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**Sunday 14 April 2024 to**

**Sunday 21 April 2024**

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Sunday 19 February 2023

**Are you real?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ (Luke 24:36).***

Read [Luke 24:36b–48](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24%3A36b-48&version=NRSVUE)

When last did you touch someone with the love of Jesus? When last do you remember being touched by Jesus' love through someone else?

You might be at that place in your life where your daily walk has little meaning or love in it. You might have come to the point of crying out, ‘Are you real, Jesus?’.

When Jesus appears to his disciples on the beach after his resurrection, he begins with these beautiful words of comfort, ‘Peace be with you’.

Asking them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?’, Jesus knows their hearts, and the disciples are troubled and frightened, thinking they have seen a ghost.

Jesus knows your heart, too. He knows your thoughts, your dreams, your feelings of failure. He knows your disappointments and your hurts. He knows you. But maybe you wonder if he is real. Sometimes, it seems like the more you pray and seek Jesus, the further away Jesus feels.

But Jesus comes to us. He comes and says, ‘Peace be with you!’ When you feel Jesus is so far away, he is closer than you realise. For Jesus lives in you by his word. Jesus is the word that is planted in your hearts and grows by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When you are feeling lost, alone, scared and in need of comfort, call on the name of Jesus, who answers prayer. As you pray, know that the Lord has answered your prayer even before you finish praying, and he knows exactly what you need even when you can’t put it into words. You might just find you will meet Jesus in the people he sends your way to encourage you and share words and acts of love.

Jesus works in us and through us, and as we grow in Jesus, spending time in his word, he sends us out to those around us who are feeling lost, alone and hurt to share the same love of Jesus that comforts and heals us. Know this peace Jesus gives you, and know that as you love others in Jesus' love, they too will come to meet Jesus and know just as you do that Jesus is real.

***Dear Jesus, come and be with me and bring your words of peace. Comfort me and show me how real you are in all I do and in the people around me you have blessed me with. Help me be your hands and feet, Jesus, by showing your love to others you have sent me to. Amen.***

*Pastor Mark lives with his two daughters aged 11 and 8 in Redcliffe, just north of Brisbane. He currently serves as a pastor in the LCANZ and is passionate about sharing Jesus' love with those around him. Pastor Mark loves to travel with his family to see the wonders of God's creation and meet people who share their stories of what God has done for them.*Monday 15 April 2024

**How well do you sleep?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well (Luke 12:25,31).***

Read [Luke 12:13–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12%3A13-31&version=NRSVUE)

Are you a member of the 4am club? Perhaps you haven’t heard of it. The club is for those members who regularly wake up around 4am and begin to – well, they say – think of things they need to sort out. In other words, they wake up not by choice but are woken by the worries of this world.

What do people do, then, when they wake up during the night worrying? They either try to get back to sleep – which, if you have ever woken during the night, you will know the more you try to get back to sleep, the more you can’t – or they worry, trying to sort everything out in their life in the space of a few hours.

What if people wake because God has called them to wake? Not to worry, but to pray?

When God woke Samuel by calling his name, Samuel didn’t realise God wanted to talk with him (1 Samuel 3). What if when you wake up in the middle of the night, God wants to speak to you? What if God is calling you to give him all of your worries?

You see, God cares so much that he sent his only Son Jesus to die on the cross for sin, your sin and mine, so as we believe in him, we are forgiven, have eternal life and are saved from sin, eternal death and the power of the devil. God cares so much that he wants to hear about your concerns and worries and to wrap you in his love.

Jesus asks us this: ‘Who of you by worrying can add a single day to your life? ... Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?’ If we can’t do that simple thing, to add an hour to our life, which God can – of course – then why do we worry about all of the other things we have no control over?

When you begin to worry, stop, pray and know that as you seek the kingdom or as you call on Jesus first, all of the other things will be sorted out. You have the word of the Lord on that.

***Lord, I worry so much about the things I cannot change, and then I worry about how I should have changed them if I could. Help me to stop and be in you by your word of promise that you are always with me. Fill me with your love and peace as I look to you first, knowing that everything I need for this life and the next is mine already in Jesus' name. Amen.***

Tuesday 16 April 2024

**Having it all**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).***

Read [Luke 12:32–48](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12%3A32-48&version=NRSVUE)

A particular teacher would start each school term by giving every student in the class an A. Only when students were not working to the best of their ability or their attitude toward learning was not positive would their grades begin to change. The students would lose the grade they were given at the beginning of the term, and it would be moved downwards.

This was a great system for those students who had never been able to achieve an A grade in school before because they could know what it felt like to have it all given freely without earning it. It also challenged those who were used to achieving an A grade on their own merits.

In Jesus Christ, we have it all. We have been bought with Jesus' blood shed on the cross at Calvary, and by faith, we are forgiven and have eternal life. God has given you the kingdom – his kingdom – in Jesus' name. God has given you an A, the highest grade you can get, and you don’t have to earn it. Instead, you have already received it by faith in Jesus. The only difference with God compared to the school teacher is that when you mess up, fail or sin, God doesn’t take away the A grade he has given you. He calls you in Jesus to repent and receive the gift of forgiveness again.

What peace this brings, knowing that as you believe Jesus died for your sins, you cannot ever lose what Jesus has won for you on the cross. Life in the kingdom of God now, here on earth and in heaven eternally.

Do not be afraid of the future. Do not be afraid to serve the Lord by going out into the world to love others. Do not be afraid, little flock, for God has given you everything you need for today, tomorrow and eternity.

***Heavenly Father, you have not held back anything but give it all to me by sending your son Jesus to die for my sins and the whole world. You give me a fresh start over and over again, and when I sin, you don’t take away your kingdom but rather wrap me more and more in your love. Help me to live a life worthy of the call you have placed on my life to follow you and to love others as you have loved me. Amen.***

Wednesday 17 April 2024

**Is it right?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right? (Luke 12:57)***

Read [Luke 12:49–59](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12%3A49-59&version=NRSVUE)

Do you remember a time when you were young when you might have secretly taken something from your mum or dad after being told not to? Or perhaps you have memories of childhood where you did something wrong, like cheating on a test or lying to someone about something you had done by denying your involvement?

At the end of the day, we know what is right and wrong in life. Although we live in a world where many wrong things are being sold as the right thing, we know, deep down, the right thing to do.

Even those who do not yet know Jesus support the idea that you do to others what you want them to do to you. So, are there things in your life that you know are wrong?

Many of us live in sin. We tell ourselves that the things we have done, knowing they are wrong, are just ‘life’, and we push down those feelings of guilt and shame and get on with living. Yet we know it is wrong.

Jesus invites us to come to him, all of us who are burdened with sin, guilt and shame, and he will give us rest for our souls. He does this through forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross for the things we do that are wrong, and the good news is if you no longer want to live with the wrongs in life, Jesus calls you to himself to set you free from sin, guilt and shame.

Jesus says to judge for yourself what is right, knowing that as you come to him in his word, and he speaks to you through that word, with power, you will know and continue to deeply know what is right and wrong, and when you fail, you know who to come to for peace through forgiveness.

***Jesus, show me day by day what I need to repent of. As I come to you, wash me and make me whiter than snow. Give me a deep peace, knowing you have died for my sins, and I am forgiven. Let me live in your word day by day, walking in the truth and doing what is right to honour and glorify you always. Amen.***

Thursday 18 April 2024

**Fertiliser for your soul**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilise it’ (Luke 13:8).***

Read [Luke 13:1–9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13%3A1-9&version=NRSVUE)

The practice of digging around a tree is common when it is not growing well and, in turn, not producing the fruit it was planted for. When the soil around the tree is disturbed, the roots are damaged in the digging, and then the tree has to grow new roots, which, in turn, strengthen the tree to bear fruit for the next season.

Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree that doesn’t bear fruit. The owner says, ‘Well cut it down’, but the man taking care of it says, ‘Leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilise it’.

The tree doesn’t need to be destroyed but disturbed and fed instead.

We are like this tree. We were planted in the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus and given a purpose – to bear fruit. Yet it is easy to drift away from Jesus and begin to follow the way of the world and the way of ourselves. We find it easier to listen to the devil, tempting us with lies in the idea that ‘it is my life and my body; I can do what I like’.

But Jesus has chosen you as his own for his purpose. To bear fruit. The fruit of God’s love in action toward those around you. You are created to be a blessing to others. You are blessed to bless others with God’s love in action.

When the word of the Lord challenges you to live differently, it is like Jesus digging at your roots – the roots in self rather than in the word. You see, the word is the fertiliser of life, and the word of Jesus Christ will feed and sustain you in bearing the fruit of God’s love in action.

When Jesus digs at your roots, hear the word, and be ready for his word to guide, challenge, heal and restore you. Be prepared for his word to nourish your hungry soul, ready to go out into the world with new growth and fruit that blesses others.

***Dear Jesus, dig into my roots of selfishness and worldly ways. Let me grow in you to bear fruit for others. Help me to be a blessing to everyone I meet today. Feed me, nourish me, and strengthen me daily in your holy word. Amen.***

Friday 19 April 2024

**Set free**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God (Luke 13:13).***

Read [Luke 13:1–9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13%3A10-17&version=NRSVUE)

We live in a world that has so many double standards. Racism sometimes seems to go only one way, and yet all people are capable of racism. We have a world now that chases and seems almost obsessed with making changes to wording on documents and less about actually giving people dignity or valuing their worth as a human being.

You see, our human hearts are quick to judge others based on race, gender, age, where someone lives, job status, parenting styles, school or university attended, and so on. Yet, our human hearts are slow to show love.

As Jesus is in the synagogue, there is a woman there. You can imagine what was on the hearts of those seeing the events unfolding. Were they thinking, what right does a woman have in this space, let alone a woman who is crippled? How many people were thinking, let us show this woman is valuable as a human, made in the image of God?

Jesus takes a huge risk, not thinking of what others might say, but instead, he puts his love to work. His love is in action when he breaks all the rules by calling a woman forward in the synagogue. He then heals her and says, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity’. Jesus goes further still and touches her. Jesus publicly gives dignity to this woman, who had been crippled for eighteen years. Jesus heals her, and she praises God. Jesus highlights her worth as God’s beloved child.

The work of the Lord is never about finding a political platform or even an influencer platform; Jesus is God’s love in action. Acknowledging a woman in the synagogue and then touching her and healing her.

Jesus has touched you, too. He has healed you by forgiving your sins and giving you a fresh start. Jesus acknowledges you, calling you by name to come to him and be healed by his love and grace. You are valuable, you have worth, and you have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in the name of Jesus, God’s only Son.

***Lord Jesus, give me the grace to show others grace and to highlight their worth, as you have made them in your image, and you love them as you love me. Jesus, when I struggle with others and begin to judge them according to my standards, forgive me and fill my heart with your love so I can see them as you see them – that you died for them as you died for me, so all who believe will know of forgiveness and salvation and a life with you forever. Amen.***

Saturday 20 April 2024

**Chased down**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life (Psalm 23:6a).***

Read [Psalm 23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23&version=NRSVUE)

When it comes to God’s love, have you ever wondered just how big it is? You may know quite well the verse, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16). But what does it really mean?

Well, God loved the whole world, all creation, and continues to love you as part of his creation. He made you his own through the suffering and death of his only Son, Jesus, who came to die for sin. That is what love is – Jesus laid down his life for you, me and the whole world, and by believing in Jesus, you will not die eternally but live with him forever.

We can easily read and say these words. God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, Jesus, but sometimes, it doesn’t feel like we are loved. The devil can tempt us with lies when we feel down, simply by asking us, ‘Are you really loved? If God loved you, maybe you would be happy and not hurting’.

It is easy to tell ourselves this, too, without the temptation from the devil. We can put ourselves down when hurting, frustrated, sad or lonely. Yet the words of Psalm 23 give us so much comfort.

God’s goodness and love are amazing. You might say that’s great, but it doesn’t feel like it at all.

How about this? The word used in the Hebrew language we translate as ‘follow’ means so much more than just following. It literally means to hound and pursue. So, as you read these words today, know the meaning behind these words is this: God’s love will not quit on you; in fact, it will chase you down, pursuing you forever. It will not be far from you but in you. God’s love and goodness will never let you go.

***O my Shepherd, help me to know that you are all I need. When I am struggling, remind me of your love and goodness that chases me to the ends of the earth because I am yours. You have called me by name and know everything I face day by day. Wrap me in your goodness and love this day as I do the work you send me to do. Amen.***

Sunday 21 April 2024

**One flock**

by Faye Schmidt

***I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16).***

Read [John 10:11–18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A11-18+&version=NRSVUE)

The image of Jesus as the good shepherd is a beloved image that demonstrates the love, care and gentleness of God to his people. It is a very personal image, with the shepherd declaring that he knows us, and we know him. Psalm 23 also supports this thinking when we say with the psalmist, ‘The Lord is *my* shepherd’.

But the text shows us that we are not just a scattering of individuals but part of a flock, a community, a family. The dangers are to the flock, not just the individual sheep. In verse 12, we read, ‘... the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it’. Division and disharmony result.

In Isaiah 53:6, we read, ‘We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’.

So, what does it mean to be a sheep of Jesus’ flock? It means that we enter through his gate. Jesus is the way to salvation. We know his voice and follow him. He cares for us, keeping us safe. And when we wander away, which we know we do all too often, he comes and searches for us.

These are wonderful, comforting images, but this passage includes another challenging thought. The good shepherd decides who is in the sheepfold; we do not. ‘I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold’ (John 10:16). The Pharisees and disciples thought they knew who God's chosen ones were. But this shepherd is telling them, and telling us, that there will be ‘one flock, one shepherd’, and it is God, in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit – not us – who brings together that flock.

***Dear Heavenly Father, we pray you will send your Holy Spirit to those who do not know you and that they may hear your voice, come to know you and be welcomed in the fold as members of your flock. Amen.***

*Faye Schmidt continues her diaconal calling through governance, having served on the Vic–Tas District Church Board, the General Church Board and currently as chair of the Standing Committee on Constitutions and her congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. Having lived and worked in many locations within Australia and overseas, Faye has a heart for the stranger and the newcomer and for being open to new ideas, learning from others and responding to needs.*