****

**Sunday 25 February 2024 to**

**Sunday 3 March 2024**

****

Sunday 25 February 2024

**Saving our souls**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8:36)***

Read [Mark 8:31–38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A31-38&version=NRSVUE)

The stories of *Faust*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and similar tales provide an interesting parallel to the story of the Fall. They portray people who make a deal in order to obtain wealth, knowledge or eternal youth. The stories don’t end well! And, of course, things didn’t go so well for Adam and Eve either – good examples of gaining the world and losing much more.

Life in Australia today seems to be pretty good. We have a high standard of living; wages are on the way up; the homes we have invested in are increasing in value … I could go on. Simultaneously, the news is full of stories of anger and aggression at a local level and unprecedented levels internationally. The ads for some shows on TV are enough to brand us as an adulterous and sinful community. Have we also forfeited our souls in gaining the whole world?

What should our aim in life be? What concerns of God can we focus on? Jesus told the assembled crowd and his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. We are being called to a life of discipleship, self-denial, obedience and loyalty – loyalty even to death. The prophet Micah put it this way: ‘He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (Micah 6:8). This seems like a good way to avoid forfeiting one’s soul and avoid making the Son of Man ashamed of us when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.

***Lord Jesus, thank you for your saving love and your saving gospel. Help me to live my life in a way that brings you glory and does not bring shame to your name. Grant me wisdom to see where justice is needed and to do it. Help me to love kindness and treat everyone with kindness – even those I find challenging. Give me humility so that I may have a servant heart and see your face in all people and treat all with dignity and respect. Amen.***

*Colleen has one husband, two daughters, three granddaughters and a wide range of extended family and friends. She lives in Adelaide and loves the way the various parts of her life intersect. Colleen is involved in numerous committees within the church and community. She loves to read. Colleen coordinates her congregation’s prayer group and is delighted to respond to requests for prayer from friends and family.*

Monday 26 February 2024

**Proclaiming good news to the poor**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips (Luke 4:22a).***

Read [Luke 4:14–30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+4%3A14-30&version=NRSVUE)

In my mind’s eye, I have a picture of Jesus in the temple, reading from a scroll with people all around him. It’s probably a composite of a few of the pictures in the Bible storybooks of my childhood.

The words in the first part of verse 22 kind of leapt out at me, particularly that people were amazed at the ‘gracious words’ that came from his lips. I’m currently reading a lot about grace. It’s something that I have always known about, but what I am reading is giving me cause to think more deeply. These days, the news is full of stories about grace-less behaviour. We have wars and rumours of wars; people are hurting and killing each other not only in situations of domestic and family violence but also in unprovoked attacks on people and property.

I wonder what would happen if the news was all about the good and selfless, grace-filled acts that are being performed daily but largely go unremarked. That’s probably not going to happen. But there’s nothing to stop you and me from noting when we experience grace, or even better, being mindful and acting graciously towards others.

Yesterday’s reflection took us to thinking about what it means to follow Jesus – doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God. Today, we have heard about Jesus reading and teaching. We learn more about Jesus’ role: ‘being anointed to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’ Jesus follows this up with the self-fulfilling suggestion that prophets are not recognised in their own country, which leads to him being drummed out of town.

This doesn’t seem to have upset Jesus. Having said his piece, he walked through the crowd and went on his way to continue teaching.

***Gracious Jesus, help me to learn from you how to be gracious to others. Help me to acknowledge and celebrate the grace that others show me. Amen.***

Tuesday 27 February 2024

**What is Jesus teaching you?**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority (Luke 4:32).***

Read [Luke 4:31–37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+4%3A31-37&version=NRSVUE)

Pu-ell-u-la me-a ab-e-vit, pu-ell-u-la me-a ab-e, Pu-ell-u-la me-a ab-e-vit, Dom--um re-port-ar-e ad me

Those words may not mean much to you – you may not even be able to pronounce them. They are how I remember the Latin version of ‘My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean’ that I learned 60-plus years ago. I haven’t sung the words since my first year in high school, but I still remember them.

It seems to me, looking back over the years, that the teacher who taught me this must have been a ‘good teacher’ for the words to stick in my head for all of that time.

These days, my husband and I regularly go to fitness classes. Some instructors are better than others. Those who are ‘good’, in our opinion, are the ones whose classes provide some challenges for us, where the exercises stretch our muscles, raise our heart rate, provide opportunities to improve our balancing abilities and, if we are really lucky, we may even get to throw a frisbee. A good instructor varies their classes, doesn’t think that just because we are older we can’t do something, provides clear guidelines and helps us if we don’t know how to do an exercise.

It seems that Jesus was a good teacher. I would love to have heard Jesus teaching – wouldn’t you?  I think that his teaching would have been equal to the best preacher or teacher that we have heard.

Yesterday we heard that Jesus spoke words of grace. In today’s reading, his words have authority! The words of Jesus that we can read in the Bible are inclusive, accepting of all-comers, free of judgement and filled with love and compassion. He wasn’t even put off by the man possessed by a demon. Jesus spoke to the spirit, who left the man immediately.

What relevance could these passages have for us today? Is it that those of us who have been in a church community all of our lives have become so used to it that we take it for granted? Do we recognise, encourage and celebrate prophets, preachers or teachers of Christ within our own community?

This is such a simple story, but I want to encourage you to carry it in your heart today. Think about Jesus’ healing ministry, his acceptance and concern for all comers, and pray that you can see and acknowledge God’s work in your life today and always.

And if you feel like singing, perhaps you could try ‘My Bonnie lies over the ocean’ in either Latin or English.

***Divine Instructor, open our hearts to listen to your words, to learn from them and to follow them in our lives. Amen.***

Wednesday 28 February 2024

**Switching off**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place (Luke 4:42a).***

Read [Luke 4:38–44](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+4%3A38-44&version=NRSVUE)

These certainly seem like busy times for Jesus. It’s the third day in a row that we have read about Jesus healing people. He has done some amazing things – casting out spirits, healing people of a range of illnesses, teaching crowds of people, being driven out of town. And remember, he is truly human and truly divine.

Today, he’s taking some time out. Such a human thing to do.

How often don’t we speak and hear the words ‘I’m so busy ….’? As an allegedly retired person, it’s not unusual to hear fellow retirees saying things like ‘I’ve never been busier’. I see our children and grandchildren hurtling from one activity to another. We are so busy doing things.

Have you thought about what it means to just be – not doing anything, just being? The psalmist says, ‘Be still and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10), which has been used as the basis for a reflective song featuring the words: ‘Be still and know that I am God; I am the Lord that healeth thee; Commit thy way unto the Lord’ (James Daniel, ‘Be still and know that I am God’, *All Together Now,* Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide 1980).

Taking time to *be* rather than constantly *doing* things allows us to recharge our batteries, renew our energy and re-centre our thinking. We can reconnect with God and allow God’s spirit to fill our hearts and revive our flagging spirits. And what a bonus if that quiet time is taken in a place that is enhanced by God’s beautiful creation, and time is allowed to just be in God’s presence.

Where is your solitary place? It’s not so easy to find such places in these days of internet access and mobile phones. In fact, FOMO (fear of missing out) is now a recognised ‘thing’. I wonder whether our enforced busyness and distraction by our modern devices is causing us to have less space in our hearts for hearing what God is saying to us. And, if you’ll pardon the pun, switching off is becoming more difficult.

Just a thought – maybe we can learn from Martin Luther, who allegedly said: ‘I have so much to do (today) that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.’

***Healing Lord, when you were busiest, you took time out for rest and reflection. Help us to be able to switch off and to do the same. Amen.***

Thursday 29 February 2024

**The ones that got left behind**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him (Luke 5:11).***

Read [Luke 5:1–11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+5%3A1-11&version=NRSVUE)

Ah! Those legendary fishing tales in which the fish that got away grows and grows to an extraordinary length and weight! Wouldn’t Simon have had a tale to tell about the ones that didn’t get away? Not only were the nets full to breaking point, but the boats were so full of fish that they were in danger of sinking. There were so many fish that help was needed to deal with this extraordinary catch.

The way that this passage reads, Simon and his partners, James and John, left the lot behind on the beach and set off to follow Jesus. An amazing catch of fish, and they just abandoned it. Wow! They just left everything behind to follow Jesus.

We seem to be living in a material age in which the rich get increasingly richer and the poor get poorer. Where I live, houses are being knocked down, gardens demolished, and larger houses built. I can’t really imagine what fills the space in the mansions that are starting to surround us.

We hear of people struggling to find affordable housing, running out of money to put food on the table, wages not being adequate to meet everyday needs, and price gouging that leaves primary producers unable to make ends meet. We also hear of people who are being paid eye-watering amounts of money – millions of dollars – for just doing their job.

I wonder what that amazing catch of fish was worth in today’s money? We have no way of knowing, and I guess it really doesn’t matter. The important thing is that the fishermen just walked away to go with Jesus. What have you given up in your journey with God? Are you part of Jesus' crew and fishing for people?

A final thought: a fishing net does not just catch good and edible fish. Rather, it indiscriminately scoops up all fish in its path. Does this have implications for you and me?

***Dear Jesus, Thank you for those who have nurtured us in our faith. Help us to be brave enough to share that faith with others and to open up opportunities for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of our friends and family. Amen.***

Friday 1 March 2024

**Truly human. Truly divine**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:16).***

Read [Luke 5:12–26](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+5%3A12-26&version=NRSVUE)

Do you get tired from constantly being with people? Or what about those constant interruptions and meetings that keep you away from your to-do list? If you are a parent or a carer, are there times when you just want to be left alone to sit quietly without interruption to have a cup of coffee and read the paper or reflect?

This is the second reference this week to Jesus withdrawing to a lonely place to pray. How truly human! After being surrounded by people seeking to be healed, Jesus took himself off to pray.

We also see a seemingly revitalised Jesus once again teaching and healing and showing his godliness by offering forgiveness to the man who was lowered down through the roof to be healed. I wonder what it was like for that man and his mates? They arrive at the house where Jesus is teaching. He’s not just teaching ordinary people. This time, he is with Pharisees and teachers of the law. The group of friends arrive – imagine their disappointment when they see the crowds spilling out of the house! However, someone in the group was not deterred by that. I can almost see him sussing out the situation, walking around, studying the house, scratching his head, and then coming back to his friends and saying: ‘I reckon, if we go up the stairs to the roof, we can easily remove some of the tiles, and let him down in front of Jesus. I’ve figured out which tiles we need to shift. Come on. It’s worth it to have Jesus heal him.’

Jesus demonstrates his divinity by forgiving the man’s sins. How good is that! Can you imagine the relief of having Jesus utter those words to you in person? ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’

But wait! Isn’t that what happens for us each time we share in the confession and absolution? We hear those blessed words: ‘Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.’

Let’s be like the man who was healed and head home from church praising God – a God who came down to be among us and is truly human and truly divine.

***Amazing God, thank you for your humanity, which meant that you experienced what we experience, and for your godliness, which gives us the gift of forgiveness, for which we offer you our thanks and praise. Amen.***

Saturday 2 March 2024

**Declaring God’s glory**

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

***The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 19:1).***

Read [Psalm 19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+19&version=NRSVUE)

Reading this Psalm, I am struck by the big-ness of the universe and God’s creation. The concept of infinity really does my head in. I am writing this in the aftermath of Christmas. Once again, we have heard the familiar words telling of Jesus’ birth and the choirs of angels who heralded that event. At that time, I guess the heavens were declaring God’s glory. I haven’t seen the sky filled with angels singing, but that doesn’t mean that these days, the heavens don’t tell of that glory – even in these troubled times.

Have you ever seen the stars when there is no light pollution? What a gift is a view where you can watch a lightning display in safety or take in the glories of a sunrise or sunset. How do you feel about thunder cracking overhead? You may prefer to hear it rumbling away into the distance. I haven’t experienced the Aurora Australis or the Aurora Borealis, but I know that people travel vast distances to see them and gaze in wonder at the display they provide. I appreciate seeing a rainbow and remembering God’s promise that he will always be with me no matter what happens. And, sometimes, it’s just good to look up at the sky and see the blueness and the clouds with which it is decorated. How amazing is our God who has created these phenomenal displays? And I love the notion that ‘God has pitched a tent for the sun’.

And just as the sun, moon and stars have their set order and paths to follow, the psalmist goes on to praise the law of the Lord. God’s commands are a gift and not a burden. I wonder whether you and I share that view? Do we celebrate God’s desire that we love one another – not just those who are easy to love, but everyone? Even that person – colleague, acquaintance or family member – who really gets under our skin and manages to upset us sometimes by just being there?

We know that living with no boundaries is not a good thing. We need boundaries to help us contain our lives. To give us guidance about when to stop so that we do not harm ourselves or others. The psalmist paints a beautiful picture of God’s will – it gives wisdom, joy and light to our eyes. How blessed are we to know God’s wishes – and how much more blessed are we when we follow God’s will in all we say and do.

***May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart today be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.***

Sunday 3 March 2024

**Come and you will see**

by Giesa Panpan

***He said to them, ‘Come and you will see’ (John 1:39a).***

Read [John 1:35–42](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A35-42&version=NRSVUE)

In the Melanesian communal perspective, an invitation from someone means two things: participation and celebration. Invitations are made only for significant occasions, with specific tasks assigned to engage both host and guests. When everyone is participating from the time of preparation to celebration, the event becomes successful and satisfying.

The passage for this meditation tells us about two disciples who began to follow Jesus for their own reasons. But then Jesus asked them, ‘What do you want?’ Their answer was far from profound, but Jesus gave them a simple invitation, ‘Come and see’.

That invitation is an invitation for a journey with Jesus. It is not a simple journey to undergo only spiritual experiences, but an invitation to respond to Jesus’ call throughout the whole of life. From the enthusiasm of youth to the maturity of old age, the discipleship of Jesus makes obedience to the master’s call the central priority – a special journey of discipleship formation.

When Jesus began to call his disciples, they already knew what kind of person he was (John 1:35–41). They already knew he was inviting them for a purpose, and they were willing to follow him even though they did not understand the meaning of the invitation. Jesus told Peter and John to leave their fishing business and ‘fish for men’ – to help others come to Jesus. Jesus was calling them away from their productive trades to be productive spiritually. It is a call to journey into a complete transformation of life witnessing to the gospel. The gospel is like a net, lifting people from dark waters into the light of day and transforming their lives.

This invitation begins with asking ourselves, ‘What am I seeking?’ To follow Christ for our own purposes would be asking Christ to follow us – to align with us, to support us and advance our cause, not his. Christ’s invitation is a journey of radical transformation that affects our job, our lifestyle, our values, our goals, or aspects of our beliefs. Although it took time for Jesus’ call and his message to get through, the disciples followed.

In the same way, we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus. As we journey through this Lenten season, take a moment to pause and reflect. What are you really seeking? Will you commit to seeking Jesus and continuing to journey with him?

***Heavenly Father, bless the work of the ELC-PNG Ministerial Training Department as they train leaders to serve those in their care with a holistic approach, ensuring they know their identity, accept themselves as a gift from their Creator and love and respect their neighbours. Amen.***

*The devotions for the coming week are taken from LCA International Mission’s 2024 ‘40 Days – a Lent Devotional and Prayer Guide’ and are written by mission partners around the world. This year the devotions have been written by members of our partner churches focusing on the theme ‘40 days with the Storyteller’. LCA International Mission invites you to pray for God’s global mission and churches beyond our borders. You can download an electronic copy of the ‘40 Days’ guide at the* [*LCA International Mission website*](https://lcamission.org.au/join-gods-mission/pray/) *or request a printed copy by emailing**lcaim@lca.org.au* *or phoning 08 8267 7317.*

*Giesa Panpan is the Ministerial Training Department Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG).*