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**Sunday 7 January 2024 to**

**Sunday 14 January 2024**

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**God revealed in the Jordan River**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased' (Mark. 1:11).***

Read [Mark 1:4–11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A4-11&version=NRSVUE)

The most basic and important truth in Christian theology is that God reveals himself.

Apart from that, we would have no idea of what God is like. We would be stuck in a completely lightless cellar, creating god or gods out of our imaginations – making idols instead of knowing God as he really is.

Yet, thankfully, God has revealed himself. He has done that through his acts in history, his relationship with great Old Testament figures, such as Moses and Abraham, the prophets, and his law. But most completely and fully, God has revealed himself in his Son. In Jesus, we see God fully as he is. As Archbishop Sir Michael Ramsay once said, ‘God is like Christ, and in him is no un-Christ-likeness at all’. Jesus said, ‘If you have seen me, you have seen the Father (John 12:45; 14:8).

That stunning revelation of God's presence with us is amazingly clear in the passage before us today. Jesus’ baptism was not merely an earthly event. He was baptised by John in the Jordan River. And he was also baptised with the Spirit, as his Father declared his love for him, so that all history might know who Jesus was and is.

This passage reveals Jesus in our midst being baptised for us, to stand with us. It also reveals God, the Father who sent him. And God, the Holy Spirit, who filled and empowered Jesus to do the Father’s will.

You will not read many devotions this year containing a Latin phrase. You don’t have to remember it! There is no test at the end, but the phrase is ‘opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt’.

What does that mean? It means that every action of our Triune God involves all the persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each fully involved in creating the world, sustaining the world and redeeming the world. And embracing you.

You live in the middle of a three-fold embrace.  
That can never be undone.  
Because they can never be undone.

**Thank you, Heavenly Father, for revealing yourself to us in your Son Jesus. Thank you for sending him into the world by the power of your Spirit for us and our salvation. Thank you that, through Jesus, you have gathered us in your arms, and we are fully loved, embraced and secure. We pray in the grip of the Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.**

*Noel is currently spending his retirement serving as the Intentional Interim Pastor of the Top End Lutheran Parish. He lives in Darwin with his wife, Kirsten, a medical doctor who mainly works in remote Indigenous communities. He also serves as a professional supervisor for a number of pastors, chaplains and others.*

Monday 8 January 2024

**A wise hearer or a babbling fool?**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin (Proverbs 10:8).***

Read [Proverbs 10:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+10%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE)

Over the next few days, our devotions will take us to some of the most ancient parts of the Bible.

The Bible contains different types of literature. To name just some of them, there are letters, such as Paul’s letter to the Romans. There are prophetic books*,* such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. There are books that comment on the history of God’s Old Testament people, like 1 and 2 Kings. There is poetry. And there is wisdom.

Proverbs is chief among a number of Bible books characterised as wisdom literature*.* But also, some of the psalms are wisdom psalms, and books like Ecclesiastes and Job are also types of wisdom writing.

Why is this important? Because God is not only interested in the big themes of salvation and redemption but also the practical day-to-day issues of how best to make our way in this sometimes confusing world.

Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings. They are easy-to-remember, shorthand descriptions of what makes for a good life. Our focal verse contains one of the most important biblical principles: wisdom is found by *listening –* in having a quiet, humble and submissive spirit, which cedes our sovereignty to God’s.

That is what faith is. Trusting him more than ourselves.

Proverbs 10:8 can also be translated as:

* The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin (Proverbs 10:8 NIB).
* The wise are glad to be instructed, but babbling fools fall flat on their faces (Proverbs 10:8 NLT).

This is good advice. We are too prone to rush headlong. We are apt to trust our own opinions. We often refuse to be told, even when we are clearly in the wrong.

Yet, as we ponder this proverb even more, it becomes clear that the one person who has lived this most fully is Jesus. He was not a babbling fool. He had a listening ear and a humble heart.

Even if we sometimes babble too much, he does not. If we have been foolish, he remains our wise Saviour. If we have fallen flat on our faces, he delights to raise us up and put us on a straight path. Perhaps today is the day for your heart to stop babbling and be still and receive from the hand of God, who knows what we need and what he is doing.

***Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your wisdom, which has been most perfectly embodied in Jesus. Thank you for your patience with us and for the humble heart with which Jesus serves you and saves us. Let us be filled with your Spirit so that we can walk with wisdom in this sometimes confusing world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.***

Tuesday 9 January 2024

**The fear that frees**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honour (Proverbs 15:33).***

Read [Proverbs 15:16–33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+15%3A16-33&version=NRSVUE)

Today’s focal text contains another of the most important phrases in the Bible. It speaks of the ‘fear of the Lord’ from which all wisdom comes.

Here are two other examples:

* ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!’ (Psalm 111:10 ESV).
* ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction’ (Proverbs 1:7 ESV).

This is not an attitude of terror or slavish fear. It is a gospel invitation to hear the voice of his Servant. It is a divine summons to come under his will. It is to live wisely: recognise his wisdom, desist from our stubbornness, listen to his voice, hear his gospel, and seek to obey his instructions.

‘The fear of the Lord’ is relational. It recognises who God is in relationship to us and who we are in relationship to him. In ‘the fear of the Lord’, we recognise that we are not in control of our own lives but walk humbly before the God who is.

We pray the Lord’s Prayer regularly. That prayer describes what it’s like to live in the fear of the Lord. It’s a humble request for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, for his kingdom to come, and for his name to be holy and exalted. Thankfully, this means our wills might not be done, and our kingdoms might not come. It means names might not be exalted. To live in the fear of the Lord is to submit to his plans and purposes and receive his blessing and presence in them.

***Dear Father, thank you for not leaving us to our own devices. Thank you for loving us so much that your will triumphs over our petty plans and schemes. Thank you for your Son, our wisdom. Thank you that, above all other people, he feared you and thus opened the gates of heaven for us. In his name, we give you thanks, Amen.***

Wednesday 10 January 2024

**Honest dealing; no payback**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***If anyone returns evil for good, evil will not depart from their house (Proverbs 17:13).***

Read [Proverbs 17:1–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+17%3A1-20&version=NRSVUE)

As you reflect on the last few devotions, you’ll find some recurring themes. Themes like humility, quietness, trusting ourselves to God, ceding our sovereignty to his. And having a listening ear.

The focal verse for today is a self-evident truth: if you are treated kindly, you should not repay it unkindly. Sadly, what should be self-evident often isn’t. Otherwise, we would not have crucified Jesus. He is the ultimate fulfilment of passages such as Psalm 109:5: ‘They repay my kindness with evil and friendship with hatred’.

Even on the level of normal human relationships, if we are treated kindly and repay it badly, we reap a harvest of unhappiness: our relationships become tainted by our selfishness, and we diminish ourselves as human beings.

When we come to the New Testament, Jesus expands this teaching: ‘But I tell you who hear me: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you’ (Luke 6:27,28). That is what Jesus did. It is what he does.

Thus, Peter says to us, ‘Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing’ (1 Peter 3:9).

Peter also says that in a time of suffering, when we are treated unkindly, ‘in [our] hearts set apart Christ as Lord’ (1 Peter 3:15) and that it is better ‘if it is God's will to suffer for doing good than for doing evil’ (1 Peter 3:17).

Because of Jesus’ ministry and the gift of his Spirit, we must also let go of wrongs suffered and not seek revenge or hold grudges. Or, to put it positively, to walk in the liberty of the Lord.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for not repaying us as our sins deserve. Thank you for sending Jesus to us, full of grace and truth, and that even as we vented our anger and hatred on him, he turned his eyes towards us in love. May we be filled with his Spirit so that his life is shared through us. Amen.**

Thursday 11 January 2024

**The Lord is Lord, indeed**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord (Proverbs 21:30).***

Read [Proverbs 21:30–22:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+21%3A30-22%3A6&version=NRSVUE)

The very first verse in the section is today’s focal verse. It encapsulates a theme that runs throughout the Bible: the all-sustaining sovereignty of God.

God created the world without any human agency. All things owe their existence to him. We might imitate him by being creative in art, music or literature. But we cannot create the earth on which we stand, the colours with which we paint, or the clay we mould into a pot.

In contrast, God creates all things out of nothing. Including us. Because God is the creator of all things, he sustains and keeps all things. Nothing fashioned against him can overthrow him. No element of the creation can defeat his goodness. No evil purpose under heaven can toss him out of heaven. And no purpose he has planned can be thwarted.

That is very good news for us!

Paul puts it this way:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38,39).

Jesus put it like this:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.  I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one (John 10:27–30).

God's sovereignty is not a threat to our freedom. Instead, it’s the absolute guarantee of it. And we can rest in that security all the days of our lives right up to our last breath.

**Thank you, Father, for bringing all things into being, even me. Thank you for sustaining all things by the word of your power, even me, this day. Thank you for being the Lord of all the details, even in my life. Thank you that no one and nothing can snatch me out of your hand. Amen.**

Friday 12 January 2024

**No broken-down walls**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***A person without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls (Proverbs 25:28).***

Read [Proverbs 25:15–28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+25%3A15-28&version=NRSVUE)

A broken-down wall or an undefended house is not only exposed to the elements, but it is also open to looting, vandalism and theft. We do all in our power to avoid that with our physical property. But what about ourselves?

In another place, we are told: ‘Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life’ (Proverbs 4:23). One translation puts it this way: ‘*More than all else*, keep watch over your heart, since here are the wellsprings of life’ (Proverbs 4:23).

A person’s identity may be shaped to some degree by their environment, upbringing and genetic load. And yet, it is also even more powerfully shaped by the choices we make in the face of the circumstances we’re in.

In other words, the same set of circumstances may result in quite different outcomes, depending on how we respond. Bitterness, unforgiveness and bearing grudges lead only to more bitterness, unforgiveness and grudges. Mercy begets love. Grace begets forgiveness. Righteousness begets righteousness.

God has begotten righteousness in us by showing us mercy. He has brought forgiveness into our relationships by meeting us and our sins with his grace. He has stepped into the broken-down ruins our lives had become to rebuild them. God has healed our broken lives by being broken for us.

Paul tells us that the fruit of the Holy Spirit includes self-control (Galatians 5:22,23), but it is not alone. It is part of a constellation of blessings, such as love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness and faithfulness. These are given to us by the Spirit of Jesus as we hear his gospel.

So, self-control does not come by gritting our teeth and forcing it by willpower, but by hearing with faith God’s love for us and experiencing the fruit of his salvation in our lives. We guard our hearts by listening to his heart. And the more we know his love for us, the more our love for him and others grows along the way. This growth in love is the wellspring of self-control. It’s a gospel gift of the Spirit to a needy world.

***Thank you, Lord, for seeing us in our needy state. We needed you to come to us, and you came before we called. Thank you for meeting us with love, mercy and grace so we might respond in gratitude, kindness and love to others. Amen.***

Saturday 13 January 2024

**Constantly watched over**

by Rev Dr Noel Due

***How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you (Psalm 139:17,18).***

Read [Psalm 139:1–6,13–18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139%3A1-6%2C+13-18&version=NRSVUE)

Psalm 139 is one of my favourite passages of Scripture. I have turned to it for comfort many times. It has carried me through grief and loss, as well as into new life and new beginnings.

It is a wisdom psalm with themes that match those we have seen already.

For example, the whole psalm resonates with the utter sovereignty of God, who has not only created all things but created us. God did not create us randomly to see what would happen. Rather, he had a plan and purpose for us, which is unfolding as we live our lives day by day. He has been present with us even before we knew of his presence.

The more science progresses, the less we seem to know. We think we understand the biology of conception and how a baby grows in the womb. Yet we have no real understanding of how God does that and what it means for a person to be a living soul in his presence. This psalm talks about the relationship God has with us from before we were conceived, right through to the very end of our days.

In reading our text for today, we are amazed to find it is not our thoughts of God that sustain us, but his thoughts of us! His thoughts of us are endless. His eye is constantly upon us. He is continuously meditating on us with joy and singing over us with love: ‘The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing’ (Zephaniah 3:17).

It is as though God can’t get enough of the joy he has in having us in his presence. Even while we’re asleep, he is with us. And as we awake, we do not enter his presence; we realise we have been in that presence all the way through. That’s so if it’s our afternoon siesta, night-time sleep, or the doctor’s anaesthetic.

This takes us away from our self-centred reflections. It moves us to a world where we are amazed at God’s mindfulness of us far more than our mindfulness of him. And that means we can live freely and at peace with him and the world he has made. Because even when we sleep the last sleep of death, we awake in his presence, knowing he has never left us.

**Thank you, Father, for your care for us. Thank you for holding us eternally in the threefold embrace of Father, Son and Spirit. Thank you that your embrace carries us from the womb to the grave and beyond, with no condemnation in Jesus and no separation possible because of our union with him. Amen.**

Sunday 14 January 2024

**Finders keepers**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me' (John 1:43).***

Read [John 1:43–51](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A43-51&version=NRSVUE)

The day before Jesus called Philip, Philip had been with John the Baptist in Bethany beyond the Jordan. This was over a 24-hour walk from Philip’s home, which was in the north. So, Philip must have been a long way from home. We don’t know which way he was travelling. We don’t know what occupied Philip's thoughts as he journeyed. Perhaps he was away from home for business or family matters. Maybe he wanted to see what all the fuss was concerning John the Baptist. When he woke that morning and slipped on his sandals, he had no idea that, within hours, his life would be turned upside down. Something profound would happen to him that God had been planning before the foundation of the world.

Strange things happen when God is in town – think about Moses walking in the desert, minding his own business, when he suddenly sees a bush on fire and meets God. Or Zechariah, going into the temple (‘called up by lot’ – like the throw of dice) just expecting to do his job, and, suddenly, God is there in all his terrifying presence. Think about that.

Imagine, today, a pastor goes into a church to set up for the morning service, turns on the lights, and actually sees God. He would come close to dying of fright. God in church! The poor bloke was just there trying to get the PowerPoint to work and find a replacement guitarist. God finds us.

God found Philip. He found Abraham. He found Zechariah and gave him good news. He finds prostitutes, prisoners, parishioners, pastors and sometimes even politicians. My husband says I’m a keeper. Well, let me tell you – God is a finder. That’s what he does and who he is. Even when we don’t know we are lost.

**Thank you, Father, for meeting us where we are, whether we are near or far from home. Even before we call or know our needs, you come to us. Thank you for coming to this world to seek and save the lost. Amen.**

Kirsten enjoys working as a Medical Rural Generalist in the remotest part of Australia – from Warruwi to Ramingining and Ltyentye Apurte to Lajamanu, to name a few. Her favourite thing is showing her husband, Noel, around the communities and coming home to him and their two ragdoll cats (Courage and Perseverance). Kirsten says she does not like flying sideways in a tiny Cessna in bad weather or having to run away from grumpy buffalo, red-belly black snakes or crocodiles.