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**Sunday 23 April 2023 to Sunday 30 April 2023**

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Sunday 23 April 2023

**The road to Emmaus**

by Dianne Eckermann

***They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’ (Luke 24:32)***

Read [Luke 24:13–35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24%3A13-35&version=NRSVUE)

Luke’s Gospel mentions several occasions when Jesus meets people on the road. Today’s reading focuses on his encounter with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. The meeting itself is important, but it is also symbolic of a bigger journey as the two disciples are on a journey of discovery about Jesus.

Cleopas and his companion unwittingly become witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. On their travels, they discuss the distressing events that had just occurred in Jerusalem, namely the crucifixion of Jesus. They are slightly incredulous that the stranger they meet on the road does not seem to know what has been happening, and they ironically explain to Jesus what they know of his death and the disappearance of his body.

However, this stranger was able to open Scripture for them. They listen with such interest to what he has to say that their hearts burn within them. Finally, when realisation dawns that this unknown stranger is the risen Christ, they journey straight back to Jerusalem to tell what they now know of the much bigger journey Jesus is travelling.

If Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple were on a road trip in modern times, their journey would have been entirely different. Instead of walking along the road to Emmaus, they would be driving in air-conditioned comfort, missing tiny details of the landscape, such as wildflowers, insects or small animals. In addition to missing the natural world, it is likely they would miss their encounter with the risen Christ.

Our busy modern lives can leave little room for time with Jesus. The world presents us with so many other priorities that seem pressing. The two disciples, left in awe after their encounter on the road to Emmaus, are a reminder for us all to slow down, journey with Jesus and allow his words to burn in our hearts too.

***Dear Jesus, we ask you to open our eyes so we can see you and open our ears so we can hear your words and recognise you in all we do in our busy world. Amen.***

*Dianne has served in Lutheran education as a teacher, school leader and system leader at Lutheran Education Australia. Now retired from full-time work, she continues to volunteer on several committees and as a school board member. She lives in the Adelaide Hills with her husband, Robert, and is in strong demand as a babysitter for her three grandchildren.*

Monday 24 April 2023

**Melchizedek, king and priest**

by Dianne Eckermann

***If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood ... why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?***

***(Hebrews 7:11).***

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

Almost two thousand years ago a letter was written to Jewish followers of Jesus who were coming under pressure, even persecution, to return to their Jewish faith. The reading for today assumes their knowledge of the Old Testament and specifically their knowledge of Melchizedek, both king and priest. Traditionally, Jewish priests are descendants of Levi but Melchizedek preceded this tradition and was both king and priest.

The writer of Hebrews encourages the persecuted Jews, who are wavering in their faith to see that Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and king of peace, is clearly linked with Jesus, a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (verse 17). The resemblance between Jesus and Melchizedek was highlighted for the followers of Jesus who were then able to see how Jesus was part of their ongoing tradition.

The important question asked by the writer of Hebrews and relevant for Christians today is why was there a need for another priest? The writer begins his question with asking, ‘If perfection could be attained …’, implying that perfection cannot be attained, even by priests in the Leviticus priesthood, because, like all of humanity, they are flawed. Salvation also does not come through the law – which does nothing but condemn us – but through Jesus. While this letter to the Hebrews had a a very clear purpose in demonstrating the identity of Jesus for those who knew the Old Testament, it also speaks to Christians throughout time as it shows that Jesus embodies a new tradition, not based on law ‘but on the power of an indestructible life' (verse 16).

Jesus as a high priest breaks tradition – he is not a descendant of Levi, but is another priest ‘in the likeness of Melchizedek’, a priest forever. Jesus is a new kind of priest, not flawed, but perfect and therefore our perfect Saviour.

***Heavenly Father, we thank you for our salvation through your son who has freed us from the bonds of law and shown us the wonderful extent of your grace. Amen.***

Tuesday 25 April 2023

**A perfect priest**

by Dianne Eckermann

***Such a high priest truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens (Hebrews 7:26).***

Read [Hebrews 7:18-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+7%3A18-28&version=NRSVUE)

The concept of a high priest is not something familiar in our worship life. In biblical times the high priest held a significant role as the most important religious leader. Part of that role was to make offerings for wrongdoing by members of their community, as well as their own wrongdoing. They were, after all, only human and needed to atone for their own sin as well as that of others. Their offerings temporarily covered the sins of the community and their own sin.

We do not follow the Jewish tradition of high priests. We also do not offer sacrifices to God. The role of our pastors is quite different. The significance of today’s reading is that Jesus made all of these traditions obsolete.

The argument of today’s passage from Hebrews is that Jesus is the ultimate high priest, holy, blameless and pure. He has no need to continually make offerings as he offered himself conclusively as a sacrifice for our salvation. His resurrection after death also means he can serve forever. Jesus is a new priest, one who is perfect and therefore has no need to continually make offerings.

Perfection we see in the world around us is transient. The amazing colours of a sunset are breathless, but darken quickly as night falls. Flowers bloom but their colour will eventually fade. Even a perfect day must come to an end. In Jesus we have a high priest who is not transient. He is always with us. He is unique in that he understands our humanity and his once-and-for-all sacrifice for us draws us nearer to God. His love for us will never cease. He truly meets our need.

***Dear Jesus, we thank you for the immense sacrifice you made for us, a sacrifice you made because you truly understand our needs and love us all the same. Amen.***

Wednesday 26 April 2023

**A new covenant**

by Dianne Eckermann

***But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6).***

Read [Hebrews 8:1-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+8%3A1-13&version=NRSVUE)

The writer of Hebrews continues to challenge and encourage readers to maintain their faith in Jesus in the face of opposition. Today’s reading reminds them of a new covenant promised by God because the old covenant had served its purpose.

A new covenant implies change and change is not always welcome. As the audience of the letter to the Hebrews has already discovered, following the new teachings of Christ has not been easy and the idea of change may make them wary. A modern audience may also be reluctant to embrace change. Something new can be seen either as a welcome challenge – or a threat. Sometimes change can be so uncertain we would rather spend time complaining about the old instead of trying something new.

The saying, ‘If it ain’t broke don’t fix it', justifies maintaining the status quo and avoiding change. The key point of Hebrews 8 is that our world *is* broken. The existing covenant had greater relevance when God brought his people out of Egypt but, as the descendants of these people had ignored the covenant made by their fathers, a new covenant was needed.

The writer of Hebrews draws on the words of the prophet Jonah to show that the old covenant was flawed as it was based on flawed humans. It is only a shadow of heavenly things (verse 5). The new covenant is heavenly; it is eternal. It is in their hearts and minds. This covenant can be seen in Jesus.

At the end of the previous chapter, Jesus had already been established as the perfect priest, holy, blameless and pure. No priest under the old covenant can take away sin like Jesus. Jesus offered his life as a sacrifice for the sin of all people, a sacrifice better than any offered by a priest on earth. The new covenant is therefore better than the old, because it is based on better promises.

***Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the promise you make to all of us through the saving power of Jesus our Saviour and high priest. Amen***

Thursday 27 April 2023

**A new relationship**

by Dianne Eckermann

***How much more, then, will the blood of Christ ... cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:14)***

Read [Hebrews 9:1-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+9%3A1-14&version=NRSVUE)

Times change. Compared with the ways in which our grandparents worshipped in our churches, we now have a choice of new music, new worship songs, new translations of the Bible, all designed to provide greater understanding of the wonders of the life of Christ and what our God continues to do for all of us.

Today’s reading begins with a description of the traditional rituals carried out by priests in the temple in Jerusalem. Only the high priest could enter the inner part of the temple, and then only once a year to atone for his sin and the sins of the people. In contrast, Jesus brought redemption, not through rituals, but through his own sacrifice, a sacrifice that redeemed people for all time.

This marks a change in the relationship between God and his people from atonement, as understood in the Old Testament, to redemption through Christ. The curtain that closed off access to the most holy part of the temple is no more and the way to God is now opened. Jesus’ sacrifice opens the physical barrier between us and God. The blood sacrifices of the temple priests have been surpassed by the infinitely superior blood of Christ.

This is a significant change for the new Christians who are the audience for the message in Hebrews, far more significant than the relatively minor changes we have observed in our worship over the years. Jesus’ sacrifice also achieves far more than the priests in their humanity could ever hope to achieve. His sacrifice cleanses our consciences, which in itself is amazing. Even more amazing is that Jesus has overcome death and through him we now serve the living God! Through Jesus we are able to see God as the centre of all things because his death and resurrection have opened the way to a new relationship with God.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for the incredible sacrifice Jesus made for us. Thank you that through the Holy Spirit our conscience is cleansed, and we have been given sufficient grace to love you and serve you. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

Friday 28 April 2023

**Eagerly waiting**

by Dianne Eckermann

***Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).***

Read [Hebrews 9:15-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+9%3A15-28&version=NRSVUE)

The readings from Hebrews for this week have been exploring the traditions and rituals familiar to both the Jewish and Christian faiths, showing how the sacrifice of Jesus has established a new promise, a new life and a new hope.

Today’s reading finishes with another new promise – the promise that Jesus will come again. Most importantly Jesus, having shed his blood already for the sins of many, has no need to offer further self-sacrifice. He has already dealt with sin and so those who wait for his return can do so eagerly, knowing that God’s mercy has already been offered to ‘those who are eagerly waiting for him’.

We can understand eager anticipation. Whether it is looking forward to a special holiday, planning a celebration, or a small child counting the sleeps to a birthday, we have all been there. No matter how exciting these events might be, they pale when compared with the time when Jesus will appear a second time.

Jesus is not absent from our lives while we wait for him. As explained in verse 15, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, a covenant that could only be implemented through his death, just as a will cannot be invoked until the death of the person who created the will. Therefore, while we may eagerly wait for Jesus to come again, we do not have to wait for forgiveness or redemption. We also do not need to make sacrifices for redemption as described in Old Testament rituals as that ultimate sacrifice has already been made on our behalf. The events of Christ’s death and resurrection, so recently commemorated at Easter, were not just for that time but are still at work today and will be tomorrow and into the future.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

***Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus is with us always to comfort and help us. We thank you also that he is our heavenly advocate. Amen.***

Saturday 29 April 2023

**My shepherd**

by Dianne Eckermann

***The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing (Psalm 23:1).***

Read [Psalm 23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23&version=NRSVUE)

This most well-known of psalms is both introduced and summarised in its first verse: The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. This short, simple sentence holds profound and deep meaning – God is with me; I need nothing more.

Our Shepherd knows us better than we do ourselves. He knows we need rest and provides green pastures and still waters so that we may be restored. He looks after our spiritual wellbeing, guides us on the right paths, protects us from our enemies, provides us with sustenance and covers us with his goodness and love. The psalm ends with a promise of life with the Lord forever, but it is also very much about trust in Immanuel, God with us here and now.

A small flock of wild sheep lives near our home in the Adelaide Hills. They graze wherever they can. They are afraid of people, cars, wild dogs and foxes. Their fleece is unkempt, tangled with blackberry brambles and badly in need of shearing. Somehow they manage to find water during summer when the creek dries up and they survive through the dangers surrounding them. Above all, they evade every attempt to be taken to a safe place where they can be properly cared for and their needs met.

Without trust in God we, like those sheep, are uncared for, living in the shadow of death and fearful about what may happen next. Instead of guidance from a good shepherd, we fall back on our own resources and have the potential to lead a ragged life, always wanting more and not knowing how or where to find it.

By trusting the Lord as our Shepherd we live with his promise, 'I am with you'. We know where our lives are going as we are refreshed, guided, protected and comforted in God’s love. Nothing more is needed.

***Dear God, we thank you that you shepherd us through our lives, during difficult times as well as times of peace. We want nothing more than to feel your goodness and love for each of us as we travel through life to live with you forever. Amen.***

Sunday 30 April 2023

**Hearing and trusting God’s voice**

by Charles Bertelsmeier

***… they follow him because they know his voice. They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice (John 10:4b,5).***

Read [John 10:1–10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A1%E2%80%9310&version=NRSVUE)

This verse is from a half chapter in the Gospel of John in which Jesus talks about himself as the Good Shepherd looking after his sheep. The only responses required of the sheep are to recognise Jesus’ voice and follow where he leads them. He promises a rich and fulfilling life. If we try to translate this to our own context in our lives, it raises the question of how we identify the voice of our Lord Jesus and recognise it in the midst of other competing voices.

This brought to mind an experience I had when I was in my late 30s. It was a period of my life when I had few commitments and some spare time, and I was open to experience other expressions of Christianity. This led me into some of the 'fringes' of Christianity (you may refer to them as sects). The contact point for one of these groups was a colleague from work, and he proposed some one-on-one Bible studies during our lunch break. He started by quoting many Bible verses and proposing interpretations that I was uncomfortable with. An amazing thing happened; the Holy Spirit put other verses of the Bible into my mind that clearly countered his interpretation. Together, we searched for these verses in the Bible, and this led to some interesting discussions. Unfortunately, we only managed one study; the opportunity for more didn’t eventuate. On reflection, I see that I was hearing and recognising the voice of the Good Shepherd to me (the Bible verses I was recalling) at the same time this other 'shepherd' was trying to lead me down a different path.

This experience also brought home to me the necessity of continuing to hear the voice of our Good Shepherd through systematically reading the Bible. The Holy Spirit could only bring to mind verses I had already read, and these only then had authority to speak to the situation when we actually found them in the Bible. Otherwise, I would effectively have been only offering an opinion.

Are you finding time to regularly and systematically read through the Bible (possibly using different translations each time through), so that you come to readily recognise the voice of the Good Shepherd as he leads you?

***Thank you, Heavenly Father, for revealing yourself to us through the Word, your Son. Thank you for the word written down so that we can read it and grow in knowing you. Thank you for your Spirit who keeps speaking your word into the situations we face in our lives. Amen.***

*Charles is a retired engineer who has worked on communications projects for the Air Force, Army and Navy. He lives in a retirement village in the outer north-western suburbs of Sydney with his wife, Diane. Together they have four children and eight grandchildren whom they love spending time with. He keeps himself busy with their pot plants, community vegetable garden, researching his family history and volunteering at LifeWay Lutheran Church.*