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**Sunday 26 November 2023 to**

**Sunday 3 December 2023**

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**Christ in me! Christ in you!**

by Peter Bean

***Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (Matthew 25:37)***

Read [Matthew 25:31–46](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3A31-46+&version=NRSVUE)

What surprises me about these verses is that neither the ‘good’ nor ‘evil’ people knew what they were doing! (Perhaps Jesus was praying on the cross for forgiveness for everyone!)

So how do we know how to live well if we don’t even recognise when we are? Perhaps we need to take a step back from the doing and the trying to live well.

Before we do, we are! Who are we? Children of God! Friends of the Saviour! In John 14:20, Jesus says, ‘You are in me, and I am in you’.

Perhaps we need to look in the mirror and see Christ (rather than an old, craggy face like mine or a young, beautiful one, possibly like yours). See Christ in me. See Christ in you. See Christ in the other person. Then act towards (do to) the other person as you would to Christ.

Then, who we are is what we do. Our actions and what we do reflect the gift we have received of life and forgiveness, grace and mercy, and justice and integrity. Then Christ lives in me and through me. And if Christ lives in the other person, what we do is being done to Christ.

And Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 begin to make sense. They are not at all about us making judgments on others, but recognising and realising the gift of life we receive and can give!

St Patrick (AD 390–461) picked this up in his famous prayer (perhaps look up the whole prayer for context), but for now, why not pray this portion of it with me:

***Christ with me; Christ before me; Christ behind me;
Christ in me; Christ beneath me; Christ above me;
Christ in hearts of all who know me;
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. Amen.***

*Peter is often out tending his garden – with 83 fruit and nut trees and extensive native bushes, he says there is a lot to do! Other times, he will be walking his dog, reading (too many books at a time), enjoying his family (15 grandchildren!), and occasionally writing – poetry, opinion pieces, devotions! To keep out of mischief, he is currently teaching himself to play the piano and is writing a paraphrase of each psalm. You can read these on his website, Creative Walking* [*www.creativewalking.com.au/psalm-reflections.html*](http://www.creativewalking.com.au/)

Monday 27 November 2023

**Living In Truth**

by Peter Bean

***My dear friend, it is good that you help the brothers and sisters, even those you do not know (3 John 5).***

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

Who are our brothers and sisters? In the context of 3 John, they are our fellow followers of Jesus. And so, it is good that we help congregations, working groups, the wider church, overseas missions and so on. Some of these people we will know well. Others we will not know. We may have only heard of their work. But living in truth, with life in Jesus, we support them anyway.

But is there not a wider context? If there is any truth in the prayer we prayed yesterday, ‘Christ in mouth of friend or stranger’, then surely God is at work wherever the Holy Spirit moves. There are numerous incidents in the Bible where God chooses to use people who do not recognise or acknowledge or understand God’s power and presence (for example Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36, the woman at the well in John 4, or even some of the disciples!!).

God does indeed work in mysterious ways, wonders to perform. How often do we miss out on witnessing those wonders when we limit God to our little worlds, when we put God in a box of our own making?

So, it is good to support our sisters and brothers – all who are doing God’s work, whether they recognise it or not, and, whether we recognise it or not. God is not limited to the LCA, nor to the wider church. The wind blows where it wills: a description to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. So, in good faith, let’s allow the love of Jesus to flow through us, and support those who are putting mercy into action, seeking justice where there is injustice, empowering the marginalised, and perhaps living in truth, without even realising it!

***Lord God, through your Holy Spirit, you work where you will. Help us to acknowledge this, and to look for opportunities to support your work in all sorts of places. Amen.***

Tuesday 28 November 2023

**Mercy, peace and love – or judgement**

by Peter Bean

***Mercy, peace and love be yours richly (Jude 2).***

Read [Jude 1–16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jude+1-16&version=NRSVUE)

If you read this whole Jude passage, it is easy to be horrified at what was happening. Today, it is easy to be horrified at what is occurring in the world. As I write, the horrific happenings in Israel and Gaza are headline news, there’s been another mass shooting in the USA, and civil war continues in Sudan. Closer to home, we have political lie after political lie; we continue to treat fellow human beings seeking asylum monstrously; governments continue to approve coal mines as the West Antarctic Ice reaches melting point; another Indigenous youth has died in captivity; three women have been killed in Australia this week by their partner (making 51 so far this year). If we are not horrified at the world we live in, we are not alive!

But mercy, peace and love still exist! Gifts of safety (verse one) from God through Jesus. Despite the horrors of the society in which we live – and possibly in your own personal world – there is still mercy, peace and love.

Mercy lets us know that no matter our situation, how bad we feel, or how awkward we are with others, the God of steadfast love shows mercy and brings mercy into our lives. Mercy restores and refreshes us. Mercy re-creates who we are. It keeps us safe in Jesus.

Peace is far beyond all human understanding (Philippians 4:7). Peace – *shalom* in Hebrew – encompasses wholeness, courage, a life worth living, generosity, confidence, community – and much more. Peace from the Prince of Peace. It settles any anxiety and doubt and helps us move on in life.

Love is the greatest of all (1 Corinthians 13). Love binds us together; love looks beyond mistakes and offence; love so freely given to us; love available to share with no limits. It allows us to act in positive ways we did not even know we had in us. Love conquers all.

It's okay to be horrified by the things happening in the world. It’s easy – and sometimes we are too quick – to pass judgement. Remember, mercy, peace and love are yours – to encourage and strengthen you and remind you of the Creator’s love; they are also yours to share – with anyone and everyone.

I think I would rather share mercy, peace and love than judgement.

***Lord God, we can become overwhelmed by many things; keep us safe; help us to live in your mercy, peace and love – and share them widely. Amen.***

Wednesday 29 November 2023

**Waiting for mercy!**

by Peter Bean

***Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 21).***

Read [Jude 17–25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jude+17-25&version=NRSVUE)

The news hasn’t got any better today. Not only are nations still hating each other, destroying the planet, and putting money before people, but people are also laughing about God (verse 18).

It’s not easy being a Christian today. There are so many varieties that you have to define yourself, so people know which ‘camp’ you are in! And people are laughing about – and at – God. What hope is there? Well, as yesterday’s verse told us, love, mercy and peace are yours!

And that’s re-iterated at the end of this short letter from Jude. Remain in God’s love; wait for the mercy of Jesus. But perhaps our immediate thought is that of the many psalmists: How long, O Lord? How long do we have to wait? How many tragedies, disasters and wars must occur before your mercy arrives and takes over?

I take great comfort in the fact that Jesus only lived as a human being on earth for 33 years, and his ministry took place in three short years. It would seem to me that there would have been a bit of waiting at that time. Waiting for the opportunity to use his divine power. Waiting for the disciples to get it! Waiting for the Pharisees to become humble. Waiting to be arrested (and sweating blood while praying, in the meantime). Waiting to die!

How are you at waiting? I’m not so good (although hopefully I’ve improved as I've aged!). Waiting can be painful. Waiting can be the pits. Waiting can seem useless. How long, O Lord? But waiting reveals mercy. Waiting allows for re-creation. Waiting brings new life. Waiting brings hope. Waiting brings peace. Waiting reveals love in action.

In fact, waiting lets us know that mercy has been present all along. God has been walking with us – waiting with us (or perhaps for us). Jesus did die eventually! And, of course, rose again, so the mercy he had demonstrated during his time on earth could continue to be a sweet salve for each of us for all time.

***Thank you, Jesus, for your mercy; thank you, God, for your patience. Amen.***

Thursday 30 November 2023

**Sins thrown away**

by Peter Bean

***You will throw away our sins into the deepest part of the sea (Micah 7:19b).***

Read [Micah 7:11–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Micah+7%3A11-20&version=NRSVUE)

I am not a scuba diver. My wife went scuba diving once, and I wished her well as I watched from the safety of the boat! I could not imagine spending any time inside a submarine, let alone plunging into the depths of the ocean. I take my hat off to those who go scuba diving or forge a career that way.

Hence, I have no idea what the deepest part of the sea is like – except for what I have read and documentaries I have seen. (*My Octopus Teacher* would be one of the best!) Anyway, I imagine it as a dark, inhospitable place where no-one wants to go. So I would be happy for my sins to be thrown there! But I also know there is the most amazing life deep underwater, with all sorts of marvellous wonders.

Perhaps that’s the problem with sins and sin in general. Some are obvious, and we are happy to have them thrown into the darkest places to forget them and get on with a better life. But some sins are amazing and make us marvel. So we tolerate them, excuse them, and perhaps, in some cases, even encourage them. Not that we do that deliberately, but we get hooked in by their marvellous wonders!

God’s people have done that for ages: think golden calf, full barns, viewing ourselves better than others. List your own way of deceiving yourself! Read any of the prophets and see how the people of God betrayed their God, followed other gods, and justified their evil ways of living.

But if you read any of the prophets, make sure you read the last chapter! There, you find verses like our verse above. God will have mercy; God will restore; God will enact justice; God will forgive. This does not excuse anything the people did, nor what we do. But it does reassure us; it does restore us. We do know forgiveness, life and new beginnings.

I don’t care where my sins are thrown. I am just grateful that God, in Jesus, took them away and made me a new creation once again. And that’s my prayer for today.

***Thank you, God, in Jesus, for taking away my sins and making me a new creation once again. Amen.***

Friday 1 December 2023

**Healing and energy**

by Peter Bean

***The sun of righteousness will dawn on those who honour my name (Malachi 4:2a).***

Read [Malachi 4:1–6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Malachi+4%3A1-6&version=NRSVUE)

I have to admit, when I first read this passage, I wondered why on earth anyone would include it in a daily reading guide. It is not your typical end of a prophet’s book (referred to yesterday). At first glance, Malachi 4 seems all doom and gloom – appropriate, I suppose, for a traditional end-of-church-year reading. But I was uncomfortable and not sure what to write.

So, I prayed. I read the whole book, and then I looked at various translations. Praying reassures me that God is working through me. Reading the entire book reveals the more traditional ending of good news in chapter three. Looking at various translations sheds new light on what the prophet says here.

Make no mistake: there is no escape for those who live evil lives and perform evil actions. But there is hope. The people had returned to God but had then fallen away again, primarily due to the dereliction of duty by the priests (see chapter two – a warning for those of us who are pastors, perhaps!).

But Malachi (whose name means ‘my messenger’) talks about a messenger coming (Malachi 3:1); he refers to the messengers Moses and Elijah in chapter four. Malachi talks about the promise of mercy (Malachi 3:17).

Then we have these wonderful words, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translation. The sun of righteousness will dawn on those who honour my name. Amongst all the doom and gloom, amongst all the evil and pride, there is hope; there is a new beginning. To those who are faithful, mercy is offered. Healing is promised. Energy is present.

These are gifts from Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Jesus, who met and talked with Moses and Elijah (see Mark 9), suffered, died and rose again so we would know sunrise! So we would receive healing and energy. So, no matter how much doom and gloom may be present in the world, we may know hope and a future. New beginnings in Christ.

***Sometimes, Lord Jesus, I am overwhelmed by the evil in the world: wars, disasters, hate. At these times, remind me of your presence and healing gift of life. Please fill me with the energy of the Holy Spirit so I may be your faithful servant. Amen.***

Saturday 2 December 2023

**Show us your kindness**

by Peter Bean

***Show us your kindness, so we can be saved (Psalm 80:3).***

Read [Psalm 80:1–7,17–19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+80%3A1-7%2C+17-19&version=NRSVUE)

These words are spoken three times, prefaced by the phrase, ‘Lord God All-Powerful, take us back’. In between, there is a list of what God has done for the people. Again, these are interspersed with mini-comments, suggesting the people had fallen away. The relationship seems to have been on again, off again. At least from the people’s side!

It is very much a human psalm! Look at verses 4, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 16. According to the writer, God has turned away. Built the people up, then let them down. How often do we think like that? Things are going swimmingly. God is good to us! But then something bad happens. We cry: Where are you, God? Why have you let this happen? Why are you punishing me?

And it’s okay when we ask these things. The psalmist does so. God can handle it. Sometimes (always?), we think we can’t express our true emotions to God: those when we are feeling down, disappointed or questioning. But that is just when God wants us to come with our raw feelings. The God revealed in the Bible – and especially in the Psalms – is not one who turns away from us at the first sight of complaint, anger or despair.

We may feel uncomfortable thinking or expressing these things, but God can handle it. God is there waiting for us. That is shown by this refrain: God, take us back. Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

Despite complaining, blaming God, and expressing frustration with God’s actions, the psalmist knows in their heart that God is a God of compassion. A big enough God to let the insults fly by. A God of kindness who knows our every thought and values our every feeling. A God of kindness who offers a new beginning every day, whose mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22,23).

That’s the God this psalmist knows. That’s the God this psalmist can trust in. That’s the God we know and can trust in.

***Lord God All-Powerful, show us your kindness so we can be saved. Amen.***

Sunday 3 December 2023

**The coming of the Son of Man**

by Faye Schmidt

***But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come (Mark 13:32,33).***

Read [Mark 13:24–37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+13%3A24%E2%80%9337&version=MSG)

The focus for many when reading this text is on the reference to the Son not knowing when he will return. Why doesn’t he know? Isn’t the Son one with the Father? Of course they are, but we ignore the nature of Jesus as both God and man. In referencing those who do not ‘know’, it is Jesus in his humanity that is referenced, linking him to us in our humanity. It is humanity that will not know when, where and how the Son will return.

And what are we to do? Keep awake. Be alert. Watch.

But do we? Don’t we just find ourselves thinking, ‘It hasn’t happened yet. Not likely to happen in my lifetime. I have plans – things to do – a life to live’.

Until we come face to face with a drama that forces us to recognise it, we don’t even think about our own death, let alone the coming of the Son of Man. It is there, buried deep and not considered until we are forced.

The consequence of this attitude is that we tend to put off living our lives fully committed and engaged in ‘being Christ’ in the world to our family and neighbour.

Is there peace in my family – both my biological and church family? Am I doing unto others as I would have them do unto me? Is loving others the focus of my engagement, or do I prefer to judge? Do I regularly sit at Jesus’ feet and open my heart to his word?

There is a proverb, ‘Don’t put off for tomorrow what you can do today’. According to today’s text, we must not delay. We don’t know the time – there may not be a tomorrow.

We do, however, live confident of God’s love for us, his promise of mercy and grace – and that is both endless and timeless.

***Through your Holy Spirit, Lord, awaken me to live as your child in the time you have given me so that others may see you in me and come to know the joy and peace of your love and forgiveness. Amen.***

*Faye Schmidt continues her diaconal calling through governance, having served on the Vic–Tas District Church Board, the General Church Board and currently as chair of the Standing Committee on Constitutions and her congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. Having lived and worked in many locations within Australia and overseas, Faye has a heart for the stranger and the newcomer and for being open to new ideas, learning from others and responding to needs.*