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**Sunday 16 May to Sunday 23 May 2021**

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Sunday 16 May 2021

# In the world but not of it

by Sal Huckel

**My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one (John 17:15).**

Read John 17:6–19

Today we read the section of Jesus’ prayer to his father for the disciples. We will look at some other sections of Jesus’ prayer later in the week. Perhaps we don’t often focus on this prayer dialogue, or even many others of Jesus’ prayers, such as the prayer for his friend Lazarus. We talk about the prayer Jesus taught us – but what stands out to us from reading this prayer of Jesus himself? What a privilege to be able to listen in on this intercession!

We learn of Jesus’ mission to the disciples now being complete – they have accepted his teaching. He is on his way to the cross after his final words to the disciples before his arrest. Jesus knows what is coming next for him on this earth – but he also knows what is coming next for his disciples. He glorifies the Father and prays for protection on his disciples, praying to the Father for their safety in his name. From all we have learned about prayer from Jesus himself, we know that there is an absolute certainty that his prayer to his Holy Father will be answered.

Jesus says that the disciples are not any more ‘of the world’ than he is! Jesus does not pray for the absence of suffering – but he prays for protection from the evil one. We sometimes use the words ‘in the world but not of it’ to describe ourselves or encourage others who suﬀer when following Jesus is ridiculed or challenged. We do well to remember this. Jesus will protect us from the evil one. But he isn’t necessarily going to ‘airlift’ us out of troubled situations. Current times demonstrate this all too clearly. But we are his children; he prays for us, and he is with us. We may need to remember that we are indeed not of this world, and we must resist temptation when it comes upon us. Or do we need to remember that we are supposed to be in this world? How can we share the truth of Jesus if we remain in a holy huddle, staying out of the world?

Who can you lift before the Lord today?

**Father God, help us to must remember who we are, who we belong to, and that we are sanctified by the truth through Jesus’ death on the cross. Help us follow Jesus’ example to pray for others, just as Jesus did, even when we are facing our own troubles. Help us to put others’ needs before our own – a great indicator that we are in this world but not of it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Monday 17 May 2021

# Eucatastrophe!

by Sal Huckel

**My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest (Isaiah 32:18).**

Read Isaiah 32:14–20

Let’s start with a quote from JRR Tolkien about a literary device that features in his writing: ‘I coined the word “eucatastrophe”: the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears’.

Tolkien refers to the resurrection as the greatest eucatastrophe producing

that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love (Letter 89).

We see the same effect in our reading today.

When the Lord’s Spirit is poured out from on high, we are promised the transformation of deserted cities and wastelands and the dwelling of justice and righteousness, bringing life-giving fruit! In Isaiah’s day, as in ours, we see a stark contrast between the messianic kingdom that is to come and the worldly government. Perhaps we feel that the present day is the worst we have seen in our lifetimes – though, of course, generations have struggled before in times of great hardship and crisis. Famine, wars, genocide – earthly troubles are not new. But we have an assurance and a hope, both now and in eternity.

We see that there is only one source of security for an insecure world. We pray for the renewal that will eventually come, bringing peace, quietness, confidence, security, rest and blessing. While we look forward to God’s kingdom reigning on earth, we can also pray for renewal and an outpouring in our lives right now. Pray for the Lord to reign in your heart, in your life, in your home. God’s kingdom ruling in our hearts brings his reign closer for others too.

**Father God, pour out your Spirit from on high today. Transform my life with your justice and righteousness. I long for your peace, quietness, rest and blessing. Reign in my heart and give us patience and peace in the struggles of this world. May your people share their hope with others as we look for your coming in glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Tuesday 18 May 2021

# Hope for the parched soul

by Sal Huckel

**I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs (Isaiah 41:18).**

Read Isaiah 41:17–20

We begin with a bleak, parched spiritual picture. Perhaps some of us are feeling this way spiritually right now? We have all the signs of looking as though we have come out of a diﬃcult time in our country; life almost looks normal but isn’t. Around the world, we see a raging pandemic, wars, political unrest. Have we been drinking enough life-giving water, coming to the well? Or are we focusing on the wasteland, our own troubles, and feeling as though there will be no end to it?

It’s time to refocus on our prayer lives, to pray for this restoration and renewal of our relationship with the Lord. Worldly troubles aside, we can receive this hope and restoration today.

Pray over this passage, and visualise your own spirit being renewed by the Holy Spirit, bearing fruit and bringing glory and honour to the Lord. Pray for renewal of your vigour for the Lord, the energy to plant and sow new fruit bringing life and hope to others. Let’s share our thirst-quenching hope with those around us who don’t know how to find their way to the oasis in the desert and need it more than ever. While our earthly troubles are here for now, we have the promise of much peace and hope for the parched soul.

**Almighty God, some of us might be parched, searching for hope. Others of us are refreshed, our thirst quenched, ready to share the hope of restoration and renewal with others. Meet us where we are at, Lord, and may we see and know the works of your hand. Show me today, Lord, who I can encourage and help for them to be brought to a deeper knowledge of you and to find spiritual refreshment. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 19 May 2021

# May we be one

by Sal Huckel

**I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one (John 17:22).**

Read John 17:1–6,20–26

On Sunday, we listened in on Jesus’ prayer for his disciples. Today, we see that Jesus first looked towards heaven and prayed for himself that he would glorify the Father and be glorified. After praying for the disciples, Jesus prays for all believers. This is not ‘the prayer that Jesus taught us’ – it is the prayer that Jesus prayed for us.

Through the witness of first the disciples and those who came after, we do indeed believe in Jesus Christ. What is the first thing that Jesus prays for here? For us to be one in the Father and Son so that the world will believe that the Father sent Jesus into the world. Jesus wants us to be brought to complete unity. This unity will be evidence of God’s love for us and will continue to make him known in the world.

How is our unity looking right now? In our homes, family relationships, congregations and wider church? If our unity is evidence of God’s love and unity, how is our witness?

We can only be one with each other if we are in Christ. We must remain in him and he in us. Meditate on this prayer. Pray for the church yourself as you are moved by the Holy Spirit, who also intercedes for us and inspires our prayers.

Are we more interested in spending time on our knees in prayer for our own personal needs than for the wider body of believers? Jesus’ own focus here is heavenward, bringing people to himself, and glorifying the Father. Let’s challenge ourselves also to turn heavenwards and seek first the kingdom of God, praying more in this way than for ourselves. Everything else will be added after that (Matthew 6:33). Jesus prayed for us right before his death! Let’s do our part!

**Heavenly Father, thank you for sharing this intimate moment of prayer with us. We know that you hear our prayers in Jesus’ name – and how much more you answer his own prayers. It is convicting to know that our unity as a body of believers is the means through which the world will know Jesus and will make your love known. Lord, show me in my heart today where I need to let things go, make amends or act towards others in my home or outside it, to do my part towards unity. May we hold unity and witness higher than our own need to be right or to bring our own justice into being. May you reign sovereign over your church. In the unifying name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I pray, Amen.**

Thursday 20 May 2021

# Base camp

by Sal Huckel

**So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it (2 Corinthians 5:9).**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10

From the beginning of this passage in The Message translation, we read: ‘Compared to what’s coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we’re tired of it!’

We often hear others – or ourselves, even – complain about aches and pains, weaknesses in our bodies, things we have inherited from one side of the family or the other.

We are reminded today that while our earthly bodies have diﬀering degrees of frailty, there is an eternal house in heaven coming that will one day replace our earthly tent! This, brothers and sisters in Christ, is a certainty. We have the Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing that this will be to come one day. With that confidence, what do we do day by day? We are to live by faith. We are built (and given the Holy Spirit) to want to please God wherever, and whatever, our situation. We have a clear reminder at the end of this passage that one day we will indeed all appear before the judgement seat of Christ to receive what is due for the things done in the body – good or bad. Well, it may as well be good!

If faith motivates us to good works (Hebrews 10:24), what works can we do? Whatever our frailty, there is something. Ask the Lord to show you what work you can do from your earthly base camp. Can’t walk far? Encourage someone with a call or letter. Can’t bake a casserole? Who would appreciate a food voucher or a cup of coﬀee? Wherever you are, however strong or weak your ‘tent’ is, there’s kingdom work to be done. If we have a hope and a future in Christ but still find ourselves weary in the earthly home we are given, how much more reason is there to share that hope with others who don’t yet know it?

**Heavenly Father, I praise and thank you for the earthly tent in which I reside. Help me to care for it and ‘keep house’ well in this life. I am sorry for my ungrateful heart when I think about my frailties. I pray you will give me ideas and inspiration for sharing your love with others so that my actions and life here will be pleasing to you and bring glory to your name. Here I am, Lord, send me! In the name of your son, Jesus, I pray, Amen.**

Friday 21 May 2021

# Remain in Christ

by Sal Huckel

**As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does you will also remain in the Son and in the Father (1 John 24:24).**

Read 1 John 2:24–29

We see themes of unity and ministry among believers running through our readings this week. Today, there is a strong theme and exhortation to remain in the Son and the Father with the help of the Holy Spirit, both throughout this entire letter and in the Gospel of John (also in our readings this week) – likely the same author.

Recently in my own devotions, I have been thinking about the authorship of John and the letters 1–3 John. It has also been interesting pondering the identity of the disciple whom Jesus loved. I have been considering the distinction made between disciples in this way and how that can be relevant to those in ministry. While there is much here to research and debate, one thing is certain: as believers, we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and we have received eternal life.

With the discernment of the Holy Spirit, we will recognise real teaching from counterfeit – it’s as essential at the time of the writing of this letter as it is today. With the help of the Holy Spirit, how else will we remain in Christ? By staying in the word by attending our regular church services with our church family, going to Bible study, praying and doing personal devotion. Encourage those around you, just as this letter was intended to encourage the early church. Are there members of your congregation who haven’t come back as regularly, or at all, since COVID-19 disrupted our daily lives? Pray for those you haven’t seen, make contact, and oﬀer fellowship and accountability. We are the body of Christ. Not only must we remain in him and he in us, but we need to help others to do so as well.

**Lord, you bind us all together in your love and make us one body. We need to remain in your teaching and the body of Christ. Show me any way in which I am straying from your teaching or have let things slip in personal devotion or church attendance. If I have become too comfortable ‘on the sofa’ and have not rejoined congregation life after all the changes of the past year, gently bring me back as my Good Shepherd. Please help me also to work with you to ‘round up’ those who are straying from the flock and protect them from false teaching or distraction. Please help us keep our eyes on you and the work you have for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Saturday 22 May 2021

# Praise my soul, the King of Heaven!

by Sal Huckel

**Praise the Lord, my soul. Praise the Lord (Psalm 104:35).**

Read Psalm 104:24–35

Recently as a family, we rediscovered Taize worship music. We have found some wonderful recordings to use in our own devotion time or to play in the background in our home. It’s playing as I write. One of the interesting things about Taize is its repetitive nature. A phrase from a Scripture, sometimes in Latin, English or both.

Beautiful musical interludes between phrases leave space for our own reflections or prayers. When we have no words left to pray, we can listen and let our minds wander in God’s presence.

If you struggle to praise God simply for who he is, going back to the Book of Psalms is a really wonderful practice. They are often repetitive. You may be reminded of a similar phrase in another psalm, or sometimes a phrase is repeated in the same psalm. Repetition is a great way to learn. Perhaps by repeating phrases in Taize songs, or as we read the psalms for our own devotion time, we will teach our souls a little more about how to praise God for who he is, to focus on him and not ourselves and give him the praise and honour due to his name.

Don’t read this psalm; pray it. Start at verse 1 and appreciate the majesty of our Creator God. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach your soul to praise the Lord, and may our meditations be pleasing to him as we rejoice in the Lord (verse 34)!

**Praise the Lord, my soul! Lord, I thank you for the treasures throughout Scripture that I can use to expand my knowledge of you but also that you can use to teach my soul to praise you for your glory. Show me this day your marvellous deeds and works all around me, and may my heart be full of praise for you. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Sunday 23 May 2021

# God uses sights and sounds to get attention

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**And suddenly from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2).**

Read Acts 2:1–21

In mid-April 2021, my state of Western Australia experienced severe weather when Cyclone Seroja hit.

It was a deadly tropical cyclone that brought historic flooding and landslides to portions of southern Indonesia and East Timor and later went on to impact Western Australia's Mid West region. People who had never experienced a cyclone told of sheltering in their homes and being terrified by the sound outside of the powerful winds. The cyclone wreaked havoc and caused massive destruction and, sadly, well over a hundred fatalities in parts of Indonesia.

When wind and rain combine, the last thing we would expect is for a fire to survive. Water quenches the flames, and they are extinguished.

Wind without rain can indeed fan a small spark into a bushfire, which we’ve also seen so often in Australia. The power of the wind is an amazing energy source that, when harvested, can also produce electricity that we can use to benefit our way of life in so many ways.

We know what the normal effects of wind combined with other things can do.

To get Jerusalem’s attention that first Pentecost morning, the sound of a mighty wind was heard. The amazing sight of small tongues of fire could be seen. Speaking in strange languages connected with many nationalities of people.

God used the sights and sounds to get people’s attention long enough for Peter to bring God’s word to the masses.

The Holy Spirit was unleashed into the world and is still doing what it does best – leading people to hear about Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

What has God used to get your attention to be drawn closer to Jesus?

**Come, Holy Spirit. Come and pour yourself anew into my life so that I may be drawn closer to Jesus and be used to help in the work of God’s kingdom. Amen.**