentrate on the pictures within it. See the active shepherd, protecting his lamb, showing it where the best grass is, saving it from damaging itself, and carrying it home, close to his heart. Thank Jesus for his love.

And carry out into your week this peaceful confidence: ‘Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’

**Good Shepherd, I am in your care. You do more for me than I deserve. My cup overflows. Let me dwell in your house forever. Amen.**

Sunday 25 April 2021

# Jesus, be my shepherd

by Nick and Brian Schwarz

**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11).**

Read John 10:11–18

Christians love the image of Jesus, the good shepherd, tenderly caring for his sheep and lambs. The sheep and lambs represent us, of course. The image inspires us to trust in Jesus’ protection, guidance and provision. It is of special comfort to Christians who are ‘walking through the valley of the shadow of death’, such as soldiers and civilians in wartime, people in the midst of a pandemic, people nearing the end of their lives, and people mourning the death of loved ones.

Sheep in need of a good shepherd are all around us. Some decided they could look after themselves and wandered, lost their way and are vulnerable and hungry. Some followed other shepherds who didn’t really love them and turned out to be predators in disguise. Some are not yet ready or receptive to a call to follow Jesus.

But many are ready and receptive. They discovered that following their own desires led them into the wilderness. They now realise that one path is actually not as good as any other, and they are seeking the right and true path and a trustworthy guide.

Such sheep are open to receiving the good news that they have a shepherd who knows them, loves them, sacrificed himself to save them, and wants to lead them from their wilderness to a life of true abundance.

How well the old song expresses this life:

I am Jesus’ little lamb
Ever glad at heart I am.
For my shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my need and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same,
Even calls me by my name.

**Dear Lord, help us to recognise ‘sheep’ who are ready to be invited into your flock or back into it again. Help us to live in ways that make joining your flock seem to them like the obvious and right thing to do. Help us to look after our fellow sheep so that they will grow strong and remain in your care. Amen.**