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**Sunday 8 August 2021 to Sunday 15 August 2021**

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Sunday 8 August 2021

# My son, my son

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! (2 Samuel 18:33)**

Read 2 Samuel 18:5–9,15,31–33

Talk about skeletons in Jesus’ family closet! Mind you, the ones that are referred to in today’s reading are about 25 greats back into the family tree in King David’s time. We have David committing adultery, and one of his sons, Amnon, commits incest. Another son, Absalom, seeks revenge for his sister by killing Amnon. Absalom also sets fire to a neighbour’s field when the neighbour won’t intercede with King David on his behalf. And when he is allowed to return from exile, he goes on to try to usurp his father.

What a family! Absalom doesn’t sound like a very nice person, even though he was a handsome man with a fantastic head of hair.

Yet King David loves Absalom, his wayward son. He grieves deeply for him when told of his death. You can hear the agony in his words, ‘O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would I had died instead of you’.

The grief of a parent is always lurking in the shadows, ready to emerge when a child is hurt physically or emotionally, when expectations are not met, when things go wrong, or when a son or daughter dies.

Loving parents want the best for their children. They want to be proud of them, to be able to brag to other parents about their achievements and the wonderful things that they are doing. But things aren’t always picture-perfect, are they? The hopes and dreams of our parents haven’t always come to fruition, and there are times when tragedy strikes a family, and parents may cry out in despair, just as King David did all of those years ago.

We have a Father in heaven who welcomes us into God’s kingdom. Maybe there are times when we cause our Heavenly Father to grieve – yet that Father is always there, ready and willing and waiting for us to come with our frailties and imperfections and welcome us with joy into his presence.

Of this, we can always be sure.

**Heavenly Father, you sent your Son to die for us so that despite all of our frailties and failings, we can still be sure of your love and acceptance. Please help us to accept that love and let it shine through our lives into the lives of those who are near and dear to us. Amen.**

Monday 9 August 2021

# Land of plenty

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land (Deuteronomy 8:7).**

Read Deuteronomy 8:1–10

Many of us can trace back to when our family arrived on this good land. They came for a variety of reasons. Some were seeking religious or political freedom; others came for safety or economic security. Many have found it to be a good land indeed.

Before our arrival, the First Nations people nurtured the land and lived well on it. They had looked after the ‘flowing streams with springs and underground waters’. Their needs were simple, and they lacked nothing.

The arrival of European settlers upset the established order. New ways of managing the land were implemented, and the iron and copper and other minerals in the stones and hills were harvested to fill pockets.

People ate their fill, but did they remember to bless the Lord for the good land he gave?

The richness of the land has diminished; the rivers and underground waters have been drained, and God’s commandments are no longer guiding the lives of many. I wonder what God is thinking about us now?

We are constantly hearing about extreme weather events and natural disasters – heatwaves, floods, bushfires, mudslides, mouse plagues and, of course, the pandemic. Species of animals and plants are in danger of being lost forever.

On the one hand, some people are earning more and more – eye-watering numbers of dollars which can never be spent. On the other hand, many people do not have enough money to pay for food and shelter.

Rather than wallow in a sea of depression and pessimism, let’s be positive! We can walk gently on the earth, and if we each do our bit to be good stewards of the earth, we can make a difference. And as we do that, let’s bless the Lord our God for bringing us to this good land while remembering that it is God’s good land – not ours.

**Creator God, you made the world and all that is in it, and you saw that it was good. Forgive us for when we have taken the land for granted and have used it to serve our own purposes. Help us to be better caretakers so that it is sustained into the future. Amen.**

Tuesday 10 August2021

# Who are you?

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**They said to him, ‘Who are you?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Why do I speak to you at all?’ (John 8:25).**

Read John 8:21–30

Wow! Imagine asking Jesus, ‘Who are you?’ and then hearing his response, ‘Why do I speak to you at all?’

I have been wondering what Jesus’ tone of voice would be. I think about the times that our children or grandchildren ask questions that seem to have obvious answers, such as Miss 4-Year-Old having a tantrum on Christmas Eve and asking why no-one had told her it was nearly Christmas. To be honest, that one caused us to burst out laughing. But Jesus seems to be far from amused. His audience just didn’t get it – they didn’t understand who he was or why he was there, let alone why he would be going away.

Let’s think about the text from the point of view of the Jews. They had been taught that the Messiah was coming, and now that Jesus has arrived, he has the task of convincing them that he is the Promised One – the Messiah. I’m guessing that would not be easy. Particularly given that he didn’t come in glory, but as a carpenter, part of an ordinary family from a humble village.

Jesus says that by questioning him, the people are also questioning the One who sent him. The situation ends happily. Jesus convinces people that he is the Son of the Father, and he takes joy in pleasing his Father.

Fast forward to today. Many have heard about Jesus but would not know who he is or have turned away from that knowledge. Our challenge as Christians is to share our knowledge of Jesus so that others may learn about his saving grace. By doing that, we are doing what is pleasing to God – and to Jesus.

**Dear Jesus, help us clearly know who you are and share that good news with our friends and family. May the Holy Spirit give us the words and the wisdom to know what to say and when to say it and use each of us so that all may know you. Amen.**

Wednesday 11 July 2021

# We wish to see Jesus

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’ (John 12:20).**

Read John 12:20–26

This is a different story from yesterday. Rather than asking who Jesus is, the Greeks (Gentiles) are asking for him by name. They know who he is, and they want to see him.

There seems to be a bit of a Chinese whisper to pass the message onto Jesus! Jesus’ response that is recorded here foreshadows his death and the glory of his resurrection. He uses the analogy of the grain of wheat that needs to fall into the earth and dies but then grows and produces much fruit.

I am reminded of my dad, a sheep-and-wheat-farmer. I loved going out with him when the crops were growing and ripening. I can still visualise him plucking a head of wheat and rubbing the chaff from the grains with his big farmer’s hands so that he could see how the harvest was coming along. A farmer needs to pick the right time to harvest – when the wheat is dry and golden, and the ears are ripe and full.

There is a message for each of us here as well. If we follow Jesus, we will have eternal life; in order to serve Jesus, we must follow him. How good are we at being Jesus’ servant? I’m not sure about you, but I don’t know many people with the job title of servant. I’m more familiar with the term ‘servant leadership’.

A servant leader focuses on the good of the community and the wellbeing of the people. Rather than exercising power, a servant leader shares it and puts the needs of others first. Such a leader is willing to learn from others. Now, what would our world look like if we all had servant hearts?

And surely, if we have a servant heart for others, we would also be seeing in them God’s image in which they are created, and in them, we would see Jesus.

**Dear Jesus, please give us servant hearts that we may serve you by helping others. Help us to think of others before ourselves and see your face in those we meet. You have promised you will be with us as we serve you, and we ask that you would help us provide that service with a loving and joy-filled heart. Amen.**

Thursday 12 August 2021

# A most special family meal

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’ (1 Corinthians 11:24).**

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–32

I love a family get-together over a meal. My husband’s family gatherings have a particular pattern. Before we start eating, one of his sisters asks me to pray. The prayer includes thanks for all the good things we have and those who are no longer part of our group. There are prayers for those absent and those who are not well.

At some point in the meal, someone will start telling the family stories. The same tales are told at most gatherings. My favourite is about the time that my husband and his brother switched his sister’s electric blanket on one night when she had spent the day getting sunburnt at the beach. I think that some of the stories have grown over the years – which is one of the reasons why we still love to hear them. The next generation is starting to feature in them, and they delight in hearing about themselves and where they fit in the family.

Today’s reading is about a gathering of people who had shared some amazing times together. Imagine the stories that could have been told around that table. This meal was different, though. This instigated that special meal we continue to share with our sisters and brothers in Christ. It is through this meal that Jesus established the new covenant – the new order that came through his life, death and resurrection.

The meal comes with a caveat. It is not to be taken lightly – and the admonishment is there for those who eat and drink unworthily. Our participation in the Lord’s Supper is to be something that we think about, reflect on and prepare for.

In sharing this meal, we build and strengthen our Christian family life as we celebrate and remember the life and death of our Saviour. So, after sharing Holy Communion, the thanksgiving prayer acknowledges the healing gift that it is, and we pray that through it, we would be ‘strengthened in faith toward God and in love toward one another’.

**Loving Saviour, thank you for living and dying for us. Thank you that as we gather around your table, we share this celebration with all of your children. May we be strengthened by it and joyfully share the message of your love in our daily life. Amen.**

Friday 13 August 2021

# To God be the glory

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:15).**

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–15

I received an email today: ‘Thanks again for your … Just wanted to let you know that I love your piece; what a great idea!’

I was thrilled to receive the acknowledgement. It came out of the blue and was totally unexpected. It made me feel valued and appreciated.

This made me think about giving thanks. It seems we are robbed of the opportunity to give thanks with so many of our daily transactions undertaken online. The art of writing a thank you note is vanishing – except for our next-door neighbour, who faithfully pops a card or postcard into our letterbox when etiquette requires.

I grew up in a home where daily devotions were the norm, read from The Book (‘Can you get The Book?’, my dad used to say as tea came to an end). Meals were bracketed with prayers: ‘Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed’ before and ‘O give thanks to the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever’ at the end.

These daily rituals did not survive into the 21st century in my family, which makes me feel sad. In fact, I’m sure we are not the only ones to have lost this practice.

Today’s verse encourages us to give thanks and glorify God. When praying, we can use the mnemonic ACTS to structure our prayers, including adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

**Adoration** – some of our favourite hymns How great thou art, Amazing grace and To God be the glory offer some wonderful examples of this.

**Confession** – this can include reflection on where we have strayed from leading a godly life. This can help us become aware of who we may have hurt. We then can consider not just asking God for forgiveness but also what we need to do to heal relationships.

**Thanksgiving** – there is so much that we can give thanks for, not least for the grace God extends to all of us, as this verse states. So, let’s give thanks whenever and wherever we can, particularly to our loving God whose grace is there for you, me and anyone who dares to claim it.

**Supplication** – God is happy to hear our prayers and wants us to bring our requests through them. God is generous in answering those prayers – how very blessed we are!

**Gracious God, thank you for the gift of faith that lets us believe we will be with you in eternal life. Thank you for your gift of grace, and we ask that you give us thankful hearts so that we can live our lives to your glory and to the good of our family and community. Amen.**

Saturday 14 August 2021

# Leaving evil behind

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34:13,14).**

Read Psalm 34:9–14

This is a tough one! How easy it is to slip into saying mean, nasty and/or untrue things. I find it very difficult to keep my tongue under control. Things just slip out when I’m not thinking about what I’m saying. It is so easy to badmouth people and pass judgement. I guess that the psalmist would also ask that people stop taking God’s name in vain. I find it sad to hear the phrase ‘O my God’ and the abbreviation ’OMG’ used so frequently in everyday conversation and the media. Surely this is not pleasing to God!

The psalmist is very clear here – we must be much more careful about what we say and do.

The exhortation is to depart from evil. Many things today could be classified as evil or morally bad, wicked, harmful and the opposite of good. We only need to pick up a newspaper, turn on the TV or check out our favourite news website to be assailed by all sorts of bad, wicked and harmful things. On a large scale, there are wars and rumours of wars, and at a personal level, we can read of countless crimes or violations of people and their property. Think about the royal commissions investigating a variety of matters that could be classed as evil – institutional responses to sexual abuse of children, abuse of people in aged care or disability services or the culture of disrespect for women even at the highest levels of our government.

Apart from the factual evil, there are all sorts of manufactured bad things that can be viewed online, on TV, in books, in video games or in movies – things that are not life-enhancing or respectful of people’s dignity or things that seem to glorify violence and evil.

In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable.Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you (Philippians 4: 8,9, Good News Translation).

For me, that says it all.

**Lord God, you have given us so many good things. Help us to live our lives doing good and seeking peace and in ways that please and glorify you. Amen.**

Sunday 15 August 2021

# The present life

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day (John 6:54).**

Read John 6:51–58

Do you live in the present? Or perhaps you long for the past – the good old days? Or do you have hopes for the future? Each could be said to be important in its own way.

I am fascinated by the use of the present tense in Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John. John 6:54 is but one example of numerous times Jesus says, ‘you have eternal life’. Often, beliefs or actions are attached to his statement. But it is constantly a real thing, a present action, something people can grab hold of. We have often tended to talk about the future hope or the reign of the kingdom to come. But Jesus here seems to be saying something different.

There is also the use of the words ‘I am …’ by Jesus in this gospel. You are probably familiar with them. I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the vine, the way, truth and life and in John 6:51, I am the living bread.

It seems to me Jesus is making a point. Faith, grace and living with Christ is not something in the future alone. It is not pie in the sky but a living reality. Even Paul picks this up when he says, ‘for me to live is Christ’.

Enjoy your memories – they are important to who you are. Look with confidence and hope to the future – there are bright times ahead. But live in the present grace of God, spoken to you and demonstrated for you in the person of Jesus and refreshed in you daily by the Holy Spirit. Believe in Christ. Enjoy life!

**Lord Jesus, we worry about things we have done in the past; we get anxious about the future. Reassure us, Jesus, with your words of grace: ‘you have eternal life’. Amen.**