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**Sunday 29 August 2021 to Sunday 5 September 2021**

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Sunday 29 August 2021

# Dirty disciples

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules made by men (Mark 7:6b,7).**

Read Mark 7:1–8,14,15,21–23

According to the Pharisees and some teachers of the law, Jesus’ disciples failed to conduct a ritual washing of their hands before eating. The disciples were dirty because they didn’t perform the tradition of the elders. Jesus’ response to them highlighted what it really meant to be clean. He wasn’t concerned about ceremonial washing but something far more important.

Jesus said that what needed attention was the real dirt deep down in us – the dirt on our hearts. Our brokenness, sin and rebellion against God is the real problem – and not whether we follow all the rules, traditions, and rituals handed down to us (as helpful and positive as they might be).

The holy and pure Lord Jesus comes to us and makes us clean. He comes to forgive, restore, renew and transform us into people who can reflect his love and grace – instead of just giving us rules to guide us.

And when this happens, we may find ourselves getting down and dirty and even liking it. We are enabled to look past our expectations of others, we can look above and beyond our regulations, policies and procedures, and we are challenged to become grubby in our service to others.

Dirty disciples roll up their sleeves and care for this world and the least of God’s children. They don’t worry about looks and appearances. Instead, they look into the eyes and hearts of their neighbours. Dirty disciples see God’s face in those around them rather than their imperfections, weaknesses and failures.

As cleansed, purified, justified and forgiven people, we can now serve those around us who need the love, grace and acceptance of Jesus.

Our hearts are clean because of Jesus. Others can now experience his mercy and endless love through us.

**Lord God, your Son humbled himself in obedience to your will and gave up his life for us. Transform and renew us within. Help us not to be conformed to this world but dedicate ourselves to you and do what pleases you. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Monday 30 August 2021

# The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean’ (Mark 7:20).**

Read Mark 7:15–20

What image comes to your mind when you think of someone or something that’s ‘squeaky clean?’ Maybe it’s the image of a thoroughly cleaned baby who has just come out of a bathtub of warm, soapy water. Then after being gently dried with a big, fluffy towel, lots of powder is applied to the squeaky-clean child.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law wanted to appear squeaky clean before God because of their outward actions and appearances. Earlier in Mark 7, the same teachers criticised Jesus and his disciples for not keeping ‘all the traditions of the elders’. Jesus, quoting Isaiah, said, ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men’ (Mark 7:6,7, from Isaiah 29:13).

In explaining further, Jesus told the parable, ‘Nothing outside a man can make him “unclean” by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him “unclean”’ (Mark 7:15).

God’s word helps us understand what makes us unclean. Jesus lists 13 things that are displeasing to him and are not ways he wants us to follow. He describes these as ‘heart issues’ which make us unclean: unclean thoughts, unclean actions and unclean words.

As we search our hearts, we have to plead guilty to having ‘heart problems’. And our only way forward is to humbly bow before our Lord in repentance, asking for his forgiveness.

By God’s grace, we fully and freely receive his mercy and forgiveness because Jesus took upon himself all our sin, guilt and shame. For this, he was punished, crucified and died, so that through his victory over sin, death and the power of the devil, we would receive forgiveness and eternal life!

What we could never do for ourselves – making ourselves acceptable to God by our own actions and observance of man-made traditions – Jesus has fully accomplished for us, and now, thanks be to God, we are squeaky clean – inside and out!

***Loving Lord, you know our hearts; you know we have heart problems. Thank you that in your love and grace in coming to us with your forgiveness through Jesus, you have made us clean. Keep us pure by your Spirit in our thoughts, words and actions so that we may reflect your love and grace in our relationships with those around us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.***

Tuesday 31 August 2021

# Do you still not see or understand?

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?’ (Mark 8:17).**

Read Mark 8:14–21

Jesus put no fewer than eight questions to his disciples in these verses. And I can imagine that he was a little frustrated with their inability to grasp what he was really getting at. They could not fully understand who he was or what he was capable of doing.

They had witnessed two extraordinary events: five thousand people fed with five loaves and four thousand with seven. They were all Israelites who would have known the story of how God had fed their ancestors with manna in the desert. Yet they did not seem to grasp the implication of the miracles they had just witnessed, nor the divine identity of the One putting the questions to them.

It wasn’t the bread, the lack of it or the incredible amount of it that was the issue. The disciples seemed distracted by what they wanted to see, touch and taste and missed out on what was most important – Jesus himself.

We dare not stand in condemnation of the disciples, for Jesus’ questions are for us as well. He challenges us to think through what it means for us to believe in him as the Son of God, to listen to his teaching, to trust in his provision for us and to take him at his word.

Looking for miraculous evidence of his reality and presence can lead us away from what is most important. Having things we can see, touch and taste might be helpful at times, but the good news of Jesus in us, for us, and with us goes far beyond that.

Jesus’ word of forgiveness, hope, love, grace and peace can’t be measured, analysed, catalogued or examined in the same way that we see things around us. They are exceptional and gifts of a unique and generous Lord, who more than anything else wants us to receive, rejoice in and share it.

***Lord Jesus, open our eyes, ears and hearts to see, hear and receive what you want to give us. Don’t let us be distracted by the things of this world and our own desires. Keep us looking to you, trusting in you and confident that you will give us what we need. Thank you for your presence and promises that give us the sure hope we need to live in this world and look forward to eternity. Amen.***

Wednesday 1 September 2021

# Penalty all paid!

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).**

Read Romans 6:12–23

Penalties are a reality in our lives. Whether it is a speeding fine or interest on a late credit card payment, we face the consequences.

And there's a price – a penalty to be paid for our sin, disobedience, imperfection and broken relationship with God. The Bible's very clear about that penalty. The wages of sin is death. For all of us who sin in any way against God, his clear word is: there's a penalty that has to be paid.

But his word also says that the one person who didn’t sin came to pay the penalty in our place. He could have decided otherwise very easily. He might well have and could have fairly said that we need to pay for our mistakes ourselves. But he didn't. He came to take our penalty in our place.

He knew it wasn't going to be easy for him. He knew before he was born that he'd be stricken, smitten, despised and forsaken. When he was born, King Herod tried to put him to death. When he began his ministry, his own townspeople in Nazareth tried to kill him. And his own family thought he was ‘out of his mind’ and tried to stop him from preaching and teaching.

But none of this stopped him. He stood strong when people laughed at him, persecuted him, accused him, hated him; when he lost his followers; when he lost the trust of his disciples; when he lost his own Father in the loneliness of his suffering on the cross. And lastly, when he lost his life.

Any other person would have said ‘enough’. Any other person would have said, ‘I can't take this’. But he didn't because he wasn't just any other person.

He was God's Son, and he refused to leave us to pay the penalty for our sin. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Because of Jesus and his sacrifice, we've been rescued from the punishment we deserve. We have God's forgiveness and peace and the assurance of eternal life.

***Gracious Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you for paying the price that we deserved to pay for our sin. Thank you for the sacrifice you made for us. We can so often take it for granted because we don’t always acknowledge the seriousness of our sin or its consequences. So, thank you. Fill our hearts with gratitude again today. Help us to show our thanks in all that we say and do. Amen.***

Thursday 2 September 2021

# Be transformed

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:1).**

Read Romans 12:1–9

God is not really interested in just changing things around in our lives. Rearranging things doesn’t mean any real difference at all. God wants to continually change and transform our nature – not just what we do or how we do things.

He wants to work deep down. He wants to get to the heart of the struggles we face. He wants to challenge us to see ourselves as he sees us – as people who are always falling short of his expectations, who wrestle with things like pride and failure to work in harmony together with other Christians. He wants to cut to the very core of our character and expose us for what we really are.

But he doesn’t stop there. That’s not ever the end result of his working in us. He continues to work by declaring through Jesus: Your sins are forgiven. And with that forgiveness, we have a foundation on which to build our lives. We have what we need to be continually transformed, day by day, to become the people God wants us to be.

It mightn’t be spectacular. It may not always be in our timeframe. We may even resist God working in our lives at times. But he continues – sometimes in dramatic ways and perhaps more often than not, in small, quiet ways. He comes to influence us, grow us, shape us, and transform us continually into his image.

That’s his commitment to us. Because of Jesus’ claiming us as his own, we can be confident that even when we don’t see God doing the things we want him to – even when our prayers are not answered in the way we would like him to – we can still believe that he’s at work.

***Loving Jesus, we praise and honour you for continuing to work in our lives, transforming us to become the people that you still want us to be more and more. Help us to be open to your Spirit moving within us. Give us the confidence to believe that you are with us, for us and in us at all times. Because of your presence and power, we can trust in your working for the good of your kingdom – thank you. Amen.***

Friday 3 September 2021

# Serving the Lord

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters (Colossians 3:23).**

Read Colossians 3:18–25

The kind of behaviour that Paul is talking about in these verses is not really surprising. It would have been generally thought of as right and noble in the society of that day. He is not presenting a completely new morality for Christians.

What he is doing is saying something very new about the motivation for this behaviour. This is continually emphasised in the phrases ‘as is fitting in the Lord’, ‘this pleases the Lord’, ‘reverence for the Lord’, ‘working for the Lord’ and ‘the Lord Christ you are serving’.

In the repeated references to Jesus, we are reminded that as Lord, he is Lord in the everyday lives of believers and our relationships with other people.

What a great challenge and responsibility. And what a great privilege!

We are called to live and serve. But instead of being motivated by rules, regulations and laws, we are encouraged, inspired and energised to reflect the love of Christ because of his presence and power within us.

Rather than being pressed, forced and coerced into serving, rather than being under the threat of punishment if we don’t do what’s expected of us, rather than feeling obligated and duty-bound, we’re freed to give of ourselves as Christ has given of himself to us.

The service we offer, then, while never perfect, is the very love and grace of God, offered by our hands, voices, ears and hearts. It is Jesus Christ himself serving those around us. He comes, he acts, he gives, he forgives, he blesses, and he loves as we live in loving relationships with those around us – and especially those in our homes and family life.

***Gracious Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to serve us. Thank you for releasing us from the pressure of living under the law and enabling us to serve you freely in gratitude for your love and grace. Bless us in our serving, especially those who are near and dear to us. Bind us together as sisters and brothers in Christ, and give us your grace as we serve one another. In your name, we pray. Amen.***

Saturday 4 September 2021

# A God of action

by Pastor Mark Lieschke

**Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live (Psalm 146:1,2).**

Read Psalm 146

What a great reflection on the activity of our Lord. Just think about the verbs in this psalm that describe his actions:

* He remains faithful forever.
* He upholds the cause of the oppressed.
* He gives food to the hungry.
* He sets prisoners free.
* He gives sight to the blind.
* He lifts up those who are bowed down.
* He loves the righteous.
* He watches over the foreigner.
* He sustains the fatherless and the widow.
* He frustrates the ways of the wicked.
* He reigns.

He is a God of action. And we are the beneficiaries of his actions. We don’t deserve what he has done and continues to do for us. In fact, we deserve the exact opposite. But his commitment to us, and especially in and through his Son Jesus Christ, means that he will never give up on us.

His love and grace will continue for all time – and especially in times when we might feel distant from him, experiencing struggles or feeling guilt for when we have let him down.

He continues to come, forgive, bless, lift us up, give us patience, protect us, provide for us, give us hope for the future, heal us, and call us into service in his kingdom.

He continues to act in us, for us and with us so that we can continue to live and grow as his people.

And this is why we can praise him. No-one else and nothing else can come close to him with the gifts and blessings we have through him. No-one else and nothing else deserves our adoration, honour or glory. Praise the Lord!

**Lord God, you have been our help in times of need. You have guarded us in times of danger. You have kept us safe from the evil one. You have provided us with what we need to live and serve as your people. Thanks and praise to you. Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.**

Sunday 5 September 2021

# Too good not to tell

by Maria Rudolph

**People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak’ (Mark 7:37).**

Read Mark 7:24–37

Some things are just too good to keep under wraps. Think of the amazement of the woman at the well in John’s Gospel in chapter 4. She meets Jesus and drops her water jars then and there to run back to the village to tell everyone about him. It wasn’t just his teaching about God but what he had done to her that blew her mind – he revealed intricate knowledge of her life.

The people in today’s story are overwhelmed with amazement at what Jesus does, too. Only a short while ago, none of the people in this non-Jewish region of the Decapolis were interested in Jesus or the one true God at all.

Do you know who these people are? There used to be a demon-possessed man living among the tombs by the seaside there, shunned from society, for he was not in control of his mind nor his violent outbursts against others and himself. Jesus drove a legion of demons out of this man and restored him. The transformation was so amazing that the people of that region couldn’t help noticing and being awed by this Jewish rabbi, Jesus. The healed man himself and the witnesses of this healing obviously brought a crowd to believe in the powers of Jesus.

By the time Jesus returns there, people bring a deaf and mute man before him, expecting restoration. Jesus heals the man. The people’s amazement grows. Despite Jesus asking the people to stay quiet, this was too good to keep under wraps.

Of course, the good news of Jesus isn’t meant to be kept under wraps by us. At the end of Jesus’ earthy ministry, he tells his disciples, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you’. When you become aware of God’s constant transformative power in your own life and the lives of people around you, the good news of Jesus becomes too good to keep under wraps. How could you include God in the conversations you have with people today?

**Loving God, you amaze me time and again with your timing, provision and transformative powers. I am in awe of all you have done and continue to do for me. And I am in awe of the work of your Holy Spirit, whom I can see at work around me. Help me find the words to talk about you with the people I come in contact with today. Thank you for letting me be your light to the world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**