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**Sunday 28 March to Sunday 4 April**

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Sunday 28 March 2021

# Jesus, the king of the simple

by Darren Pope

**Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ‘Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!’ (John 12:14,15).**

Read John 12:12–16

I love the way Jesus does stuff that is so simple and so powerful as an example to those around him. He knew he couldn’t book an Uber to Jerusalem. He didn’t have a fancy entourage to provide luxurious transit, so he just got on with sorting out a lift for himself. The journey of Jesus in Passion Week echoes metaphorically in our lives each day.

It is too easy for us to overthink stuff, make extravagant plans or focus on the wrong things. Jesus hopping on a smelly, wobbly, obstinate and dead-slow little donkey allowed the journey to be the focus rather than a distraction for the ‘how, who, where or when’ of getting there. Jesus just gets about it. He knows what he has to do and keeps it simple. How good is it to know that no matter what, Jesus is coming! He’s on his way into our lives, our days, our relationships, our jobs, our streets and our homes. And he brings the simple message of hope and love in partnership with his Father, through the free gift of grace.

Jesus comes to us every day. Simple!

**Lord and king of simple, thank you for coming to me each day in grace. Amen.**

Monday 29 March 2021

# Stinky feet

by Darren Pope

**Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3).**

Read John 12:1–11

In my early teens, I sprinkled powder in my shoes and sprayed deodorant under my toes. But no matter what I tried, it never seemed to help make a difference. I had stinky feet!

The blokes who hung out with Jesus each day were rough-and-tumble kind of guys. They came from all walks of life. Most of them had hands and feet that told the story of a lifetime spent doing hard physical work.

When they scrubbed up to go out for a meal, they did their best to be a bit fancy by washing their body, hands and hair. There was no point in washing their feet because after walking barefoot on dusty tracks all day, dirt had ingrained itself into every fold of skin. It was wedged under their toenails and crammed into the crusty cracks of their heels and souls like tattooed veins. Jesus’ feet were the same. While this bunch of blokes reclined around the table together, yarning, eating and drinking, an unpleasant undercurrent wafted from below the table. Everyone had stinky feet!

In a seemingly simple act, Mary washed Jesus’ feet and used her hair. Was this normal? It stirred up the crew that had gathered together, especially when she used some really special and expensive perfume to do the job!

Symbolically, Mary points forward to Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, but more importantly, lavishing Jesus’ feet with such a beautiful scent during this moment highlights the reality that he will always be a living Saviour, rather than buried and forgotten.

No doubt, after his feet were cleaned and perfumed, there was a very different aroma pervading the room as it slowly seeped into the senses and experiential memories of each disciple. When Jesus retired for the evening, the scent was with him. The essence of Christ was precious, tangible and shared with many.

The journey of passion heralds the coming of a new aroma, a new era of kingship that is precious, tangible and shared with many. God comes to us day after day, in Christ, and works through us in his world as we serve in response to his unconditional love, mercy and forgiveness. By grace, we are washed clean each day. And even with our stinky feet, the scent of Christ goes with us as we travel our journey and influence others as gentle witnesses … ‘you will always have poor among you’.

Be the perfume of Christ.

***May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.***
***May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.***
***May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.***
***May the Child of God grow in you, and his love bring you home.***
—Robin Mann, 1983

Tuesday 30 March 2021

# I’ve got your back!

by Darren Pope

**Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going (John 12:35).**

Read John 12:20–36

So little is documented about the first 30 years of Jesus’ life. It fascinates me and is something I have often thought about. I wonder what his daily life looked like, what his friends saw in him and how he handled puberty, pimples, pressure and prickly people. A lifetime of learning through a human lens, filled with authentic, unfiltered earthly encounters equipped Jesus for his time of ministry. He lived through experiences of great joy, deep sadness, friendship, rigorous dialogue, feeling smothered and just needing space and time to recharge.

I can’t help but think that, in his humanity, there must have been moments of doubt, anguish and fear about the journey of the passion that he knew of far in advance. Viewing this through the broken lens of my sinful humanity, I am in awe that Jesus didn’t just bail out, hide from God like Adam and Eve or do a runner like Jonah!

What we learn about the character of Jesus, being fully human and fully God, is astounding. Even with full knowledge of the shattering betrayals and horrendous suffering that lay ahead of him, Jesus hung in there. He even told his mates that the idea of suffering that made them recoil and cower was exactly why he had come to this time in his life. Jesus was in it for the long game, for the greater good and all people.

When stuff gets ugly in our lives, Jesus steps right into the middle of it, looks us in the eye and calmly says, ‘This is why I am here with you’. As sinners and saints, condemned by the law and freed by grace, it is so awesome to know that death and burial was not the finish of Jesus' story. Real daily hope comes through knowing that Christ defeated the grimness of death and is risen. Lean into his unconditional love. He’s got your back!

**Lord of love, there’s a tough week and a big day ahead. Thanks for being with me today. Thanks for hanging in there with me. Amen.**

Wednesday 31 March 2021

# Righto, I’m ready

by Darren Pope

**The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking (John 13:22).**

Read John 13:21–32

To get ready, I checked that my swimming goggles fitted well and packed my phone and wallet safely away. This was no ordinary moment of plopping into the pool during a summer scorcher. No, this was the middle of a mild Queensland winter, and I was gearing up to endure my half-hour on the sponge-throw stall at our annual school carnival. So, just to be really frank here, I never enjoyed this – ever!

Stoically, I poked my head through the hole in the wooden target board, smiled and called out, ‘Righto, I’m ready’. Blam! Within a heartbeat, a sodden, tepid car sponge slammed into my face, accompanied by the giggling of the person who had flung it.

It seems that I was, indeed, not ready at all. In fact, each time that I faced up, watched the next combatant pluck their dripping sponge from the bucket and anticipated it hurtling toward me, I could not prepare myself for the impact. Not even once. It shocked me every time. After a couple of direct hits, I was ready to shy away, flinch or quit.

Jesus was hanging out with the disciples when they wanted to know the answer to a tricky question. They thought they knew each other pretty well and that they were ready for the answer, but ‘blam!’ Jesus’ response hit them in the face with cold, hard facts.

Again, we see Jesus remind us that we are held accountable by the law, facts and the truth, but we are also set free because of the work God constantly does to glorify Christ who comes to us daily in love and grace. That means whatever challenges and curve balls life throws at me, God is with me, and I don’t need to shy away, flinch or quit.

Righto, I’m ready!

**Loving Lord, you are awesome! Thank you for the confidence that you are with me today. I am sorry that I doubt or forget about your complete love sometimes. I know you will help me in the challenges of the day ahead. Thank you. Amen.**

Thursday 1 April 2021

# Ugly toes

by Darren Pope

**Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him (John 13:5).**

Read John 13:1–17,31b–35

One summer I used a blend of speckled paint and chemical sealer to refresh my large-sealed driveway, patios and paths. It was a huge job and took me days with a wide roller and lots of perseverance. As for PPE, I wore a fancy respirator, long, thick rubber gloves and old sandshoes. When it was done, I stood back and admired my work. I was stoked with the result and really proud of how new and fresh it made the areas look. The hard work seemed to be worthwhile.

Two days later, something weird started to happen. I noticed that both my big toenails and four other smaller toenails had turned red. I didn’t think much of it, but over the coming days, they all turned a deep dark purple, got wobbly and dropped off! What was going on? I have no idea why this happened or what caused me to lose my toenails. I was so embarrassed!  I wanted to hide my feet from view, but it was a summer of stinking hot days, so I kept wearing my Birkenstock shoes to the local swimming pool and shopping centre. I felt completely self-conscious and that everyone was looking at my ugly toes. It took a whole year for the nails to grow back.

Our feet are not a particularly glorious part of our body. When Jesus demonstrated love in action by washing feet, we often focus on this as our role model for Christian service. Appropriately, this helps us understand the values of love, humility and servant leadership; however, the unsung hero at this moment is grace. Jesus knew each of the disciples very well. He knew their backstories, their strengths, their failings as sinful human beings and that one would betray him, condemning him to death. Jesus knew they had ugly toes and that it felt like everyone was looking at their sins. Jesus washed their feet individually and completely. Jesus washed them clean.

I can try to clean off my sins, but only through Christ and his grace are my sins actually and truly dissolved and resolved. It is God’s work through Christ. God serves the world as he comes to me and works through me. Yep, even with my ugly toes.

**God of the new day, in you, I’m washed clean. In you, I’m refreshed. I’m yours; I’m ready! Amen.**

Friday 2 April 2021

# Horrific hope

by Darren Pope

**When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30).**

Read John 18:1–19:42

Wow, that is heavy going! In a few short words of simple text, it says that they crucified him. Reading it is hard to digest. Tears well up in me, my heart beats faster, my head spins and my demeanour sinks. It’s just ugly, gruesome and horrific. Crucifixion causes death, but not by pain from the nails driven through hands and ankles. It is gruesome and horrific. Death by asphyxiation. Lungs collapse after hours of agony, pushing up on severed ankles to expand the chest and gasp for another breath.

What a hopeless scene. So where is the gospel in the hurly-burly of this messy power grab and complete humiliation? Where is hope?

Jesus experienced false accusations, taunts, temptation, excruciating suffering, emotional torture, exclusion and public humiliation. I need to pause after that list. Every one of these words is an action and things people deliberately did to him. In each of these, Jesus is fully God and fully human. Soaking up the horror of sin as God, feeling every nerve being severed as a human and continually being grounded in the reassurance of unconditional love, forgiveness and eternal life through grace, Christ radiated hope. The quiet, intentional way that Jesus absorbed every battering, and ultimately his gruesome death, injects bold and unquestionable hope into our lives today and in the days yet to come. That’s the gospel right there. It is always God’s work. It doesn’t matter how ugly it is; he gets it. Lean into him. Our hope is in Christ. It’s enough.

**God of hope, I am leaning into you today. Thank you for being enough. Amen.**

Saturday 3 April 2021

# A song, really?

by Darren Pope

**You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me (Psalm 31:3).**

Read Psalm 31:1–4,15,16

Thrashing out lyrics at the top of your lungs, laughing and smiling. Have you ever been in full voice with friends at a pub, concert or party? Chances are, you didn’t even know all of the lyrics, but you sang loud and strong anyway. It’s pretty funny to discover the real lyrics, particularly when you have been singing something else in your head, car or shower for years!

It seems quite random that a song is the focus of our reading, especially when we are bogged down and consumed by thoughts about the intensity of Jesus’ suffering, execution, death and burial as a stranger.

As a songwriter, David had a talent for cutting straight to the heart of real life and the authenticity of our human experience. Psalm 31 almost pleads with God to be there in moments of need, and it sounds a bit desperate. It’s not really a pumping karaoke number that we might smash out with our mates! It sits right at the heart of our very human need to know that we are cared for, safe and supported, no matter what. The good news is hidden within the lyrics of Psalm 31. Look beyond the yearnings. In our humanity, with moments of personal denial, doubt, desperation or dread, David continually draws our attention to the comfort, strength and safety of God’s unconditional and unfailing love. That is what we needed, David. Sing in your heart. Lift your voice. Lift your eyes. Tomorrow, he is risen!

**Lord over suffering, Lord over hatred, Lord over brokenness, Lord over sin, Lord over death. Lord of love, Lord of life. Lord of grace, our new song is in you. Amen.**

Sunday 4 April 2021

# Who are you looking for?

by Georgie Schuster

**He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ (John 20:15).**

Read John 20:1–18

We can only imagine the whirlwind of emotions that buffeted Mary’s mind and heart. Horror, despair, numbness, exhaustion. Now, enveloped in darkness, she makes her way to the tomb to do what needed to be done. Things had happened so quickly, and there hadn’t been time for Jesus’ body to be properly prepared for burial.

And now the stone is removed? Along with his body? Panic and confusion! Peter and John come and go. But where is Jesus? All she wants to know is the whereabouts of Jesus’ body. How could she fulfil the requirements for a proper burial? How could she grieve? And then someone asks, ‘Who is it you are looking for?’

Isn’t it blatantly obvious?

The one who had shown kindness to her when others had abandoned her. The one who had freed her from torment. The one who had spent time with her. The one who had lived, loved and served; the one whose life had been so abruptly and cruelly snuffed out. Then, as Jesus calls her name … a dawning realisation.

Instincts kick in as she goes to cling to the one she loves. But Jesus quickly redirects her to what really needs to be done. Tell the others, ‘I’m going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’.

What emotions would have flooded through her she ran towards the disciples? Her understanding of who Jesus is was expanding, breaking an inferior mould like an Easter egg. I don’t know whether it was in those moments, or in the days to come, that she came to understand Jesus as Saviour. That there was so much more to him than she had known. But I would have loved to be there when she burst forth with the news, ‘I have seen the LORD!’

**Dear Father, we praise you for Jesus’ victory over the grave and all that means for us. Help us to share this life-changing news with others. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**