****

**Sunday 20 November 2022 to Sunday 27 November 2022**

****

Sunday 20 November 2022

# Serving the King

by Verena Johnson

**So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back’ (Luke 19:13).**

Read Luke 19:11–27

I don’t know about you, but I sometimes wonder how effectively I am using the gifts, talents and resources God has given me. I can safely say I haven’t hidden anything away in a cloth like the servant in the parable. But there have been times when I have not stepped forward to do something I could have, or I have found excuses and reasons for why I can’t get involved (some of them have been really good!). Or I have been too busy or preoccupied to notice that God may ask me to use my gifts, talents and resources.

God has called us all into his service, and what is more, he has given us all that we need to do what he is calling us to do. Even more than that, unlike the king in the parable who goes away, our King is with us every step of the way as we serve him. Then there’s the set of ‘steak knives’ to clinch the deal. We have the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, prompt and equip us as we serve.

So, there’s nothing stopping us from giving our all for our King.

Or is there?

I think my problem is that I think about myself too much and what I am capable or not capable of rather than who my King is and what he can do through me. I focus too much on my faults, failures and mistakes rather than on my King’s provision. The other problem is that the clamour of my busy life can stop me from hearing the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit as he tries to prompt and guide me to use my gifts, talents and resources the way my King wants me to use them.

That’s me, but what about you? What might be stopping you from using your gifts, talents and resources the way God wants you to?

Thank God that our King is not like the one in the parable. He loves us and forgives us again and again and again when we get it wrong. He gives us new chances every day to truly live as his servants.

**My King, thank you for giving me my gifts, talents and resources. Help me use them the way you want me to in your service. Forgive me when I get it wrong or miss the opportunities you give me. Open my ears and eyes to hear and see the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Verena is a Church Worker Support Officer for the LCA Church Worker Support Department, where it is her privilege to support congregations, pastors, lay workers, employees and volunteers of LCA. In her spare time, she is involved in drama ministry, women’s ministry and prayer ministry. She has three children and eight grandchildren in three different states.

Monday 21 November 2022

# Our merciful God

by Verena Johnson

**So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived (Genesis 19:29).**

Read Genesis 19:15–29

Interestingly, the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is often used to prove that the God of the Old Testament is angry, vengeful, harsh and judgemental. Yet I see so much of God’s grace and mercy in it.

Firstly, God allows Abraham to bargain with him for the lives of any righteous people living in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16–33).

Then, even though there aren’t even ten righteous people, he still sends angels to rescue Lot and his family, even though they don’t necessarily want to be saved. When they hesitate to leave, the angels have to grab their hands and lead them safely out of the city.

God even lets Lot bargain with him to save a small town nearby from destruction. Why? Just because Lot says he can’t run all the way to the mountains! Can you imagine what God’s reaction would have been as Lot told him how tiny the town was, with only a few very sinful people, so it won’t really matter?

However, our merciful God agrees to Lot’s request, and he waits patiently for Lot and his family to get to Zoar (which literally means ‘very small’) before he begins the terrible destruction of the cities.

Why does God do all this? ‘For the Lord was merciful to them’, it says in verse 16. God showed incredible mercy towards Lot and his family with all their faults, regardless of the result of his wife’s choice to look back.

He shows incredible mercy towards us. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, he has saved and rescued us from ultimate destruction. He takes us by the hand and leads us at times when we hesitate or are lost or confused. He patiently listens to our requests, demands and complaints about what he is doing and doesn’t treat us as we often deserve. He loves us despite all our shortcomings. He will never turn away from us, even when we turn away from him or look back.

Spend a moment now to reflect on God’s incredible mercy towards you.

**Merciful God, thank you for the incredible mercy you have shown towards me. Thank you for saving me, taking me by the hand and leading me through the messiness of life. *Thank you for your patience and unending love towards me despite all my faults. Amen.***

Tuesday 22 November 2022

# No favouritism

by Verena Johnson

**For God does not show favouritism (Romans 2:11).**

Read Romans 2:1–16

As much as we try to avoid it with our children, family, friends, workmates and church family, it’s hard not to show favouritism at times. There are simply people we prefer to spend time with, people we relate to more than others and people that we just seem to click with. We all have our favourites, whether we admit it or not. However, the interesting thing is that even though they are our favourites, it doesn’t mean we still don’t find ourselves judging them.

Then there are the people in our lives who are definitely not our favourites. People we struggle to spend time with, people we don’t relate to very well and people who seem to rub us the wrong way. These are the people that we often judge so easily.

The other side of the coin is that when it comes to us, we would love for people to show favouritism towards us and refrain from judging us. We all grapple with feeling unfavoured and judged by other people at times.

What amazing comfort it is that God does not show any favouritism. Although to be strictly honest, there are times when I struggle with that. Why don’t bad people always get what they deserve? Why do good people suffer? Why does life often seem so unfair?

So there I am, making judgements again and showing favouritism – precisely what this passage warns us about.

God loves us all. He died for us all so we would not be judged as we deserve when we come to him.

The truth is that we are all God’s favourites!

This includes you. You are God's favourite – that’s right, you.

Think about that for a minute. Don’t think about all those other people. Think about what it means that you are especially favoured by the God of the universe.

**Loving God, thank you that you show such incredible favour towards me. That I am your favourite. Help me to see other people around me as your favourites also. Forgive me when I have been quick to judge. Help me to look at others through your eyes of favour. Amen.**

Wednesday 23 November 2022

# Spiritual glasses

by Verena Johnson

**So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18).**

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:10

Not long ago, I found myself doing what I once swore I’d never ever do. Something that instantly marked someone as old when I was a teenager … I was catching up with a group of friends, and we were comparing medical conditions and operations, and yes, a few scars were even shown. Teenage me would have been horrified!

I must say, though, that as I get older, the idea of a whole new body in heaven in place of this deteriorating ‘earthly tent’ becomes more and more attractive!

In this passage, Paul urges us to ‘fix our eyes on what is unseen’, which, at first, sounds like a bit like an oxymoron. How can you look at what you can’t see? And if you can’t see it, how can you fix your eyes on it?

Of course, he’s talking about our spiritual eyes, but they can so easily be distracted. It’s easy to focus on the things we can see, touch and feel in this world. To be so caught up in our daily circumstances and the earthly struggles and trials we face that we lose our heavenly perspective. Sometimes, we need to put our spiritual glasses on to see the truth more clearly when it all becomes fuzzy.

I know about this because some years ago, I refused to entertain the idea that I might need glasses. (Another sign that my ‘earthly tent’ might be getting older.) Instead, I kept on squinting through the growing fuzziness. When someone finally gave me my first pair of reading glasses, I was amazed at the difference they made. I could see properly again and not get headaches from trying to read or sitting at the computer all day. I couldn’t believe that I hadn’t done it earlier!

So put on your spiritual glasses, and fix your eyes on this clear truth …

We are made for more than this. This life is not all there is. Our true eternal home is in heaven.

Keep your spiritual glasses on, and fix your eyes on that truth today – whatever this day holds for you. Fix your eyes on it amid everything. Fix your eyes on it regardless of your circumstances. Fix your eyes on it in the coming days, weeks and months.

You might be as amazed as I was at the difference some glasses can make.

**Heavenly Father, thank you that you have a heavenly home for us with you. Thank you that we are made for more than this and that this life is not all there is. Help us fix our eyes on what is unseen and eternal in the midst of our earthly lives. Amen.**

Thursday 24 November 2022

# That’s some crown

by Verena Johnson

**Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown (Revelation 2:10).**

Read Revelation 2:1–11

I remember visiting the Tower of London and getting quite excited about the chance to see the famous crown jewels, including the actual crowns. There are two main crowns: St Edward’s Crown, which is only ever used at the crowning of a new monarch, and the Imperial State Crown, which the monarch wears after leaving Westminster Abbey and on state occasions like the opening of parliament.

However, we saw the queue and wondered whether it was worth waiting for! But as we waited, we heard some interesting facts from a tour guide giving his spiel ahead of us. St Edward’s Crown was made in 1661 of solid gold. It weighs 2.23 kilograms and is adorned with semi-precious stones. The Imperial State Crown is also made of gold and set with 2,868 diamonds, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds, 269 pearls and 4 rubies. It weighs a much more bearable 1.06 kilograms.

Then came the moment we finally got to see them in person, surrounded by armed beefeater guards and behind all the security glass. We stood, frantically taking pictures, on a slow conveyer belt that takes you past them. This is so that no-one holds up the queue, and everyone gets a chance to see them in a very organised way.

So, what did I think of these priceless treasures? Yes, they were impressive, especially in light of all the tour guide’s facts, but I think I expected them to sparkle more or something. Maybe they needed cleaning!

I found out later that they are cleaned every January with gin and water! (Apparently, the royal jeweller swears by it.)

I will never get to wear a crown like that here on earth, but in heaven, I will get an even better crown.

So will you.

God has promised us all a crown far more priceless than any earthly crown: a victor’s crown that will be truly ours to wear, not guarded and hidden behind security glass. He will freely give us the crown of life that will never perish, fade or lose its sparkle. This crown won’t just be worn at our coronation or for state occasions; we get to wear it for all eternity.

Now that’s a crown worth waiting for!

**Heavenly Father, thank you for the crown of life you have promised to us. Help us stay faithful to you and serve you here on earth while we wait for our eternal heavenly life with you. Amen.**

Friday 25 November 2022

# Everything new

by Verena Johnson

**Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea (Revelation 21:1).**

Read Revelation 20:11 – 21:1

Only last year, the Happy Valley Reservoir in Adelaide was finally open to the public. I was keen, as were many others, to finally see inside the well-fenced reserve that I have been driving past for over 30 years. I started regularly walking there on weekends. It is a lovely place to walk, with the large expanse of water and native animals and bird life.

However, it didn’t take very long for the public to make their mark on this beautiful place. Within weeks, you could see all the litter and rubbish that people leave behind because they couldn’t be bothered taking it with them and disposing of it properly – especially in the most frequented parts of the reserve.

I sometimes think of our earth and what we human beings have done and are doing to it, and I despair. I also think of what we are doing and have done to each other. While I would love to fix this earth and the people on it, wave a magic wand or something to make it all perfect again, I know it will never happen because people are people – imperfect and sinful.

I thank God for the new heaven and new earth that is coming.

A perfect new heaven and new earth.

I try to imagine what the new heaven and earth will look like. I’ve seen pictures where people have tried to capture it, pictures people have painted who say they’ve been to heaven and come back or seen visions. Some have said we just don’t have enough colours to capture it. Others have said that it’s simply beyond our imagination and indescribable.

All I know for sure is that I will be there, God will be there, and people that have gone there before me will be there too.

So will you.

**God of the universe, thank you that you will make all things new. Thank you for preparing a whole new heaven and earth for us. Help us to care for this earth and each other while we are still here. Amen.**

Saturday 26 November 2022

# Another chance to rejoice

by Verena Johnson

**I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’ (Psalm 122:1).**

Read Psalm 122

My mum loved Sundays and going to ‘the house of the Lord’. I remember being woken up on Sundays by Christian songs and choruses like ‘This is the day that the Lord has made’ being played quite loudly on our record player. Yes, those were the days of the black vinyl disc, for people who remember them.

My bedhead happened to be on the same floorboard as the record player, so I could always feel the bass vibrations. If that didn’t wake me up and mobilise me, the door would be flung open with some catchphrase like ‘Rejoice, it’s the Lord’s day!’ or ’Hooray, we get to go to church!’

It didn’t matter if I had friends sleeping over. It didn’t matter how late I’d gotten to bed either. In fact, Mum used to say that the later I got to bed, the more I probably needed to go to church to either thank God or repent.

Whenever I read this verse, I think of Mum and how she rejoiced about going to church to worship God. It was hard not to get swept up in it.

I have been trying to remember the last time I truly rejoiced and was actually excited about going to church. Yes, it’s my usual practice, and I’m happy to go. I look forward to catching up with my friends there. I expect that God will speak to me through the service. I like being with him and my fellow Christians … but rejoicing and excitement?

Then I remembered how it felt on those first few Sundays that we could finally worship together again after all the COVID restrictions. How excited we all were to be able to go to church again. There was a lot of rejoicing then when it was all new and fresh.

So tomorrow is Sunday again. Another chance to rejoice as we go to the house of the Lord. Another chance to get excited about being with him and our fellow Christians. Another chance to rejoice that we can go to church and worship God freely in this country.

I might even put on one of my Christian CDs!

**Dear awesome God, we sometimes forget what an amazing privilege it is to worship you and how wonderful it is that we can worship you together as a church. Stir our hearts so we can truly rejoice as we go to the house of the Lord. Amen.**

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.