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**Sunday 16 January 2022 to Sunday 23 January 2022**

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Sunday 16 January 2022

# Cup full and overflowing

by Norma Koehne

**What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he reveals his glory; and his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).**

Read John 2:1–11

What is revealed about Jesus in this his first miracle? First of all, it reveals him as truly human. Here, he is seen as a man enjoying the wedding of a friend or relative, at home with everyone. These were probably people he had known and worked with, played with and shared in their everyday life.

But he is also different, as his mother realises as she tells him that the greatest embarrassment has occurred, ‘They have no more wine’. What did she expect him to do – go to the corner shop? Even though Jesus almost rebukes her, she tells the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’, and they follow what must have seemed rather bizarre instructions, filling 6 stone jars with water, 120 gallons in total. That would have taken some time. Then they take the water turned into wine to the master of ceremonies, and it turns out to be the best wine ever. A miracle to help and save his friends and their family from shame. Jesus shows he is truly God, a saving God.

Most importantly, it is revealed that Jesus, as truly God, gives the best to us and in abundance. Christians are not cup-half-full or half-empty people but are blessed people whose cup is always full and overflowing (Psalm 23:5b). We are triply blessed. We have a loving Father who showers us with his love. We have Jesus, our brother, who gives us his hard-won forgiveness and clothes us with his righteousness. We have the Holy Spirit, our friend and guide, walking beside us every day to strengthen and protect us. Praise God for his abundant goodness!

**Loving Saviour, my brother and Lord, thank you that through your saving death, I have life in all its fullness as you shower me with an abundance of blessings. Amen.**

Monday 17 January 2022

# Beautiful in God’s eyes

by Norma Koehne

**I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness (Isaiah 61:10a).**

Read Isaiah 61:10–11

This chapter begins with these verses:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour (Isaiah 61:1).

This shows us so clearly who our gracious God is and what he has done for us. We are so blessed in our present time to have the good news freely preached to us, to have it in our hands so that we can read it every day as we wish. It is in our minds and hearts. So many people in ages past would have loved to have the same access. This precious word is with us in times of sorrow and despair; it tells us that we are free from the power of sin and enables us to live every day knowing that we live with God’s favour and blessing. As we say in the Aaronic blessing, the Lord’s face shines on us.

How has this happened? It is all the work of our gracious God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, ‘he has clothed [us] with garments of salvation and arrayed [us] in a robe of his righteousness’. When God looks at us, he sees beauty, even splendour. We shine and sparkle with jewels like the Jewish bride and bridegroom. This work of God is as natural as seeds sprouting and grass growing. It is there for all mankind.

What is our response? ‘I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God’ (Isaiah 61:10).

**Gracious God, I cannot believe that I am beautiful in your eyes. Help me to rejoice that through Christ I am truly clothed in his righteousness, so dearly won for me on the cross. Amen.**

Tuesday 18 January 2022

# Restoration

by Norma Koehne

**I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness (Jeremiah 31:3b).**

Read Jeremiah 31:1–7

God does not give up on his people. His love is everlasting, and his kindness is unfailing. He has proved this as we read the history of the Jewish nation in the Old Testament. They were God’s chosen people, the ones through whom he would bring salvation to all nations with the birth of his Son. He performed amazing miracles for his people as he took them out of slavery in Egypt and continued to show his everlasting love and kindness to them.

And yet, they turned their backs on him, preferring to worship other gods, such as the golden calf and fertility gods like Baal in Canaan. To bring the Israelites back to him, he disciplined them, but he always promised to restore them. In the time of Jeremiah, they were taken into captivity in Babylon, but God promised to build them up again and restore them. They would plant crops, worship again in Zion and sing and dance for joy.

In many ways, our western societies are like the Israelites of old, turning their backs on God and worshipping false gods. They may not be gods of wood and stone, but we worship ourselves, knowledge and achievements. We have ‘itching ears’ for every new ‘ism’ that pervades our society.

God does not give up on us. When we are tempted to follow the prevailing ideology of the world, God reminds us that he loves us with an everlasting love. We are his baptised children, and he will never let go of us; he holds us in the palm of his hand. As we partake of Jesus’ body and blood in the sacrament, we are reassured that we are forgiven and loved. Praise God for his unfailing kindness.

**Loving Father, your love for me is constant and unfailing. Forgive me for the times I have not been constant in my love for you. Restore me through your word and sacraments to strengthen my faith and love. Amen.**

Wednesday 19 January 2022

# From desolation to joy

by Norma Koehne

**The voice of joy and the voice of gladness … ‘Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his mercy endures forever’ (Jeremiah 33:11).**

Read Jeremiah 33:9–11

In the middle of this passage, we have a picture of utter desolation. The Babylonians have destroyed the cities of Judah. Wind blows across empty places with no sign of life. The image that immediately comes to mind is areas of Australia that have suffered from years of drought, the terrible emptiness of the land with no vegetation and no animals. But God will restore the desolate places, and the howling of the wind will be replaced by songs of joy. As Isaiah says, ‘No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hepzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married’ (Isaiah 62:4). This image of being married is repeated here as we hear the songs of joy from ‘the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride’ (Isaiah 62:11).

Earlier in the week, we had the story of the wedding at Cana, where Jesus restored the happiness of the bride and groom by performing his first miracle. But even more powerful is the image of Christ as the bridegroom and the church his bride.

Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25–27).

Christ loves his church - not our church, as we often imagine but a multitude of believers brought to faith by the Holy Spirit in the washing and words of baptism and are cleansed daily by these waters as they repent and are forgiven and presented ‘spotless before the throne’.

**Lord, you have been good to us as you have shown your enduring mercy through your saving death and brought us into your family through our baptism. You have taken us from desolation to joy, and we thank and praise you for your enduring love. Amen.**

Thursday 20 January 2022

# Remaining faithful

by Norma Koehne

**But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast (Mark 2:20).**

Read Mark 2:18–22

So many Jewish people at the time of Jesus and the early church found it hard to change from the old covenant with its many laws expanded by the rabbis. Jesus was often criticised for supposedly breaking these laws. For example, he healed on the Sabbath, his disciples ate corn on that day, or they did not fast as John’s disciples did. The laws of Moses had a purpose. It was to keep the Jewish nation different from the people around them, to preserve them as a holy people for the birth of the Messiah.

Here, Jesus says that the Messiah has come, and the old covenant with the Jewish nation has been completed. It is a time for the new covenant, sealed with his death for the sin of the world and his resurrection, which showed the act of salvation was complete. This is a time to rejoice with the bridegroom who created his church from all nations of the earth.

Why then, now that the bridegroom has gone to his father, do we fast? In this instance, fasting means living a life of discipline so that we, too, can remain ‘a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness to his marvellous light’ (1 Peter 2:9). Thank God we have the Holy Spirit as our guide, God’s word as our sure testimony, and Jesus’ body and blood as the assurance that we are his holy people, beloved and forgiven.

**Lord, although you are no longer with us bodily, we thank you that you are with us as we receive your body and blood in the sacrament, so we can rejoice in the sure knowledge that we are your forgiven and beloved children. Amen.**

Friday 21 January 2022

# On the palm of his hands

by Norma Koehne

**But you have come to Mount Zion … to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:22,24).**

Read Hebrews 12:18–24

What a tremendous contrast we have in these verses. The fear and trembling, the overwhelming darkness and tempest of Mount Sinai where God gave his law to Moses, and the beauty and joy of Mount Zion, the site of the temple. The contrast is between the law, which shows us that we can never attain the holy standards of our holy God, and so we are ‘exceedingly afraid and trembling’ like Moses. But we have ‘Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant’ and ‘the blood of the sprinkling’ that assures us that we are forgiven and that our failures are wiped away completely. The blood of the sprinkling of the sacrifice on the high altar on the day of atonement foreshadowed the shed blood of the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Through faith in God’s saving act of redemption, we are included in the ‘spirits of the just men made perfect’, worshipping the living God in the heavenly Jerusalem.

This is our sure hope because we are ‘registered in heaven’. Our names are written in ‘the book of life’ (Philippians 4:3) and ‘on the palms of God’s hands’ (Isaiah 49:16). My children used to write notes on the palms of their hands so that they would not forget some important fact or task, and I have sometimes done this myself. The image of my name and yours written on the palm of God’s hand is so reassuring and comforting. He will never forget us. We are important to him. He will be with us through the ups and downs of our life here and will take us by the hand as we leave this earthly life and lead us into the perfect joy of heaven.

**Loving Father, what joy you have prepared for us in our heavenly home. We wait with eager longing for the day when we will be with you forever. Amen.**

Saturday 22 January 2022

# How can we know God?

by Norma Koehne

**The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple (Psalm 19:7).**

Read Psalm 19

As is appropriate through this time of Epiphany, this week, God’s word has gradually revealed who he is. We have seen that Jesus is the true God and true man and gives us the very best in abundance. God graciously and freely robes us with salvation and his righteousness. God loves us with an everlasting love and unfailing kindness. We are blessed with the Holy Spirit as our guide and with the word of God. God assures us that he will never forget us and has a place for us in heaven.

How do we know these truths? Here, we can know God in two ways: through the majesty of nature and through the beauty of his word.

The heavens can show us God’s glory through the myriad of stars in the night sky and the perfection of our planet to sustain life. No-one can escape the glory of the heavens; it is clear to all the peoples of the earth. They tell us of the power and majesty of God. The glory, sustaining heat and light of the sun shows the sustaining work of the creator and his care for his creation. Its constancy in rising and falling shows us the constancy of our gracious God. But the heavens cannot reveal all we need to know about God. We need God’s word.

All of God’s word is described in the psalm as a perfect law, a sure testimony, right statutes, pure commandments, true and righteous promises. I just want to look at the word of God as a sure testimony. It is the truth, something we can trust and know that through it, God has revealed himself in his fullness as our loving and saving God and has revealed to us his good and gracious will for our lives and the world he has created.

The world mocks God’s word, so we need to guard against the tendency of becoming ashamed of its simplicity and thinking we are too clever in our modern age to accept the truths in the word. The word of God is perfect, teaching us, converting us, making us wise, rejoicing our hearts and enlightening us.

**Gracious God, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us as the sustaining creator of our world. We praise you for your goodness in giving us your word, which tells us that you are above all, our loving and saving God. Help us immerse ourselves in your word and let it dwell in our hearts and lives, giving us joy and the assurance of your love. Amen.**

Sunday 23 January 2022

# Christ as the interpretation and sense of God’s instruction

by Pastor Matthew Bishop

**So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading (Nehemiah 8:8).**

Read Nehemiah 8:1–3,5,6,8–10

Last year, a good friend gave me his spare whipper snipper. No less than a Stihl. It hadn’t been used for a little while. As he handed it over, he pointed out the instruction book. Then he added what I really needed to know: I will need to buy a new spark plug and douse the spark plug housing with an engine starter before I try to get it going. A trip later to the auto parts supplier, and I was ready to go.

Having returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the walls, the former exiles gathered on ‘the festival of trumpets’, a day of rest. Thank the Lord for his law! They then asked that the law of Moses, think ‘God’s instruction’, be brought for them to hear. The priest Ezra duly obliged, and from early morning until midday, everyone listened. God’s appointed priests (verse 7) were faithful in that task to the point of helping the people understand through ‘interpretation’ and ‘giving the sense’. Just like the way my friend added how to really apply my whipper snipper instructions.

Applying God’s instruction is something I’m pretty convinced that all Christians struggle with. Too much, and wow, look at how good I am! Or bad! Alternatively, too little, not often enough – are we really taking the word of God seriously, and do we ask whether this idea in front of us originated in the word of God or the world?

In today’s gospel, Luke 4:14–21, Jesus gives the ‘interpretation’ and ‘sense’ of how to apply it all. Picture him in the centre of the synagogue, having just read from the scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1,2a) with its promise of deliverance from all that binds and its gift of entry into the Lord’s favour. Jesus proclaims, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4:21). Jesus’ little sentence is a power-packed Christocentric ‘interpretation’ and ‘sense’ of how to understand all of God’s instructions. Christ fulfilled God’s instructions because we couldn’t. That’s release for the captive! Yet in his gift of new life to us, he also asks us to be devoted to him by sacrificially loving God and neighbour – the basis of Christ’s instruction being the Ten Commandments (Luke 18:18–30; Mark 12:28–34).

You can probably use too much engine starter. But we can never use enough Jesus in remembering our forgiven state before God through him. Then in Christocentric devotion, apply his command of sacrificial love to God and neighbour in all we do.

**Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you make Christ known to us (John 14:25–27). Keep us Christ-centred: free from both self-condemnation and self-congratulation and free to serve in sacrificial love of you and our neighbour. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**