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**Sunday 12 April to Sunday 19 April**

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Easter Sunday 12 April 2020

**He sees you**

by Jane Mueller

**‘She thought he was the gardener … “Mary!” Jesus said’ (John 20:15,16).**

Read John 20:1–18

Chemicals in the brain that cause emotional responses are generally absorbed in about six seconds. When we give in to overwhelming emotions – confusion, anxiety, anger, terror, grief – these chemicals can take up to four hours to dissipate. Neuroscientists call this the amygdala hijack. During the amygdala hijack, we can become inward-looking and irrational, and lose sight of what’s happening around us. It’s not until we shift our thinking to the prefrontal cortex – the logical part of the brain – that we are better equipped to assess and respond to a situation.

I wonder if Mary Magdalene was experiencing the amygdala hijack when she initially turned to leave Jesus’ empty tomb. Not only had she lost her Teacher, Friend and Lord to an unfair trial and barbaric execution, but she witnessed first-hand that Jesus’ body was not where it should have been. Throw into the mix a chat with a couple of angels. Mary had experienced a tumultuous and unnerving few days.

Overcome with grief upon grief, despite knowing and loving Jesus, Mary mistook him for the gardener. There he was, standing right in front of her, but she didn’t recognise him.

How often are we so swept up in our emotions that we fail to see Jesus standing right in front of us? How often do we default to panic or hysteria, neglecting to trust that Jesus is at work in our circumstances and that he had a plan all along? Could it be that, on a grand spiritual scale, the human condition leaves us in a constant state of amygdala hijack? Maybe at times it’s our disbelief that God will truly follow through on his promises. After all, his promises are unfathomable to the human mind.

The highlight of Mary’s story is that, even though she didn’t immediately recognise Jesus, he recognised her.

Mary’s story is my story. Even when I don’t see the Resurrected Lord Jesus because of my human doubts, frailties and insecurities, he sees me.

This is your story, too.

He sees you.

**Jesus, you are risen. You are risen indeed! You see me and you call my name. You are my constant Companion and you never leave me. When I feel distanced from you and can’t see you, open my eyes to your presence. All glory, praise and honour are yours, my Risen King. Amen.**

Monday 13 April 2020

**Generosity**

by David Folker

**‘You glorify God … by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others’ (2 Corinthians 9:13).**

Read 2 Corinthians 9:10-14

You only need to glance at the news to see that humanity, for the most part, is gripped by a fear-fuelled frenzy. And we shouldn’t blame them. Tidings of doom and gloom are pouring all over us from every direction. It is easy to drown in them.

In the face of such catastrophe, the love of our Lord is needed more than ever. For what can break through this present darkness except for the Light of the World himself? How can we reveal Jesus to our world during this rapidly unfolding crisis? I believe the answer is simple.

Generosity. Heart-felt, good old-fashioned, no-holds-barred generosity. Life is changing dramatically. Many people are staring down the barrel of unemployment, mounting bills, ruined dreams or real fears for their health, even their life. Now is not the time for God’s people to be looking inward. Now is the time for the church to rise up and fill the void with the tenderness of God’s care and compassion.

From a book I was reading with my daughter, we learnt that the collective noun for eagle is ‘congregation’. I was struck by the image of our church, our congregation, rising up on wings of eagles in the midst of the current crisis. We will not drown in it. We will rise above. And with clear heads and hearts filled with the love of our God, we will ride on the currents of this crisis and reach those who need the hope and generosity that we have in Christ.

We may never again in our lifetime have a better opportunity to reveal the grace of God and his generous, all-encompassing love. Make the most of it. Make it count.

***Creator God who created eagles to soar above the troubles of the world, fill us with your Spirit of selfless love and generosity, so that we might make the most of the opportunities this time of crisis brings. Amen.***

Tuesday 14 April 2020

**Look but don’t touch**

by Sal Huckel

**Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' (John 20:27)**

**Read John 20:16-17; 26-29**

It is interesting to read in our Gospel story, post resurrection, these accounts of Jesus appearing first to Mary, and about a week later inviting Thomas to reach out his hands to touch Jesus' side.

Mary’s first reaction is to want to hold on to Jesus but he tells her she may not. Yet Thomas receives Jesus’ grace in his unbelief and is invited to do that very thing – to touch Jesus and feel for himself the truth of Jesus’ resurrection.

Right now we are more like Mary in many ways. We cannot touch and hold on to the Lord – or each other –in physical ways. We are the Body – the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth – yet our hands are held back from touching and our feet have very limited freedom. We cannot easily even take comfort to a loved one or friend, and when we do there’s a ‘look but don’t touch’ instruction. In order to save lives we are prevented from meeting a very basic need, human touch, outside our immediate household.

We know of stories about babies in orphanages dying, despite their food and material needs being met, because they did not receive the human touch they needed to stay alive. Our Creator designed us with human touch being this essential to existence. We look forward to these restrictions being over and in the meantime we must look and pray for ways the hands and feet of Jesus can bring healing, hope and help to our loved ones and communities.

**Lord Jesus, we grieve that we, the Body of Christ as your hands and feet in our world, are prevented from meeting each others’ needs in person at the moment. We ask you to stand in that gap for us and to bring the love and comfort that many need but cannot experience physically at this time. Help us to continue to find ways we can operate within these restrictions, as we know that doors and hidden-away rooms are not barriers to you. Amen.**

Wednesday 15 April 2020

**Who did this?**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

**‘Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I am the LORD, the first and with the last; I am he’ (Isaiah 41:4).**

Read Isaiah 41:4–7

We had a lot of toys when I was younger. Not expensive things – mostly blocks, books and anything that could get stepped on. I was good at playing and creating. What I wasn’t good at was cleaning up.

One afternoon, a frustrated parent walked into the living room, where strewn across the entirety of the carpet were sharp objects, small toy cars and discarded lolly wrappers, and exclaimed loudly with hands perched on hips, ‘Who did this?’

To be honest, that’s a rhetorical question. Obviously, she knew who did it. But it’s good to know who, right?

In this scripture verse, the people of Israel are wondering how in the world they ended up in exile. Who did this? How did this happen? Who made this mess?

In previous chapters, Isaiah reminds the people of their role in the exile – chasing after idols, practices that did not honour God or their role in faithfulness. Then, in Isaiah 41, with no subtlety at all, God switches gears and reminds them who has been with the first of them and who shall be with the last of them as he brings them home isolation.

In the current crisis, no-one knows how it happened, and certainly not why, but we can see God’s hand in the aftermath. Faithful people are coming together to take care of each other and, as verse 6 reads, ‘Each one helps each other and says to another, “Take courage!”‘

Each of us, in this time of fear, says, ‘Take courage!’ in whatever you are making of this. In the end, we will say, ‘Good has come out of this’.

Because, this is what God does.

***Father, remind us of your power, your strength and your guiding love. Unite us to encourage and love each other in these days. Amen.***

Thursday 16 April 2020

### ****What God doesn’t do****

### **by Jane Mueller**

### ****How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!**** (Psalm 139:17,18a)

### Read Psalm 139:1-18

God does infinitely more than we can possibly imagine. But what doesn’t he do?

I’ve been Rick Roll’d on more occasions than I care to remember, mainly due to an over-zealous cousin. (Shout out to Wayne.) Rick Rolling involves tricking someone into listening to Rick Astley’s 1980’s hit Never Gonna Give You Up. It usually involves a ‘bait and switch’ strategy, where the prankster shares a website, claiming it is something of interest to the non-suspecting victim. When the victim clicks the link, they see Astley’s music video and – ta-da! – they’ve been Rick Roll’d.

The memes doing the rounds for Rick Astley’s Never Gonna Give You Up are countless. One meme my cousin fervently reminds me of, provides a check-list of all the things Rick would never do: give you up, let you down, run around and desert you, make you cry, say goodbye, tell a lie, hurt you. If you know the song, you’ll appreciate the meme.

What if God was the lyricist of Never Gonna Give You Up? Never gonna give you up (Deuteronomy 31:8), let you down (Isaiah 41:10), run around and desert you (Deuteronomy 31:6), make you cry (Zephaniah 3:17), say goodbye (Matthew 28:20), tell a lie (Psalm 89:34), hurt you (Genesis 9:11).

God’s version of the song would probably be longer than a standard radio version because he has so many things to add to the check-list. For example, never gonna reject you (Job 8:20), stop thinking about you (Psalm 139:17-18), stop loving you (Jeremiah 31:3).

**Heavenly Father, you never give us up, let us down or desert us. Your love for us is unfathomable. Teach us to reflect your love in our relationships with others, by never giving up on them and never abandoning them. Amen.**

Friday 17 April 2020

**Radical peace**

by Mitch O-Shea

**‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’ (John 14:27).**

Read John 14:25–30

There’s been a lot of talk about 2020 being a year that we should cancel or start over. But those who trust in Jesus have strong reasons to have a very different point of view.

Everything that’s happening in the world right now has the potential to bring about a whole lot of good that might not have happened otherwise. Whenever hardships occur, it brings people out from the distractions of day-to-day life and leads many to question their mortality, identity and purpose. For example, if people desire peace now, they might discover that Jesus spoke a lot about peace – a peace that is unique because it can’t come from the world but only directly from him (John 14:27, our verse for today). And he first spoke about this during a time of great hardship, when the Jewish people were living under the strict Roman Empire and when the hearts of many people were far away from God – kind of similar to today in some ways. If Jesus could offer radical peace then, he can sure offer it to us now.

So, rather than wishing we could skip this year, we really have good reasons to be hopeful and optimistic about it. Jesus is doing some amazing things in our midst. His Spirit is at work making people aware of their sin and brokenness, and helping them see the free gift of hope and eternal life that can be found in Jesus Christ. What a time to be alive!

***Lord Jesus, ruler of all the universe and ruler of my heart, give me your peace and help me not to be afraid of the hardships that are in front of me. Help me to be hopeful and to trust in your love more and more. Jesus, I pray that you would be with my friends who don’t trust you yet, that you would help them see their need for a Saviour, and that you would lead them to your peace. Amen.***

Saturday 18 April 2020

**God is faithful – trust him**

by Pastor Kevin Bell

**‘Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands’ (Deuteronomy 7:9).**

Read Deuteronomy 7:7–9

The writer of Deuteronomy proclaims that our God is a faithful God and so implies you can trust him. Sounds simple enough, but often we are in the position described by a sign at the reception desk of a Country Inn in England. It reads: ‘Please introduce yourself to your fellow guests since we are one big happy family. Do not leave valuables in your room.’

Trust is a good thing, but don’t we have to be a bit cautious? The truth is, every day we face a world of so many uncertainties, troubles, pains and hurts that we naturally ask the question, ‘Can I really trust God?’ Faithfulness and reliability, it’s a rare commodity these days.

When you trust in God, you are placing your future, your uncertainties into one Who Values You and is Faithful.   You are his own dear children, who are the apple of his eye (Deut 32:10). Friends, you matter to God. You are valuable and precious to him. God is faithful. He promises to be with you. He wants to help you. Nothing in the universe can change his loving concern for you.

Will you entrust your future, and the challenges the future holds, to the God who is faithful?

Sometimes our capacity to trust has been undermined because a significant person in our lives has either betrayed our trust, rejected us, or hurt us deeply. God is not like that person who hurt you. God does not promise one thing and do another. In fact, if you want to know what God is like – his personality, his character, his heart – you find him in Jesus. In Jesus, you find a God who not only puts broken people back together again but also a God who enters your pain. In Jesus, God enters your brokenness. In Jesus, God is rejected, betrayed, bullied, shamed, abandoned and killed. He knows what it’s like to walk in your shoes, having entered your vulnerability and brokenness.

How can we not trust him?

***Faithful God, thank you that you call us precious. Help us by your Holy Spirit to put our trust in you. Amen.***

Sunday 19 April 2020

**God is our refuge**

by Ruth Olsen

Read Psalm 46

What is a refuge? The dictionary says a refuge is ‘a shelter or protection from danger or trouble; … anything to which one has recourse for aid, relief, or safety'. A refuge offers safety and security.

We usually tend to think of a refuge as a place. Here we are reminded that our refuge is actually a Person. God is our place of refuge. That’s what he gives to any who seek him. We can run to him and discover we are safe, no matter what is happening.

Times of shaking like now around the world can pummel our sense of security. It’s a good time to consider: what am I holding on to? Where am I anchored? This **is** a season of ‘stormy weather’, and we don’t know its outcome.

But there is a Person who offers us refuge. It’s available to anyone. Jesus is the way to this refuge. He has opened that door to all. Anyone who trusts him and his love for us – loved all the way to even dying and rising for us, to break the power of sin, death and Satan for us – is already inside the refuge he gives, that he **is** for us.

The Bible describes Jesus as the Prince of Peace. The peace he gives is living, dynamic, all-calming, so-settling; a peace that the world can’t give (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27).

**Lord God, thank you that you are my refuge. I am grateful. Amen.**