****

**Sunday 17 April 2022 to Sunday 24 April 2022**

****

Sunday 17 April 2022

# Oh, Peter!

by Milton Eckermann

**He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself (John 20:6b,7).**

Read John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1–12

Brash, robust, loyal, strong, impetuous – traits one can see in Peter’s life as a fisherman and disciple of Jesus. When he first met Jesus, Peter must have seen him talking to the crowd while cleaning his nets. He was willing to have Jesus in his boat and launch further into the water, and then at Jesus' suggestion, he tried fishing again with great reward. Then when asked to leave it all and follow Jesus, off Peter went.

During his time as Jesus’ disciple, he was always ready to do his bit and spoke up very quickly in response to revelations from Jesus, even to the point of being willing to die for him. He even took admonishment from Jesus and remained loyal – until he was challenged by people after Jesus’ arrest and denied knowing Jesus three times. Oh, Peter! However, he then went and wept bitterly.

We next hear that he and the other disciples went into hiding until the woman gone early Sunday morning to take care of Jesus’ body came back to them and said they had taken his body. Peter and John went to the tomb. Peter, being slower, got there second but went straight into the tomb. Later, when they were fishing, Peter saw Jesus and jumped out of the boat into the water and, again, was challenged to follow Jesus.

Our lives may cause us to have guilt that we think is unforgivable. But there is comfort from Peter's life – that even though his denial of Jesus was so great, he could turn back to God, who welcomed him back for further service. In fact, Jesus never left him.

**God, I am sorry for ever having walked away from you. Thank you for never leaving me. Amen.**

Monday 18 April 2022

# What do I have?

by Milton Eckermann

**I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me (Isaiah 45:5).**

Read Isaiah 45:5–8

Oh no! Petrol prices are enormous. House prices are beyond saving for. Food prices are restrictive. Seas are rising. Cattle are causing too much carbon. It’s too dry. We’ve had too much rain. There are too many patients waiting. I don’t like wearing masks. When can we fly on planes and go on cruises without risk? It’s all too much!

Remember God? Try Isaiah 44:24, ‘I am the Lord, your saviour, I am the Lord, the Creator of all things – when I made the earth, no-one helped me’.

Everything we have or have access to was made by God – light, darkness, the air we breathe, rain, and personal strength – even though we don’t always recognise it. All of this comes from God and is good.

Someone once asked whether Christians are allowed to drink wine or beer. Well, yes. It’s our abuse of it and any other creation that is the problem. God gives us the responsibility to use and manage what he has provided, and our failure to do that separates us from his generosity.

Next time we are in a conversation – about the weather, our health or wealth, politics, governance or our church – bring God into the equation, list the blessings and promises that he gives, and remember to get on with life trusting God.

**Lord, thank you for our belief; forgive our unbelief. Amen.**

Tuesday 19 April 2022

# The church is shrinking

by Milton Eckermann

**I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you (Ezekiel 36:25).**

Read Ezekiel 36:24–28

It’s tough living in our times. There seems to be so much to offer that distracts us from the ‘cleaner living’ of the past. This appears to be the excuse readily used to explain why we have so many empty seats in our churches. Well, look at the times in today’s reading.

The people defiled everything they had been given by the way they ‘lived and acted’, and they felt God’s anger for the murders they committed in the land and the idols they worshipped. Oh, things were different then – really? God was concerned for his holy name, and the people were scattered through foreign countries. Thank God we were not living back then. But is it so different now?

So many times throughout history, people have forsaken God. Before we despair, remember our gracious and loving God then and now. It’s as though he can’t get enough of us, but that’s the depth of his love for us. He sprinkles or floods us with clean water, and he puts his Spirit in us so that we can live in his grace. We can now share all the blessings of forgiveness and salvation with others so that they can see the wonderful gifts God gives. His promise through Christ’s resurrection is that our churches will grow and not shrink. Let’s try it out and be prepared to welcome others to the joy and freedom we have in God!

**Lord, thank you for taking us back despite so often straying from you and neglecting our opportunities to show your holiness. Give us strength and courage to be your witness. Amen.**

Wednesday 20 April 2022

# Rules new and old

by Milton Eckermann

**Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognise him or understand the words of the prophets, they fulfilled those words by condemning him (Acts 13:27).**

Read Acts 13:16a,26–33

Follow the rules, and you’ll be right! How often this advice is given to us as we travel through life. Think carefully. Did we always comply, even sometimes not being aware of whether we were or not? Did the rule save us? Maybe it showed us where not to go, but it did not necessarily save us from the consequences of an action – or lack of. Or we may have even suffered because of the neglect of someone else. Even with the best intentions from the most sophisticated legal minds, rules alone do not give the best results, as an interpretation of the rule can be successfully challenged.

The result of man sinning caused the people of God to wander or to live in exile for hundreds of years, and even though God promised them on numerous occasions that he would send a saviour, they continued to try and follow the rules on their own.

The Saviour (Christ) came, and despite his being there with them, real and visible, they still followed rules, which led them to put Christ on the cross. But thank God he raised Christ from death so that people could be physically with him to testify to the fulfilment of God’s saving promise. Even after that, some people stubbornly thought their rules were a better way to go.

Today, we still fall into the trap of what we think, rather than ‘living and trusting God’ and testifying to his salvation for all, for his glory, and not complying with a rule.

**Thank you for ‘the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ’s love’. Amen.**

Thursday 21 April 2022

# Kicking against the traces

by Milton Eckermann

**See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame (1 Peter 2:6b).**

Read 1 Peter 2:1–10

Several decades ago, when horses and bullocks were the means of transportation and toil, harness straps, hobbles and traces were used to assist the animals in providing the best efforts for the task at hand. Of course, some people misused this equipment, which caused discomfort and prevented good results.

Another example of this is how good building construction requires solid foundations, and before concrete, strong cornerstones provided the basis for solid footings. If this did not occur, then over time, the structure would lean and eventually topple over.

Today, this basic advice – if not practised – causes embarrassment to the provider and is a stress and burden to the user. If we fail to operate equipment without proper precautions or construct without the correct foundations, we and others are often deeply affected, even to significant physical and judicial hurt.

God has richly blessed us through Christ to be living stones, privileged to be used in building his kingdom. This is his promise! What’s the alternative? We become a hindrance for other people.

But God chooses us. He gives us mercy, and who are we to deny that to others? What a right we have! And, of course, with every right, there is also responsibility. But we don’t do it alone; God is always here.

**Here I am, God. Use me as you will, not how I want. Amen.**

Friday 22 April 2022

# It’s done

by Milton Eckermann

**For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18).**

Read 1 Peter 3:18–22

Every day: get up, wash, eat, work, eat, work, eat, sleep, and then it starts all over again. And that, to a large degree, keeps us alive. Of course, there are additions and variations to what occurs each day, but that's basically it. Wow, a bit boring! And every day, the sun comes up; there is air, wind (and maybe rain) and, at night, out come the stars and moon. In among all that, other people are doing the same things to varying degrees.

What’s it all about? Do we just do that until we run out of breath and die? What then? Thankfully, there is quite a bit more that occurs to fill our lives and give some purpose and meaning. However, life is not all good. It’s not always beer and skittles. We do things we regret. Other people do things that upset us, or we do things without thinking of others. Oh no! Life now becomes a bit of a problem. Where do we go; who can we turn to? The answer, friends, is not ‘blow’n in the wind’ – try God.

In his son Jesus Christ, God rescued (rescues) us by dying and rising again. We can get up each day in our life of repetition and drudgery knowing that Christ is already there, and he is there for all. We don’t have to worry about the day or weeks ahead. He is already there for us now! He defeated sin and death for us once and for all. And the amazing thing is that this is for all people. The sun doesn’t come up only for those who believe. We don’t have to wait to share that incredible gift of love with others. Let us do it now.

**Lord, as we get up each day, help us renew our relationship with you and give us the courage to share it with others. Amen.**

Saturday 23 April 2022

# Recognition

by Milton Eckermann

**You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you (Psalm 118:28).**

Read Psalm 118:14–29

In recent times, some celebrities in our country have passed on or completed a journey. There has been incredible admiration and celebration of their achievements in their particular avenues of life. I may have missed it, but I did not hear any mention of thanks to God. There have also been many reports about the lives of leaders in our community, with ho-hum references to their Christianity that are ‘by the way’ and not really important or necessary.

Why are we so reluctant to talk about God in public or give praise to him for what he has given us? Do we fear that if we do it, we might be ridiculed, or aren’t we sure about what he has done? We can say with certainty that we are going to live with God now and into eternity. Yes, really! He has saved us for that. Knowing that, we can strive to live daily giving thanks, celebrating his greatness and proclaiming his goodness.

To many, that might seem ‘soppy’, and it’s not really warranted because look what we have achieved. But after that, after all the accolades, when time has taken over, guess who’s still here? Yes, God is. He is here now with us, and he’s also where we are going, ready and prepared. Let’s not be shy. Let’s start the festival and march around the altar because the Lord is good, and his love is eternal.

**I know you, God, and I want to be part of your team. Amen.**

Sunday 24 April 2022

# Doubt

by Rachael Stelzer

**The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord (John 20:20).**

Read John 20:19–31

Thomas has been known as the doubter for centuries. Earlier, he was called ‘inquisitive Thomas’, but the more recent label has stuck. How unfortunate for this giant of the faith.

Earlier in John’s Gospel, it was Thomas who encouraged his fellow disciples, ‘Let us follow Jesus [to Jerusalem], that we may die with him’ (John 11:16). And Thomas spoke up when Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for his friends, saying, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ (John 14:5). Thomas was ready to accompany Jesus all the way, even to death. And, as everyone knew, death was the end. If even Thomas, the companion of Jesus, could experience some doubt about his continued life, couldn’t anyone?

And John had recorded earlier instances of people needing to see before they believed. Nathanael had a cynical response after being told about Jesus, ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ He had to see for himself before he would confess Jesus to be the Son of God. And the Samaritan villagers told the woman from the well that they believed in Jesus, not because of her testimony but because they had seen him for themselves. Mary Magdalene even struggled to recognise Jesus in the garden.

And just after Thomas saw him, Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe’. Was this an indictment on poor old Thomas, whose mind had just been blown, whose life had just changed forever because he had seen the resurrected Jesus?

Or was it an invitation to you – a disciple of Christ – and to me? We who have not seen and yet believe? Did Jesus include us in the ranks of his disciples? John concludes this passage by reminding us that he wrote these events down ‘that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name’ (verse 31).

**Risen Lord Jesus, among the ranks of your followers, you graciously include me. I haven’t seen you, yet I have seen your work in my life and my world. How blessed I am by your gift of faith. In this Easter season, remind me of the life I have in your name. Amen.**