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**Sunday 12 March 2023 to Sunday 19 March 2023**

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Sunday 12 March 2023

**Living water**

by Chelsea Pietsch

### *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst (John 4:13,14a).*

Read John 4:5–42

It’s a scorcher today in Adelaide. I’m pouring drinks left, right and centre and thinking about Jesus in this passage asking the woman at the well for a drink.

The woman is surprised that Jesus is speaking to her, as she was a Samaritan. Yet Jesus is not concerned that her nationality differs from his. He’ll talk to anyone.

Perhaps Jesus is not thirsty after all; he seems more interested in making conversation with the woman. He wants to tell her about a source of water that never runs dry.

Naturally, the woman is interested. She’s also perplexed. Why is this man, who apparently has access to an eternal well, asking her for a drink in the first place?

Jesus, however, is not just talking about water as we know it – H2O – he is talking about living water; water that will quench the thirst of our souls.

We might have all that the world gives and yet still, we thirst. St Augustine once wrote that ‘Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God’. Don’t we know that to be true!

But what is this eternal or living water of which Christ speaks? What is this spring that will bubble up to eternal life?

Rev J Darsow, whom some of you may know as the author of the Australian Lutheran devotional ‘Strength for the Day’ once wrote:

‘The water of life is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This restores and satisfies the soul, and quenches its thirst. It is offered freely in the gospel of Christ, which tells of the streams of love that flow from the Father’s heart, and assures us that in Christ, who has reconciled us sinners to God, there is forgiveness, life, and peace.’

Are you thirsty? The Holy Spirit is calling you to come to Jesus. Repent of trying to quench your thirst with lifeless idols. Come, drink, and live!

**Oh Jesus, how I thirst! Lead me to your waters and give to me that which the world cannot give. Amen.**

*Chelsea Pietsch is a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. She is married with two children and a consultant to Lutherans for Life (*[*www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au*](http://www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au)*).*

Monday 13 March 2023

**Father and Son**

by Chelsea Pietsch

***The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does (John 5:20a).***

Read John 5:19–29

How important fathers are in the lives of their children! It is through our fathers that we first experience the love and approval of our Heavenly Father. A father’s love and approval sets us up for life and shows us God himself is good and trustworthy.

On a more practical level, children learn how to behave in the world based on the attitudes and behaviours of their mothers and fathers. I often marvel at the way children mirror their parents, both for good or ill.

My boys love to shadow their dad and do what he does – whether it be in the garden, at church or at home. When their dad is not around, I watch my older son teach his brother the games his dad has taught him. He has learned to entertain young children thanks to the example of his dad.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus, too, mimics the work of his Father. Their relationship is one of love, approval and mutual mission. Our Heavenly Father shows Jesus what he is doing, and Christ does the same. They work together for our good.

God the Father speaks to us through his Son, Jesus, who is the icon – or image – of the invisible Father (Colossians 1:15). When we believe what Jesus says, we also place our trust in the Father. This is not only pleasing to our Father in Heaven, but it is the path to eternal life. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that you are our Father who works with your Son, Jesus, for our good. Help us believe in Jesus so that we might pass from death to life. Amen.***

Tuesday 14 March 2023

**Face to face**

by Chelsea Pietsch

***You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life***

 ***(John 5:39,40).***

Read John 5:30–47

God wants us to hear and read his word. It is one of the joys and privileges – indeed, one of the necessities – of being a Christian. Through his word, God reveals himself to us, offers us a path to eternal life and shows how he wants us to live. If only we have ears to hear.

It can be a helpful practice to open God’s word and write down passages to reflect on during the hours of the day (and night). I keep journals where I jot down scriptural passages for my own guidance and encouragement. I return to them again and again.

Yet this passage seems to tell us that while the Scriptures bear witness to God, reading them is only the beginning. God also invites us to ‘come to [him] that [we] may have life’. What does this mean?

Have you ever noticed that it is possible to search the Scriptures without ever speaking to God about them? Yes, God wants us to read his word, but he also invites us to come to him in prayer. The two go hand-in-hand. We can present to God the things we read in his word and ask him about them. He sends his Holy Spirit to guide our reading and a ‘still, small voice’ for us as we discern how God’s word is speaking to us.

God also wants us to ‘come’ to him face to face in Sunday worship. He wants to see us in person so he can shower his blessings on us through the public preaching of his word and the administration of his sacraments. He wants to strengthen us for our work in the world and as we carry our yokes – whatever they may be – on our journey to our heavenly home.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for speaking to us through your word and inviting us to be in a personal relationship with you. Amen.***

Wednesday 15 March 2023

**Plenty and in want**

by Chelsea Pietsch

***He said to the disciples, ‘Gather the pieces that are left over …’ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces … left over by those who had eaten (John 6:12,13).***

Read John 6:1–15

This story of the loaves provides us with insight into who Jesus is. It reveals to us that he has the ability to work miracles, showing us his divine nature. It also demonstrates Jesus’ practical nature. Our Lord is concerned with people’s needs. He cares for the hungry.

Did you notice that Jesus doesn’t just produce enough food to fill the crowd, but he also has enough for there to be plentiful leftovers? Jesus is generous. His hospitality is not frugal but abundant. He wants to bless us.

How has God blessed you in your life?

Sometimes we don’t see how God is blessing us. In fact, at times, he can feel very far away. A wise pastor once told me that, in times like these, we can pray to God: ‘God, I know you want to bless me. Please reveal to me how you are blessing me through this.’

Are you in times of plenty or in want? Are you giving thanks to God for his abundance, or are you crying out for assistance without explanation for your suffering?

Either way, come to Jesus. Keep speaking to him. Thank him for the times of abundance and joy. Thank him even for the times of suffering. Ask him to teach you and lead you so that, either way, you may be strengthened to show abundant love and generosity to others as he has shown you.

***Lead me, Lord Jesus, to live a life of abundant love as you have shown us. Amen.***

Thursday 16 March 2023

**Fear not**

by Chelsea Pietsch

***It is I; do not be afraid (John 6:20b).***

Read John 6:16–27

The words ‘fear not’ apparently appear 365 times in the Bible. Jesus himself uses the phrase several times in the gospels. Can you think of any examples? What are your favourites?

The message from Holy Scripture is clear – don’t be afraid! Jesus sometimes appears exasperated that his followers fall into fear again and again.

Indeed, heeding the command not to be afraid can be easier said than done. The spirit can be very willing, but the flesh is often weak.

Sometimes, our temperament, genetics, early life experiences, life choices or past sins wire us to fear. It can seem that all some of us are able to do is replace one fear with another, whether we will this or not.

Of course, we do have control over some things. We can know that when despairing fear creeps in, it is not from God. God does not want us to fear. We can tell these fears – whether they come from inside of us or from the voice of the evil one – to be still and silenced. We can then choose to focus on something other than fear, such as noble, right, true and lovely things. We can reflect on the promises of God.

There may be times in life when fear seems to overwhelm us, despite our best efforts and intentions. Perhaps this is because of calamity, strife, trauma or even a ‘fiery trial’. At times like these, we can picture Christ’s face. We can picture him holding us or holding his hands out to us on the water – as he did for Peter – saying to us, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’. We can visualise ourselves dressed in the armour of God so that no matter what arrows life or the devil might fling at us, they cannot penetrate the soul, and we can stand firm and proclaim, ‘Jesus, I trust in you’.

***Dear Heavenly Father, root out our deepest fears from the core and throw them away into the deepest part of the ocean. Grant us the peace that only you can give. Amen.***

Friday 17 March 2023

**Forgiven in Christ**

by Chelsea Pietsch

***Whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37b).***

Read John 6:27–40

Our God is gracious and forgiving. His arms are perpetually outstretched for the repentant – for those who, like the prodigal son, return to him. Of course, God does not want us to sin, but Scripture tells us that if we do sin, those who repent will not be condemned on account of what Christ has done. Thanks be to God for his love and unfailing mercy.

As we come to Jesus, look to him and believe in him, he promises not to forget us but give us life. This is such a comfort! For despite our desire to live holy lives, as Christ has made us holy, we perpetually fall short of the lives we are called to live. As St Paul says: ‘For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate’ (Romans 7:15). And yet, Christ forgives. His grace is made perfect in weakness.

Christ wants us to also model his life of forgiveness to others. He exhorts us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Not just seven times but seventy times seven. In other words, always. It almost seems that our being forgiven is conditional on us forgiving others. We must forgive, no matter the cost!

The cost of forgiveness can be enormous. Jesus knows this intimately. Forgiving our sins meant humiliation and a torturous death for him. It meant being separated from the Father he loved, experiencing the anguish of abandonment, and descending into hell. It meant his innocence and glory being unrecognised by the world.

And yet Jesus still says to us – including those who come to him at the eleventh hour, like the thief on the cross– ‘whoever comes to me I will not cast out’. Let us trust in this promise and live joyfully, without despair, feeding on the bread of God that comes from heaven.

***Oh, Lord, don’t cast us out. Have mercy on us, save us and make us right with you. Amen.***

Saturday 18 March 2023

**Come and rest**

by Chelsea Pietsch

***He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters (Psalm 23:2).***

Read Psalm 23

When was the last time you had the opportunity to lie on the grass? I recall one particular picnic quite vividly. A friend was visiting from interstate, and we all had a lazy lunch, lying on a picnic blanket. The grass was soft and verdant, and the sun warmed our backs. The conversation lulled peacefully, and a few of us drifted off on the rug. What a beautiful memory this is for me – to be so relaxed, even in company, and to feel so safe and at ease that one could just drift off to sleep.

Not infrequently, my children complain about being unable to fall asleep. They are restless and want someone to lie down with them. I explain to them that Jesus is with them. He is the Good Shepherd looking after his little sheep. So even if I am not there with them, he is. They need not fear the darkness, monsters or any terrors of the night, for Jesus is with them, guarding them. Occasionally, we play a song with the words:

In the darkness God will keep me
He will stay and never sleep.
In the darkness God is brighter
Though the night is long and deep

Thank you, Father, for your goodness
You will hold me through the night¹

The psalmist reminds us that we are safe to let our guard down in the presence of Jesus. In him, we can relinquish control and even drift off to sleep. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is trustworthy and invites us to be at rest, both during the day and at night. So calm your anxious and worried minds, and rest in your surroundings. Gaze at a flower, a bird, a tree. Lie on the grass. Pay attention to any sounds. At bedtime, press your head into your pillow and feel your body weight on your mattress. Give thanks, for the Lord is with you.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, in whom we can find rest and peace. Help us let go of our worries and rest in your love and protection. Amen.***

¹‘The Night Song’ by CityAlight (featuring Colin Buchanan)

Sunday 19 March 2023

**In him**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him’ (John 9:3).***

Read John 9:1–41

To be completely fair, the disciples' question to Jesus about why things happen is spoken not from a judgemental standpoint but from one of tradition. ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?’

That world of action/reaction and deed/consequence is one that a human mind can understand. If you do something wrong, you’re punished; if you do something right, you’re rewarded. Certainly, from the disciples’ perspective, the man’s blindness would make sense if he had done something wrong.

Punishments make sense.

Imagine the freedom the man felt, not simply being healed of blindness but released from the chains of traditional judgement. No longer would he, or his parents, be impugned for supposed sins. No longer would he, or his parents, have to suffer the finger-pointing and the whispering, the long night of condescension and isolation. For this man to hear Jesus’ words, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him’, was the ultimate freedom. And not only to see with his eyes but hear with his ears.

‘That the works of God might be displayed in *him*.’

In him.

The one everyone thought was a sinner or the son of sinners. The one who sat on the side of the road and begged. The one who was considered unworthy. Imagine his total relief to hear that God’s works might be displayed in *him*.

Perhaps you feel like this man. Are you the one who feels the constant external judgements and hurled insults? *You’re not good enough. Someone with your past? Forget about it. You don’t have the answers? You must not have large enough faith.*

But the gospel of this Scripture is for you. Even if your journey with Jesus is new and wonderful or confusing. Even if your life has not turned out as you wanted. Even if you can’t quite seem to get a handle on everything. This Scripture is for you. God loves you without reservation, and whatever your past, God’s good works can be displayed in *you.* You are free in Jesus.

***Heavenly Father, in the midst of struggles and pain, help me to hear the good news of your Son, Jesus, so that your good works can be displayed in me. Amen.***

*Reid Matthias is the school pastor at St Andrews Lutheran College in Tallebudgera, Queensland. Reid is married to Christine, who is part of the Grow Ministries team. Together, they have raised three incredible daughters, Elsa, Josephine and Greta. Dedicated to the written word, Reid has recently published his fourth novel,* Blank Spaces*, maintains the blog*[*ireid.blogspot.com*](https://ireid.blogspot.com/)*and regularly contributes to* The Lutheran *magazine.*