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**Sunday 10 March 2024 to**

**Sunday 17 March 2024**

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**The light has come**

by Kathy Matuschka

***This is the verdict: light has come into the world (John 3:19a).***

Read [John 3:14–21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A14-21&version=NRSVUE)

Today’s reading includes the well-known text, John 3:16. Did you learn John 3:16 as a child? If you did, I hope you have happy memories of teachers who not only told you about God's love in Jesus but reflected this love by the way they cared for you.

John 3:16 grounds us as we journey in Lent toward Jesus’ death and resurrection. It reminds us of the big picture: that God in love – through Jesus – has rescued us and all humanity from sin. We need not fear the darkness in ourselves and our world because the light *has* come into the world.

Zooming in a little, our readings this week invite us to focus on Jesus’ *earthly* ministry and how Jesus shone God's love into people’s everyday lives.

As our text above says, light has come into the world. But the verse goes on to say: ‘ ... but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil’. As people who are simultaneously sinners and saints, each of us is familiar with both darkness and light within ourselves. As St Paul says, we do not do the good we want to do, but rather the evil we don’t want to do (Romans 7:14–20).

Take comfort. Jesus assures us that the light *has* come into the world. Through our baptism and God’s ongoing work in us, the light *has* come into our hearts. No matter how things look, no matter how you feel from day to day, light *has* come into the world.

***Dear God, your healing and restoring light has come into the world. Your light reminds my heart that there now is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because of your light, I have hope that what I see now is not the end of the story – your story. May your light flow freely through me to those I meet today. Amen.***

*Kathy Matuschka lives in Brisbane with her husband, Mark, and worships at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Rochedale. This year, Kathy’s ministry journey led her to The Wesley Hospital in Brisbane, where she now serves as a chaplain.*

Monday 11 March 2024

**Healing light – from a distance**

by Kathy Matuschka

***‘Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof … But say the word, and my servant will be healed’ (Luke 7:6b,7b).***

Read [Luke 7:1–17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+7%3A1-17&version=NRSVUE)

Today, we turn our focus to the gospel of Luke. In Luke 6, Jesus *taught* his disciples what it looks like for them to live in God’s light. Now in Luke 7, we see Jesus reflecting God’s light by his *actions*.

While Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion, it is the centurion himself who is the focus of today’s first story. God’s light has been doing its work long before Jesus enters Capernaum. Firstly, the centurion helped to build the synagogue when he could easily have used his power to harm the Jewish people – an act of darkness. God’s light is also reflected in the concern the centurion has for his servant. This flow of light continues as the Jewish elders then advocate on behalf of the centurion.

On this day, the centurion trusts that Jesus’ God-given authority to heal is so great that Jesus doesn’t even need to be in the room to heal his servant. And so, we discover that not only does Jesus have the power to heal, but he can do so by a word, from a distance. This reminds me of Genesis 1, when God spoke the world into being, saying: ‘Let there be light’, and many other things.

By his word, Jesus speaks God’s healing light into the servant’s body.

As we grieve for the brokenness of our world, what a wonderful reminder of the access we have to God’s healing light. We can boldly pray for those near and far, knowing that what seems impossible to us is within God’s power:

***Dear God, your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. In our world, we grieve the darkness of wars and other conflicts, some close to home and others far away. We thank you for those who take a stand in these places for your peace and light, and we pray that you will bless their work. Some of us have loved ones far away who need your healing light. Please hear our prayers for their healing and wholeness. In Jesus ‘name, Amen.***

Tuesday 12 March 2024

**Light in dark places and times**

by Kathy Matuschka

***‘Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me’ (Luke 7:23).***

Read [Luke 7:18–35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+7%3A+18-35&version=NRSVUE)

We started this week considering how Jesus reflects God’s light into dark places. Surely, John the Baptist, in prison, is in a place of great darkness and despair. In verse 19, John’s followers ask on his behalf: ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’ At one level, John could be asking if the words he prophesied came true, whether he had done his job well, and whether he turned out to be right. But at a deeper level, it seems that John wants to know if there is meaning behind the suffering John himself is going through.

In other words, John asks Jesus not just for the facts of the situation but for some light in *his* darkness. It's as if John is asking Jesus to remind him that it is all worth it. And Jesus provides ample evidence that God’s light has come. Blind people receive sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

But Jesus also has a personal word for John to cast light into his dark place: ‘Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.’

It’s as if Jesus is saying: ‘Have hope, John! Know that your service meant something when you were preaching in the desert and that your suffering means something now.’

As we reflect on passages from Luke for most of this week, I love that Luke’s name means ‘bringer of light’. And I love that, in the Bible, we have stories of real people struggling with their faith and that they teach us to turn to Jesus when all seems dark.

‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it’ (John 1:5).

***Dear Jesus, life has its ups and downs, and sometimes, it seems that the darkness is too great for your light to make a difference in me or in the world. When days are hard, refresh my heart with your joy and hope. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, Amen.***

Wednesday 13 March 2024

**The revealing light**

by Kathy Matuschka

***[The woman] began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them (Luke 7:38).***

Read [Luke 7:36–50](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+7%3A36-50&version=NRSVUE)

Yesterday, we considered how Jesus’ light shone into a dark place – the prison where John the Baptist was held. Jesus didn’t need to visit John to shine light into his dark place but sent words of hope and encouragement through John’s followers.

Today, we hear a story of a woman whose life was turned around by the light of Jesus shining into her heart. We don’t know how or where this happened. Possibly, Jesus healed her on another occasion. Maybe she heard Jesus preach and repented. Or perhaps she was drawn toward Jesus’ light from a distance, curious to know more. Do you know someone whose call to follow Jesus came from out of the blue with no physical connection to the church or its people? It’s quite encouraging to know that God can make Christians without our help!

Today, I invite you to consider the revealing light that preceded the healing light – the light that convinced the woman in today’s story that she needed a Saviour.

We all have things buried deeply in our hearts. We each have blind spots to certain sins. Some churches use a prayer of confession that refers to ‘the sins to which my heart has become accustomed’. These are our blind spots.

But when the time is right, Jesus shines light into these dark places through the Holy Spirit. God is kind and gentle and doesn’t illuminate all our sins at once. But when God reveals, God also restores and heals us so that we continue to become new creations, reflecting God’s light just like the woman in today’s story.

How and where is Jesus offering you healing and forgiveness today?

***Loving Lord Jesus Christ, you know my heart and my need for healing and renewal. Please help me trust you as you shine your light into my dark places. Give me the courage to step into your revealing light. Thank you for the healing and hope you bring, Amen.***

Thursday 14 March 2024

**The light of the kingdom of God**

by Kathy Matuschka

***After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:1a).***

Read [Luke 8:1–15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8%3A1-15&version=NRSVUE)

I love how often we hear announcements in the gospel books that the kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven) has come near.

If Jesus’ individual miracles shine like the stars, these expansive statements can shine like the moon into our darkness.

At one level, it seems to me that the ‘kingdom of God’ is hard to define because it means nothing and everything about Jesus’ earthly ministry and God’s plan of salvation for humankind. Sometimes, as Christians, our ideas of how the kingdom of God should look can even divide us.

It’s like a mountain that looks a little different from various angles, and it’s hard to grasp or define its exact shape. But every story of healing – every teaching – helps us build a picture of what the ‘kingdom of God’ looks like.

So, too, as Christians today, we long to see God’s kingdom come in our world. As we witness wars and other conflicts, family trauma, natural disasters and general needs, the darkness threatens to be overwhelming.

But now, as always, God’s kingdom is revealed one story, one interaction at a time. Even when it seems dark, we can have the confidence to walk the way God leads. We can trust that God has many ways to orchestrate healing and restoration in our world and that God’s Spirit enables us each to play our part.

Like the sower in today’s reading, we can sow generously and accept our failures hopefully. Like Jesus’ followers in today’s reading, we have no light of our own. We stay close to Jesus so we can reflect his light as we go.

***Dear God, please reveal the good news of your kingdom within me and around me. Shine your light on my path so I can confidently step into the part you have for me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Friday 15 March 2024

**Family group deal**

by Kathy Matuschka

***He replied, ‘My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice’ (Luke 8:21).***

Read [Luke 8:16–25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8%3A16-25&version=NRSVUE)

Does Jesus really snub his own family? Jesus seems to turn the word of their arrival into a teaching moment for those gathered around him. He possibly goes on to greet his mother and brothers, but we don’t get to find this out. Awkward!

At Christian youth camps, leaders and campers form a sort of temporary family for the time they are together. By that, I mean that the connections are deeper than they might be when you just get together for a few hours at a time. Sometimes, this family-building is harder than others as we negotiate our relationships with one another.

Often, there is a ‘group deal’ to guide how we treat one another and the property where we gather. We want to be a respectful community; however, even more so, we want to reflect Christ’s light to one another. (Some workplaces have similar practices.)

You might say in today’s text that Jesus expresses a group deal for those who would join his family – to hear God’s word and put it into practice.

In the Bible, we see a progressive expansion of family imagery as it describes God’s people. In the Old Testament, Yahweh sets one nation apart as holy. Jesus goes further, introducing the idea that he could call each one of us his sisters and brothers. On the other side of Jesus’ resurrection, the epistle writers (for example, Romans 8:14–17) share their wonder that we indeed are children of God – it’s a fact!

Jesus draws us together as a family into Christ’s light. As we form a new family – which will last forever – we have a part to play. Moving from darkness to light means following where Jesus leads and encouraging others to do the same.

***Dear Jesus, you really are my brother. Thank you for dying and rising so it is possible for me to behave like one of your family. By your Holy Spirit, please help me to reflect your love today, Amen.***

Saturday 16 March 2024

**Turning to the light**

by Kathy Matuschka

***Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow (Psalm 51:7).***

Read [Psalm 51:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+51%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE)

Our focus this week has been on light and darkness. Although the actual words do not appear in Psalm 51, the imagery of light and darkness seems palpable.

The author of the psalm uses cleansing imagery to indicate the complete renewal of the soul. Verse 7 refers to the ritual cleansing of hyssop and washing that leaves one ‘whiter than snow’ – the cleanest of clean (‘Omo-white’, for those who recall that commercial).

White reflects colour completely. An expanse of snow reflecting the sunlight overcomes winter darkness, even on an overcast day. (If you’re reading this in Australia, you may relate more easily to the reflection of light on water than to reflection from snow.)

Just like the light off the snow in the dark of winter or the reflection off of an expanse of water for those who haven’t seen it for a while, we experience the relief of God’s cleansing most deeply when we find ourselves stuck in darkness or drought. In verses one to six of this psalm, we travel with a person who finds no escape from their guilt and the memory of it, except by facing *the* light. And so, they ask to be made clean.

Praise God, who doesn’t leave us in darkness but goes ahead of us, all the time. God’s Spirit shines rays of light and hope that reveal Jesus, our Saviour, waiting for us! God’s Spirit reveals needs and wounds we didn’t know we had and offers us cleansing and restoration. As we continue through Lent, may God’s Spirit help you to find words for *your* hopes and prayers.

***Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Amen.***

Sunday 17 March 2024

**Seeds and new life**

by Pastor Peter Bean

***… a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to make many seeds (John 12:24).***

Read [John 12:20–33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+12%3A20-33&version=NRSVUE)

I’m a gardener. I have lots of packets of seeds. Some are beyond their use-by date, but most are still viable. If I leave them in the packet, they are of no use to me or anyone else. But if I plant them in the ground, invariably, they produce ... flowers, vegetables and even trees.

Jesus paints an interesting picture when he talks about his death. He compares himself to a grain of wheat – a seed if you like. I once read about someone who asked: What if Jesus had not risen but had stayed dead? It is a hypothetical question because there are so many eyewitness accounts of him alive again, both in the Bible and historians of his time.

But if Jesus had not come back to life … well, life would not have the meaning it does. We’d still be living under the law, trying to please God and win his favour. We wouldn’t know about grace nor understand it. Forgiveness would be even harder to grasp and practice than it is now! But like a grain of wheat that dies and then brings forth many seeds, so Jesus’ death led to resurrection, with many positive results … many seeds being sown. Life and hope and peace for each one of us.

When I plant a seed and it sprouts, it is always a miracle to me; it reminds me of resurrection. How did that tiny seed become a carrot, a zucchini, a tomato? But it did, and we can enjoy the produce. If I let the plant grow long enough, it will produce many seeds. (In fact, expert gardeners will tell you the best plants are the self-sown ones!)

Each time I see a new plant, it reminds me of resurrection, possibility, hope and future. When we die, who knows what will truly happen? But it seems to me we will be like Jesus; we will come to life again, knowing life, hope and peace. It will be a miracle. It will be a resurrection. We will be children of light (John 12:36).

***Creator God, Master Gardener, help us to die to ourselves and have new life in you. Through Christ, the one who was lifted up for us! Amen.***

*In the early months of the year, Peter is often out in the garden, watering, picking and pruning – chasing the birds away from his fruit! Or he is indoors – stewing, drying, preserving. Peter also enjoys walking his dog, riding his bike, reading and spending time with his family. To keep out of mischief, Peter says he is currently teaching himself to play the piano and is writing a paraphrase of each of the Psalms – now up to Psalm 56.*