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**Sunday 17 July 2022 to Sunday 24 July 2022**

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Sunday 17 July 2022

# At home with Martha and Mary

by Ruth Olsen

**Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her (Luke 10:42).**

Read Luke 10:38–42

Imagine being at home with Martha and Mary. Luke tells us that it was Martha who opened her home to Jesus, and she had a sister Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. In John 12:1–3, we read that the village is Bethany, and Lazarus lived with them also. In both settings, Martha is serving, probably exercising a gift of hospitality. Jesus was obviously at home with them, more than welcome to be there.

Luke says that Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She was probably feeling under pressure and increasingly frustrated doing what needed to be done. Many of us, and predominantly women, most likely, can identify with her, whether we have the gift of hospitality or not. And if we are not responsible for preparing the food, we probably don’t even give it a thought.

From observation, Mary’s focus and priority were not on preparing food for the guests, and we can imagine there were other people in the home listening to Jesus also. Where would you be – in Martha’s shoes or Mary’s? Hospitality and food preparation are necessary parts of life. In any culture where it is expected that women do the food preparation and serving, people would agree with Martha’s frustrated plea to Jesus for him to tell Mary to help her. Do you sense the moment? Jesus heard Martha’s request, knew her heart in her frustration, but said, ‘Martha, Martha … only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her’. Do you sense a shift in priorities? And that sitting at the feet of Jesus is open to women also?

What catches your attention in this Scripture passage? Are you willing for Jesus to be at home with you?

**Lord Jesus, we welcome you to be at home with us also. Enable us to hear what you are saying to us, and by the power of your Spirit, enable us to change focus to pursue listening to you. Thank you!**

Ruth has been the other half of her husband Steen for 48-plus years. She has lived in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, ACT, New Zealand, and now again in Adelaide, South Australia. Together with their children and grandchildren, they number 11, so Ruth says it was rather sad when lockdown caps were 10 per household! Among many other activities, she is often reading or learning French. She is grateful for open borders now, with more caravan trips beckoning.

Monday 18 July 2022

# … And live!

by Ruth Olsen

**The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts … so that you may love him with all your heart and … soul, and live (Deuteronomy 30:6).**

Read Deuteronomy 30:1–8

It is sobering to read through the chapters before today’s reading. Deuteronomy 28 extensively spells out the blessings if the people followed the Lord’s instructions and promises of life and the curses that follow from disobedience. They are wake-up calls for us also, for we are no different. ‘Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore …’ (Deuteronomy 28:47). Are we taking our time of prosperity for granted? Even with prices and interest rates now rising, there is much that we enjoy daily. Are we cultivating an attitude of gratitude or a heart of moaning and complaining?

Reading through all those requirements that lead into these verses, I know there is no possibility on Earth for me to keep them as the Lord desires! I need God’s help – daily! Our hearts can be so far away from God, so engrossed in our human priorities that so often draw our attention further away from cultivating an attitude that seeks after the Lord. But here, in speaking of blessings and curses, the Lord already says he will come to our aid; he will circumcise our hearts (verse 6), pointing forward to the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us. Circumcision of the (male) flesh was God’s appointed ‘sign of the covenant’ with Abraham (Genesis 17). But in today’s reading, there is a pointing forward to a time when God himself would change our hearts, enabling us to receive and respond to his love and forgiveness and to live (Philippians 2:13)!

The realisation that we can’t help ourselves – plus that the Lord willingly helps us – is part of the truth that sets us free (John 8:32,36). I am grateful to live on this side of the cross where Jesus took the penalty of sin and the curse for us, and on this side of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all people (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:14–21), available to all.

**Abba Father, have mercy. Bless you, Lord Jesus. Thank you, Holy Spirit. Keep it coming, please, Lord. Amen.**

Tuesday 19 July 2022

# My son, my daughter …

by Ruth Olsen

**If you accept my words and treasure my instructions … (Proverbs 2:1).**

Read Proverbs 2:1–15

What a rich passage of Scripture! An invitation to sons and daughters – to anyone who will take notice. There are three ‘ifs’, a ‘then’ and a ‘for’ in the NIV translation. If = conditional, that is, available to all who act on this. Then = consequence, with something following. For = the reason, explaining ‘why’ the invitation and offer are made and from whom.

How often do we stop to think about what we do or say and why we do or say it? The ‘if’, ‘then’ and ‘for’ words are principles God has placed into the gift of life he has given us, repeated in his word. Whether we ignore or berate God’s principles, this doesn’t stop them from following through. But, thankfully, likewise, with the promise of God’s love for us – absolutely nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8:37–39). And because of his great love for us and creation, he came to us in human form, Jesus, to open the way for any who trust him to discover new life and, by the Holy Spirit working within, a deepening acceptance of the Lord’s words, will and ways.

Seeking wisdom from the Lord, wanting to understand, asking him for insight and understanding – these are heart attitudes that lead us to a better ‘treasure’ than the world can offer. And the ‘ifs’ invite us to open our hearts, to hopefully pursue rather than ignore the invitation. For it’s an invitation to grow in knowing the Lord, to let him draw us closer into a deepening relationship with him.

Thankfully, the Lord continually works to draw people to himself and Jesus, who is the Truth (John 14:6). He wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). And by the power of his Spirit, God works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose, giving us the desire and power to do what pleases him (Philippians 2:13).

**Lord, we call to you for insight, wisdom and understanding. Teach us your ways so that we may walk in your truth. Amen.**

Wednesday 20 July 2022

# Will we trust him?

by Ruth Olsen

**This is the way; walk in it (Isaiah 30:21).**

Read Isaiah 30:15,18–21

I love the verses of today’s reading! The Lord has drawn them to my attention back along the track, encouraging me through them at key times. So today, I pray that he gives us fresh insight and revelation in our hearts to something he is saying to us through them!

As in yesterday’s reading, we are reminded today in verse 15 that we choose by taking up what the Lord offers or by ignoring, taking no notice; in effect, rejecting it. The gift of salvation is ours to be lived daily in the combination of repentance (of our unbelief) and rest (trusting God and what he has said) – discovering strength in the quietness of the soul as we actively trust the Lord is at work in our situation and life.

Learning to surrender our frenzied activity and anxious thoughts, facing and dealing with daily happenings from an inner place of peace that transcends our understanding (Philippians 4:7), given to us by the Prince of Peace (John 14:27), and discovering the dynamic life hidden in the peace that he alone gives. This is an interesting and challenging journey of exploration and ongoing growth!

On this side of heaven, we will have times of adversity – stuff going wrong or affliction – things going wrong in our health and wellbeing. Yet these, too, are places or seasons of learning! As with me right now, anyone accompanied by sciatica in the journey knows the pain involved! It’s not fun! But in any affliction or adversity, the Lord is working something of his plans and purposes each day as we learn to rest in our relationship with him and let him accomplish whatever excavation work he wants as he prepares us for the stages of growth. Does that sound like ‘ouch’? Or, ‘let’s go’?

Will we trust him in what he is doing in our daily life? In hearing his voice, discover life!

**Lord, draw me into a closer walk with you so that you may bless others through me too. Amen.**

Thursday 21 July 2022

# The joy of the Lord

by Ruth Olsen

**Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit … (Luke 10:21).**

Read Luke 10:21–24

Can you imagine Jesus full of joy through the Holy Spirit? Laughter from the heart and whole being? Perhaps dancing or whatever the Son of Man might do … and with the laughter, spontaneous praise to Abba Father, sharing his joy and returning praise to where it belongs. We are given a glimpse of Jesus' relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

Before these verses, Luke tells of Jesus sending the seventy-two on a local assignment and hearing their joyful report of what had happened on their return. They had seen the spirits submit to them because of Jesus, beyond the realm of their previous worldview. But Jesus anchors their excitement: ‘[instead] rejoice that your names are written in heaven’ (verse 20). A ‘new thing’ was happening – ‘little children’ trusting God, resulting in the enemy submitting to God right where they were. A revelation was unfolding to the disciples of Jesus’ relationship with his Abba Father and Jesus’ authority in the earth realm.

After a time of serving others, you may feel tired, yet you might notice an inner joy bubbling up. You know that your serving was by the grace of God, by his enabling; people have been blessed, and you can’t help but praise him. Perhaps that’s a taste of this ‘joy through the Holy Spirit’ that is discovered as we, too, learn to be led by the Spirit in trusting God at work in our situations. Learning to see from heaven’s perspective.

Joy rises up within, replenishing our reserves, even energising and giving us new strength through the process. As Nehemiah wrote, the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). What does that mean for you?

Joy is also part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23), received when the Holy Spirit is given to us. This joy is different to happiness, which can be fleeting. It’s a gift from heaven and likely discovered as we serve others.

**Lord Jesus, grow in us this joyfulness you share with the Father and Holy Spirit. Give us insight and increase our understanding of your priorities. Amen.**

Friday 22 July 2022

# Endure patiently

by Ruth Olsen

**I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name (Revelation 3:8c).**

Read Revelation 3:7–13

Like the other letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, this letter addresses the past, present, and future of the church in Philadelphia. Footnotes in a study Bible can help us understand this letter or a good commentary such as Where earth meets heaven – a commentary on Revelation by John G Strelan (1994).

Jesus finds no fault with the church in Philadelphia – and he is the Davidic Messiah with the authority to open and close doors (also see Matthew 1:1–17; 28:18–20). The ‘open door’ most likely symbolises the ‘door’ of salvation through Jesus Christ himself, the only access to God (Ephesians 2:18; Acts 4:12) and through whom we come to know God as Father (John 14:6).

Jesus tells them he knows their deeds and faithfulness. He says he also knows the doings of those who oppose them – hostile pseudo-Jews who did not walk ‘in the spirit of faithful Abraham’, ‘the synagogue of Satan’ that also caused trouble at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11; Strelan, pp 62,84; also see Romans 2:28,29).

Jesus will deal with them. He encourages the Christians to hold steady and that those who remain faithful will be made ‘a pillar in the temple of my God’. Pillars commonly have a load-bearing or stabilising function or can stand alone like commemorative pillars. And Jesus will write three names on them, giving them identity, strongly reassuring them that they are safe with him; they belong to him.

There’s a theme flowing through this week’s devotional readings of relational trust in Jesus, right where we are. No matter what, annoyances, difficulties and even opposition can arise, yet how we deal with it is the thing that matters. As we hold to Jesus, trusting him, he will bring us through the trial, test or difficulty by the power of his Spirit, our Helper. We have not been left alone; he will provide us with the strength and patient endurance needed, fresh and new each morning!

**Lord Jesus, you know our past, present and future. Enable us to endure patiently, knowing your presence as your Spirit leads us. Amen.**

Saturday 23 July 2022

# Strong on our behalf

by Ruth Olsen

**Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life (Psalm 138:7).**

Read Psalm 138

Have you ever desperately needed the Lord’s help and cried out to him to intervene in your situation … and then recognised his answer when it came? What was your response?

David recognised God’s answer (verse 3), and praise to the Lord simply kept pouring out, overflowing in gratitude and thanksgiving, calling kings of nations to hear the Lord’s words and to join in praising the Lord. David knew he had received from God and was now overflowing with gratitude. David knew from experience that the Lord looks on the lowly. He also knew the Lord’s attitude to the proud – those dependent on themselves or other ‘gods’ (Psalms 31:23; 101:5; 131:1; see also Proverbs 3:34; 1 Peter 3:8; 5:5–7 – and Peter had learned this the hard way).

David had walked through some deep and dark times in his life. I can imagine there were many challenges already as a shepherd boy. The sooner we learn – and remember – challenges are actually opportunities, the more we can grow in wisdom, courage and strength of character, recognising our purpose. Our life is richer when we call to the Lord for help. He loves us and loves to help us! That’s why Jesus came for us. That’s why the Father has sent his Holy Spirit to us, to be God’s power within us, enabling us to overcome fear or whatever comes against us, to grow in gratitude and to know the Lord in the process.

As we have been reminded this week, the Lord desires us to know him, trust him and live! He wants to be part of our daily life so that he may be strong on our behalf in and through us (2 Chronicles 16:9; 2 Corinthians 12:9,10), to bring us through our time of trouble, making us stronger. It requires focus and commitment to come to the place of surrender to ‘Consider it pure joy … whenever you face trials of many kinds’ (James 1:2–6). But trials are a place where we meet the Lord!

**Thank you, Lord, that you watch out for us. Help us encourage others around us in their times of trouble also. Amen.**

Sunday 24 July 2022

# Prayer: knowing forgiveness; living abundantly

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who has wronged us (Luke 11:4).**

Read Luke 11:1–13

I am not that keen on prayer. I know that as a Lutheran pastor, that might get me labelled a heretic! Oh well. Looking at the devotional readings for this week, they are all about prayer! I had a little chuckle about the irony and God’s sense of humour!

But it got me thinking. What is prayer about? What do we seek when we pray? What do we hear (if we listen at all when praying)? What do we expect?

And I got to the point that perhaps prayer is actually about knowing we are forgiven, living in grace and forgiving others! How often do we pray for forgiveness? Obviously, in this petition of the Lord’s prayer, and if you attend a church with a communal confession, possibly once a week. But that confession time can be sterile and not so meaningful.

So, is praying about forgiveness and living well (or abundantly)? Any psychologist, and hopefully any Christian, will be able to tell you that unforgiveness is not healthy. And that to know you are forgiven by God and able to forgive others enables you to live abundantly (even if God has a different idea to me of what that means!).

Perhaps the answers we receive to prayer – sometimes what we ask for, occasionally being sent in a different direction by God, sometimes a no or a not yet – are about much more than what we are asking for. Perhaps prayer brings us closer to the living God, the cosmic Christ who lives in each one of us, to the reality of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the answers are about knowing we are forgiven, living in the gracious love of our Saviour, being freed to love abundantly and knowing that what God provides and does not provide is sufficient for us.

Don’t get me wrong; I am not downplaying the significance or power of prayer. But perhaps prayer becomes even more meaningful as it is encircled in grace and nurtured in a forgiving spirit.

**Ha! Ha! God of laughter, help us know your forgiveness and live abundantly in your grace. Amen.**

Peter is often out tending his garden – with 83 fruit and nut trees and extensive native bushes, he says there is a lot to do! Other times, he will be walking his dog, reading (too many books at a time), enjoying his family (15 grandchildren!), and occasionally writing – poetry, opinion pieces, devotions! To keep out of mischief, he is currently teaching himself to play the piano and is writing a paraphrase of each psalm. You can read these on his website, *Creative Walking* http://www.creativewalking.com.au/psalm-reflections.html