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**Sunday 25 June 2023 to Sunday 2 July 2023**

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Sunday 25 June 2023

**What are you worth?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29,31).***

Read Matthew 10:24–39

Have you ever felt that you don’t have any value in life? Maybe you are going through a rough patch. Or perhaps you are going well but feel like some people take you for granted. Have you stopped recently to ask yourself what you are worth?

The world we live in, with so much pressure to have it all together and be positive in every situation, can be a tough place just to exist. There are expectations, and then there is the judgement from others – and even yourself – when you don’t get through your to-do list each day. The world and its people can make you feel that you are only worth what you can give them. If you can do or give something, you are valuable to someone or even your workplace or retirement space. It seems that the more you do and give of yourself, the world tells you that makes you more valuable than when you are not giving or doing as much.

Yet, you are made in the image of God. You are loved by the God who created the universe and created you. Not loved from a distance but loved through the suffering and death of God’s only Son, Jesus. The love of God poured out on the cross at Calvary through Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus died so you might have life and have it to the full. Not in the prosperity sense but a life filled with God’s love, grace and mercy – a life that fills you with joy and hope, a life that is new.

God, our Heavenly Father, loves you so much. He reminds you that you are so valuable that he gave up his Son so you could be set free and receive eternal life in him. Even the sparrows, seen as not so valuable in a monetary sense, are cared for by God.

Do not be afraid. Are you not worth more and more valuable than the sparrows whom God cares for? Know that God loves you. He cares for you, and you are worth so much to him. He showed this when he sent Jesus to save you and fill you with his love.

**Heavenly Father, help me remember that you made me and rescued me from sin, death and the power of the devil through your only Son, Jesus. Help me know that I am valuable, not because I say to the world that I am, but because you declare to the world that I am. You love me and care for me. May I always remember you gave yourself for me because you say I’m worth it and because of your abundant grace. Amen.**

Pastor Mark Gierus currently serves as a Lutheran pastor in Redcliffe, Queensland. He has three beautiful girls aged 7, 10 and 19 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.

Monday 26 June 2023

**What do you smell like?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3).***

Read John 12:1–11

Do you remember the things in life you associate with a particular smell? It might be something from your childhood, the aromas of your mum’s cooking or the smell of a fire in the middle of winter that you link with warmth and family time. Have you ever wondered if Christians have a particular smell?

Mary poured the perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. In this act of love in service to her Lord Jesus, the fragrance of the expensive perfume filled the house. Can you imagine it? If you were there, would you always remember the words of Jesus encouraging her and correcting and challenging the disciples about their sinfulness? Would you close your eyes years later to remember the smell of this act of service to Jesus in love? Would you wonder what smell you leave behind in your acts of love toward others in the service of your Lord Jesus? Is it the sweet smell of Jesus’ love shared to build up another person?

It is easy to fall into safe ways of being a Christian – going to church, reading your Bible and praying. These are all good and right things to do, but God didn’t create us to only live Jesus for ourselves but for others, too, and be a blessing to them in all we do, say and smell like. You see, many people may never go to hear a sermon in church or even read the Bible. The only sermon some people in the world might ever hear is the one you preach by the way you live your life and the way they smell your good deeds as you show love in service towards each other.

When did you last fill your space with the fragrance of service in love? As you serve others, you will be blessed, for you are doing the very work of God. What a joy it is that we can love each other because Jesus first loved us. We can serve each other because Jesus came as a servant to serve us because he cares.

***Dear Jesus, may I have a heart to serve you and know that lives are changing as I share your love with others. Let me be bold to serve those I struggle with, love those the world tells me are unlovable and be a sweet fragrance, a blessing to all I encounter today. Amen.***

Tuesday 27 June 2023

**How much do we understand?**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him (John 12:16).***

Read John 12:12–19

When it comes to life, how much do we understand? How were the heavens, the earth and all things that live on earth created? Do we comprehend the intricate relationships of all living things, let alone our own human relationships? Do we understand the deep thoughts, worries, anxieties, desires and hopes of our human hearts? Do we understand the work of Jesus?

The disciples, we are told, did not understand all the events that occurred. That Jesus said that he must suffer and die and be raised again. They did not understand that Jesus came as the King of Kings, yet also a servant king. Jesus did not come as a human conqueror on a battle horse but as a suffering servant, humble and riding on a donkey. Only after the end of all the things that Jesus had to go through did the disciples realise what was happening. The heart of the matter was that Jesus came to suffer and die and rise again on the third day for the sin of the world.

Yet, like the disciples, we may not fully understand the mysteries of the work of God. We may not fully understand the work that continues in us by the power of the Holy Spirit through the word of God planted in our hearts. We may not fully understand why things happen the way they do, but as we read the word of God, we grow in faith to see Jesus in our lives. It is by faith that we live and have meaning. Faith in Jesus, the king who came to save us from our sins, to face each day with confidence in the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

When we meet Jesus on that day when he comes to take us with him forever, we will clearly see what Jesus sees. We won’t need to understand, for all that is unclear will be made clear. Some things seem wrong or out of place in life, perhaps different from how you would have done something. But it is in these very things that, by faith, we know that God works in us and through us for his glory. Jesus wasn’t weak for dying on the cross – instead of raising up an army to save him, he came as a servant to give up his life so that we might have life.

**Lord, we don’t understand so many things – the wonders of your creation and the struggles we have in our own hearts. Yet, Lord, you love and shape us for your work through what we see and do. Help us trust you and remember your deep love for us, first shown by sending your Son Jesus to suffer and die for our sins and to offer us life forever with you in his name. Amen.**

Wednesday 28 June 2023

**To accompany Jesus**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me (John 12:26).***

Read John 12:20–26

Sometimes, it is easy to do things by yourself, especially when you want to get it done quickly. It can be frustrating when you have others wanting to do something you can do in half the time. Especially when they usually don’t do it to the standard you do.

So, as Christians, it is good that Jesus doesn’t get frustrated with us because it takes us much longer to do things than he could. Jesus certainly would do a much better job than you or me.

Think about the work you are called to do by God through Jesus: to share God’s love with the world, proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ to everyone, make disciples of all nations in Jesus’ name and never get tired of doing good, walking in the good works God prepared in advance for you. Yet it is our Lord who calls us to participate in his work – the redemptive work of Jesus in the world.

What an honour to be called and then to follow Jesus and serve him day by day in his strength so others may come to know him and be saved. But notice where you will be if you are a servant of Jesus.

Jesus says whoever serves him will follow him. Not a few steps or even lots of steps behind but with Jesus. Walking with him, accompanying him along the road of this life and eternity.

What a gift to be called a child of God by faith. As a child of God, you are set apart or made holy to do the very work of God, and what a joy it is to know that where Jesus is, so too are his servants. Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you in your call and mine to serve him and accompany or follow him in all things. What a great comfort this is to go and do the work of the Lord together with the Lord of the harvest.

**Jesus, here I am. Help me follow you as I serve you day by day. Give me your wisdom and strength, and fill me with your love to boldly share with those I meet today. Help me to know that I am never alone in the work you have called me to do. Be with me as I go to serve you, walking beside you in all I do and say today. Amen.**

Thursday 29 June 2023

**Children of the light**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light (John 12:36).***

Read John 12:27–36

Jesus tells us that he is the Light of the World, and whoever follows him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. But to walk in darkness is to not know where to go. He tells us to believe in this light while we have it, believe in Jesus while we hear his voice, and in him, live in the light.

By faith, believing in the light of Jesus, we become children of the light. The very word of our Lord shines deep in our souls to illuminate our sins and show us the darkness in our hearts. Because of the light Jesus shines into us, we know of our sins and run to the light to seek forgiveness. We call on him, and he renews us, healing us of our weaknesses and forgiving our sins.

As we are enlightened by the Spirit of God, we see the need for a Saviour. We see our need for Jesus, who rescued us from eternal darkness to offer us eternal life walking in the light. As we live then as children of the light, others see the light of Christ shining in and through us, bringing that light to the darkness of their lives. The light illuminates our sins and then forgives them.

The light of Jesus doesn’t shine on our sins to catch us out and tell us how pathetic and lost we are; instead, the light in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, calls us to repentance so that we can remain in this light and live always as his children.

When we lived in darkness, we couldn’t see a way out. We did not know how to find a better place when we were living in sin, trapped by selfish desires and living for our own flesh. In sin, we often don’t understand we are lost until the light of Christ Jesus shines into us. As we hear the very word of God, we start to see the way out. We are drawn to the light of the Lord by his power because he cares. Then we have a new life in him where we can see where we go each day, and we know the same light, Jesus Christ, will one day lead us home.

**Jesus, Light of the World, let me live in your light. May your light shine through me. Call me daily to service, bringing you to those around me. Help me know that the time to serve you is always present, and may I shine in the darkness in this world. Be with me always as I follow you. Amen.**

Friday 30 June 2023

**Show me a sign**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him (John 12:37).***

Read John 12:37–50

Do you ever get to a point when you just need a sign from Jesus that he really is who he claims to be? Do you get so desperate with your situation that you feel like giving up, or do you want to stay in your circumstances, complaining that nothing is happening or even nothing good will happen? Do you feel sorry for yourself? What do you hope Jesus will show you, or what sign would be a sign for you?

Humans are interesting creatures. We sometimes want a sign, but we then ask for another even bigger one that really shows us Jesus is present. If we don’t get one, maybe we are drawn into thinking that Jesus doesn’t really care or doesn’t want to help us in our struggles. We don’t like suffering as humans, nor do we like being unable to control our situation. So, all our human thoughts when we face challenges are about proof. We wind up thinking from a human heart perspective rather than seeing from the point of faith.

Our human hearts always want more – more signs, proof and action from our Lord – so we can live a more comfortable life. Even when we see amazing things, we still want more.

We are called to follow Jesus and walk by faith, not sight. So, as we face challenges, we don’t need a sign from Jesus. We only need his word, ‘I am always with you’. When we hear the word, we hear Jesus speaking to us. ‘Do not be afraid. I am here. You don’t need a sign, for you won’t believe if you see a sign. Hear my voice and follow me’, Jesus says, ‘and I will lead and comfort you. This is all you need. Not a sign or any proof but me.’

So instead of asking for a sign, let us boldly ask Jesus to speak to us through his word. He will give you peace, for he reminds us that the world cannot provide the peace he does. Jesus is living and will lead you, and this will never change. A sign will lose meaning or shine after a while, only for us to ask or maybe demand another. Yet when we seek the Lord in his word, he will be found and always satisfy us – we will never need any more proof. Jesus is alive, and he lives in you.

**Lord, it would be good to have a sign that you are with me, but I know that you are because your word is truth. You promise to be with me always. Please give me your strength when I am weak and your words of peace to share with others when I don't know what to say. Help me know that you are with me today. Amen.**

Saturday 1 July 2023

**Using every word**

by Pastor Mark Gierus

***I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations (Psalm 89:1).***

Read Psalm 89:1–4,15–18

How precious words can be and how damaging they can be. How do you use your words every day?

Every day is an amazing gift from God. Every breath you breathe is special, for you are made in the image of God, you are valuable, you are loved, and God has called you with a purpose.

The world sometimes encourages entitlement, with people sharing what they think about everything and thinking their opinions are their beliefs, which they must fight for. Influencers who sometimes share too much of their opinion often leave you feeling guilty that you are not up with the latest stuff or trendy words and phrases. But what is their purpose in life? What is the purpose of others who are not officially social media influencers? Well, much the same. Humans want to put their opinions onto others.

In Psalm 89, the words sung and spoken are not an opinion but the absolute truth. God’s love and faithfulness – these things do not change. God loves you. He loved you yesterday, he loves you today, and he will love you forever. God will never leave you nor forsake you. He is faithful. God promises to listen to you, hear your cry for help, comfort you and, through his only Son, Jesus, who came to save us by dying on the cross, he forgives your sins.

Isn’t it wonderful to live as a follower of Jesus, especially in this world where there doesn’t seem to be truth – only a lot of truth that suits the individual. And isn’t it pure joy to live knowing God is faithful and will never leave or forsake us?

So, today, is it time to get your singing voice ready to share with the world all that God has done for you? To declare to not just those outside of your household but within the love of God so they, too, will know of our wondrous God and proclaim with word and song to their children, grandchildren, and the world that God is good and his love and faithfulness are true.

**Gracious God, you love me so much. You are faithful in your word, doing what you say you will do and showing the world what you have already done. May I share your love with those around me, declaring your faithfulness to all generations in my family and community. I know you are with me as you send me out. Thank you for all you have done for me, saving and drawing me to yourself through your Son, Jesus. Amen.**

Sunday 2 July 2023

**Welcome to the family**

by Norma Koehne

***Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me (Matthew 10:40).***

Read Matthew 10:40–42

These words come after some rather confronting words from Jesus. He talks about how conflicts will arise in families and communities when we acknowledge him before people (verse 32). Most of us have not experienced being alienated from our parents and siblings by following Christ. However, this is all too real in some parts of the world, and following Christ can even put a person’s life in danger.

In the passage before us, Jesus stresses the importance of Christian fellowship and support. When we welcome and care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, we welcome Christ and our loving Heavenly Father. Having been away from close family for most of my adult life, my church family has been an important place of support and love. As we gather, it is vital to welcome each other, especially new members coming into our midst, and get to know them, support them, and encourage them.

Amazingly, we are told we will receive a reward, even for the most insignificant and effortless kindness, like giving someone a cup of water. This shows God’s grace – his undeserved favour – if he wants to reward us for such small acts. Our reward is that we have pleased God by passing on the love he has showered upon us, and we have scattered his blessings among each other.

I am reminded of the almost unbelievable image we have in Zephaniah 3:17: ‘The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing’. What a tremendous encouragement for us to know that the smallest act of love causes our loving Father to rejoice.

**Loving Father, you have embraced us with open arms into your family through baptism. Open our hearts to welcome others who are in your family, showing your love to all. Amen.**

Norma grew up at Koonibba in South Australia. She was a teacher at Concordia College in SA and then served in various roles in Papua New Guinea with her husband. Returning to Australia, Norma worked as an international student advisor and, after completing a PhD, worked in administration at the University of Divinity. She has been privileged to serve the LCA on the General Church Council and Seminary Council and as president of Lutheran Women of Victoria and Lutheran Women of Australia. Currently, she is happily retired.