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**Sunday 8 October 2023 to**

**Sunday 15 October 2023**

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**Cornerstone**

by Verena Johnson

***The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes (Matthew 21:42b).***

[Read Matthew 21:33–46](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+21%3A33-46&version=NRSVUE)

After telling the very confronting parable of the tenants, Jesus uses this quotation from Psalm 118:22. Did you know that this verse has a special claim to fame in the Bible? Jesus quotes it about himself in Mark 12:10,11 and Luke 20:17 as well. Peter mentions it in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7,8. Paul refers to this verse in Ephesians 2:20. No text in the Old Testament is quoted more often in the New Testament.

Jesus was rejected by the chief priests and Pharisees. He wasn’t the cornerstone they were looking for! They had their own building, and he didn’t fit at all.

They didn’t approve of his lack of formal education (John 7:15). They didn’t approve of where he came from (John 7:52). They didn’t approve of his disregard for religious traditions (Luke 6:2). They definitely didn’t approve of his choice of friends (Matthew 9:11).

Yet despite the fact that they rejected and crucified Jesus, God raised him up and established Jesus as the chief cornerstone of his great plan of redemption. All things are grounded, built on and fulfilled in him.

Now, before we are tempted to shake our heads and ‘tut tut’ at the attitude of the chief priests and Pharisees – and maybe even feel slightly smug – take the time to reflect on this: Is Jesus truly the cornerstone of your life? Of every part of your life, not just the Sunday or churchy bits?

Sometimes, I can be tempted to build on my own foundation, logic, ideas and desires – especially in the everyday ‘non-churchy’ bits. I’m tempted to build in my way and in my time frame. It always seems like such a good idea at the time. But when my building starts to teeter or crumble, I run to Jesus to fix it or help me. Sometimes, he lets it fall down so that we can start building again, together this time.

If only Jesus had been the cornerstone right from the start!

A cornerstone is something to build upon. Jesus is the strong, unshakable foundation for every part of your life. Whatever you build in your life today, build on Jesus Christ, the cornerstone.

***Dear Jesus, thank you that you are the cornerstone. Please be my cornerstone and the cornerstone of every part of my life. Help me to build on you in everything. Amen.***

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Monday 9 October 2023

**Crumbs**

by Verena Johnson

***‘Lord,’ she replied, ‘even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs’ (Mark 7:28).***

[Read Mark 7:24–37](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+7%3A24%E2%80%9337&version=ESV)

During the next few days, we will read through an average ministry week in the life of Jesus in Mark. We start with this story.

Jesus was travelling in Gentile territory when a Gentile woman approached him, threw herself at his feet and begged him to heal her daughter, who was possessed by a demon … Jesus ignored her.

Why would he do that? Jesus loves everyone, doesn’t he? Yet he tells her that he was only sent to the children of Israel. She was a Gentile, so he couldn’t help. It would be like throwing the children’s food to the dogs. Basically, he calls her a dog. That’s a bit strong, isn’t it?

‘Dogs’ sounds harsh, but the term he used was the Greek diminutive kynaria, which meant little dogs, household pets. Jesus also said that the children of Israel had to be fed ‘first’. He threw her a bit of hope that her turn might come if she waited.

So, what did the woman do? At this stage, I probably would’ve been so embarrassed and humiliated that I would’ve just wanted the ground to swallow me up. But she persisted. She argued back. She used Jesus’ rebuff to her advantage.‘Even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’

Don’t knock crumbs. They do mount up. My mother-in-law would carefully gather all the crumbs on the breadboard from cutting bread and put them in a container in the freezer to use later for cooking. I was amazed at how quickly the amount grew and all the different things she used them for.

Anyway, the story has a great ending because, impressed and pleased by this woman’s reply and faith, Jesus healed her daughter.

I am in awe of this woman and her persistence. Her faith was incredible. She had no doubt that Jesus had the power to heal, and she realised that even the crumbs of what Jesus could do would be enough.

That’s true for us today, too. But Jesus offers us, his beloved children, far more than crumbs. He comes into our crummy lives and gives us the Bread of Life. He gives us everything. The whole loaf, the entire bakery, and we don’t have to argue or wrestle with him for it.

**Precious Jesus, Bread of Life, I thank you for everything you have done for me and everything you have given me. Help me never to take it for granted. I come to you now like that woman and bring you my requests. [Take the time to give Jesus the things on your heart today.] Thank you for hearing and answering my prayers. Amen.**

Tuesday 10 October 2023

**Forgetfulness**

by Verena Johnson

***His disciples answered, ‘But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?’ (Mark 8:4)***

[Read Mark 8:1–10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A1-10&version=ESV)

Back in my Sunday school days, I used to get this story confused with the feeding of the five thousand. Was it five thousand or four thousand? Five loaves or seven loaves? It took me a while to work out that they were actually two different stories!

As I read this story of the feeding of the four thousand, I can’t help but wonder how the disciples could be so thick. I can’t believe they would even ask the question, ‘But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?’

Don’t they remember how Jesus fed five thousand people and had 12 basketsful left over? It was only two chapters ago! This is a much smaller crowd, and they’re looking right at the one who did that amazing miracle. Not only that, but since that miracle, they’ve also seen Jesus walk on water, still a storm, and do some incredible healings. How can they not know what Jesus is capable of? Why is no one saying confidently, ‘We know you’ve got this, Jesus’ or ‘You can do anything’?

Just like the disciples, we forget what Jesus did for us already. We forget what we’ve already seen him do in our lives. We can know who he is and that he’s right there with us and still be a bit thick when it comes to facing our current problems, worries and cares.

Our minds and prayers can be full of questions, ‘Where will I get …?’, ‘How will I be able to …?’, ‘Why is this happening to me?’, and ‘What can I do?’

We forget that Jesus not only has all the answers, but he is the answer!

Have a close look at who he is. Remember what he has done for you. How he suffered, died and rose for you so you could be redeemed and have an eternal future with him. Reflect on your life and where you have seen him at work.

You can confidently face anything when Jesus is with you.

Jesus has got this, whatever ‘this’ you are facing at the moment.

Jesus can when you can’t and when no one else can either.

Jesus can bring good out of any and every situation.

**Jesus, thank you that you are with me every moment of my life. Thank you for everything you have done for me. Help me remember who you are and what you can do when I face problems, cares and worries. Help me look to you in everything. Amen.**

Wednesday 11 October 2023

**Seeing clearly**

by Verena Johnson

***Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (Mark 8:25).***

[Read Mark 8:11–26](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A11%E2%80%9326&version=ESV)

One of the incredible things about the healings of Jesus is that every one of them is different. There is no one-size-fits-all approach with him. He deals with each person individually and uniquely. Read through all the healing accounts in the gospels if you doubt me.

Today, we read about the healing of a blind man. Imagine what it would be like to never see the faces of the people you love. To never see a sunset or a rainbow. To be totally dependent on others to go anywhere. To be locked inside a world of darkness. That’s what it was like for this man when his friends brought him to Jesus.

I wonder how he was feeling as they were bringing him and when they begged Jesus to touch him. Put yourself in his shoes and imagine how you would feel. Annoyed? Embarrassed? Scared? Ashamed? Hopeful?

Jesus takes the man by his hand and leads him away from the crowd and the village. What was the man thinking as he led him away? Was he expectant? Was he worried?

Then Jesus spits on the man’s eyes. Yes, you read it right – he used spit. Today, our health and safety people would have a field day with this! Was the man thinking, ‘Yuck!’? Did he attempt to move away from Jesus? Was he hoping someone would save him from this madman?

Jesus asks him whether he can see anything. So he opens his eyes and can see a little, but not fully. It’s all a bit blurry to him. What was he feeling now? Was he disappointed? Happy he could see at all?

This healing of Jesus is unique because the man is only partially healed. We don’t know why, and there are lots of theories out there. However, the important thing is that Jesus isn’t finished yet.

Once more, Jesus puts his hands on the man’s eyes. This time, the blind man can see clearly. The miracle is complete. Imagine how that man felt. How did he respond? His life had just been completely changed. Was he amazed? Moved? Thankful? Worshipful?

Jesus does miracles in our lives, too. Big, little and everyday miracles. Sometimes, we can be blind to them. Ask him to open your eyes to see him clearly and recognise his hand in your life.

**Dear Jesus, open my eyes to see you clearly and recognise your presence and hand in my life today and every day. Amen.**

Thursday 12 October 2023

**Crosses**

by Verena Johnson

***Then he called the crowd to himself along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’ (Mark 8:34).***

[Read Mark 8:27 – 9:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A27+%E2%80%93+9%3A1&version=ESV)

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, but after that, Jesus has some tough stuff to say to his disciples. He tells them about his death and resurrection.

Peter instantly loses whatever brownie points he may have earned by his declaration, when he begins to rebuke Jesus for saying this. Jesus even calls him Satan!

But then the rubber really hits the road. Jesus tells his disciples and the crowd with him that they will have to take up a cross if they want to follow him.

This was not a pretty, bland or inoffensive picture he was giving them. Everyone living during that time was well aware of what a cross was and what the Romans used it for. The image that would have come to mind was not for the fainthearted. I wonder what their reaction was. Maybe there was a gasp of horror from his audience. Peter was probably afraid to say anything after the last time he tried!

Following Jesus is not a picnic in the park, and Jesus never said that it would be, but this would have made people pause.

It still makes people pause today as well. For some people, it even comes as a bit of a surprise. We all like the good bits when it comes to following Jesus, but the hard stuff is not something anybody would want. The other thing is that our crosses come to us – we don’t get to choose them.

Imagine what it would be like if we could choose them:

* ’I want mine padded; I don’t want any chafing or splinters!’
* ‘I want the smallest one you’ve got – necklace-sized would be great.’
* ‘I want the lightest one.’
* ‘I want mine with wheels, so I just have to drag it.’
* ‘Could I get a cross app on my phone?’
* ‘You got any other colours? I hate brown!’

The good news is we don’t have to carry our crosses alone. Jesus doesn’t leave us all struggling with whatever cross we must bear. Jesus is with us to help us bear the burden.

Whatever cross you might be carrying at the moment, he will help you carry it, and he’s had plenty of experience in this area.

***Dear Jesus, thank you for carrying your cross and dying on it for me. Please help me to carry my cross and look to you whenever I need strength, encouragement and comfort. Amen.***

Friday 13 October 2023

**Mountaintop**

by Verena Johnson

***Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah’ (Mark 9:5).***

[Read Mark 9:2–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+9%3A2%E2%80%9313&version=ESV)

Today, we read about the Transfiguration. I can’t help but wonder what it would have been like to be there and how it would have felt. We know the three disciples were frightened, but to see Jesus in all his glory like that – what an amazing mountaintop experience!

Can you think of a time when you’ve had a mountaintop experience?

It’s a natural human inclination to want mountaintop experiences. It’s also a natural inclination to want to hold on to them. These amazing experiences are so good that we want to stay in that place forever – or for as long as possible – and to savour it.

Peter, of course, was being Peter, so he came up with a solution for this. He wanted to build three shelters: one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah, right there on the mountaintop. Then he could visit at any time to recapture this unique experience.

We might smile or even outright laugh at Peter’s suggestion, but did you know that the Crusaders actually did build three chapels on Mount Tabor? Now, there is the Church of the Transfiguration that contains them. The Chapel of Elijah is located in the south tower; the north tower holds the Chapel of Moses.

We want to stay there on the mountaintop, but we can’t. Sooner or later, we must leave the mountain and go back down to the real world, and the glory quickly fades. Life happens, death happens, we battle our own demons, we find ourselves in a valley, and the mountaintop seems so far away.

The wonderful thing is that Jesus is also there with us in the valley. He’s not just on the mountaintop. Jesus comes into our grief, fear, doubt, confusion and circumstances. When we look to him and at him, the other stuff fades away. We can experience a bit of the mountaintop in the wonder and joy of his presence and love right where we are.

**Dear Jesus, thank you for the mountaintop experiences in our lives. Thank you also for being with us in the valleys and everywhere in between. Because of you, we can experience the wonder and joy of your presence wherever we are. Amen.**

Saturday 14 October 2023

**I lack nothing**

by Verena Johnson

***The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing (Psalm 23:1).***

[Read Psalm 23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23&version=ESV)

It was one of those long, tough weeks – both at work and in my personal life. My list of problems and cares was steadily growing, as was my emotional baggage. I desperately needed to tell God a thing or two and unburden myself.

So, I got in the car and drove to one of my favourite walking spots at the time, the cliff walk at Hallett Cove in Adelaide. Tucked away from the main walk is a little stream, and there I sat on a rock, watching the water flow over the rocks and the little waterfall.

It was the perfect time of year. For a start, there was actually some water! And some greenery. Not quite green pastures, but as green as it were ever going to get. There, I read and meditated on this well-known psalm of David.

David is right, you know. With God, we lack nothing.

I smiled as I watched a couple of birds playing and splashing in the water with joy and abandonment.

I never told God anything and didn’t even mention my list. There was just his presence with me in the peace and solitude and his assurance that he would provide everything I needed. I went home as a different woman.

Take a few deep breaths right now. Take some time to read through this psalm again and think about this beautiful picture of God …

A God who leads and guides me wherever I find myself ...
A God who rests and refreshes me deeply and completely in a way that nothing and no one else could ...
A God who comforts me when I am afraid, sad, worried or confused ...
A God provides for me so abundantly that my cup overflows ...
A God who wraps me in his love and mercy no matter what I’ve done or failed to do ...
A God who has an amazing heavenly home prepared just for me ...
With God, I truly lack nothing.

**Dear God, thank you for providing everything I need. Thank you that, in you and through you, I lack nothing. Help me to find my rest, refreshment and healing in you. Amen.**

Sunday 15 October 2023

**An invitation you can’t refuse**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***For many are invited, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).***

[Read Matthew 22:1–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A1%E2%80%9314&version=ESV)

Let’s face it – weddings can be a drag.

The fact that, in Jesus’ parable, the invitees to the prince’s wedding don’t want to come to the banquet resonates deeply in the 21st century. Be honest, like me, you’ve been to a wedding that is entirely about the photos. Or there is the professionally created video montage of a beautifully decorated bridal party placed in awkward poses with just the perfect lighting. The rest of the invitees engage in multiple hours of polite, if not painful, conversation with long-lost relatives or semi-inebriated friends of the bridal party.

I might be sounding curmudgeon-ish, but to me, that’s the way the invited guests sound in Jesus’ parable.

Maybe one invitee asks another, ‘Are you going to the king’s banquet?’

The reply: ‘I thought about it, but the big game is on Saturday night. Oh, and I promised my spouse I would clean the boat this weekend. On Sunday, the kids have a birthday party to attend and …’

‘I know’, says the first. ‘It’s just one more thing … We’re just too busy.’

As the invitees do everything in their power to avoid attending the banquet (including killing the king’s servants), Jesus ends this parable with, ‘Many are invited, but few are chosen’.

In the 21st century, theologically, we might understand this parable is directed to the Jews who choose not to come to the king’s party and the Gentiles who are given the next go. In the 1st century, though, no one would turn down the invite. Thus, it’s a strange moral of the story. It feels like it should read, ‘Many are invited, but few accept’. Right? But chosen?

When someone is chosen, they are selected for a purpose or mission. Perhaps the invitation to the kingdom of heaven is an invitation to participate in God’s banquet celebrating Jesus’ love for the entire world. Perhaps Christians have been chosen to serve rather than simply attend.

What does your invitation look like? Are you too busy? What do you think you have been invited and chosen to do?

**King of the banquet, thank you for the invitation to celebrate and participate in Jesus’s work of bringing about the kingdom of heaven. Amen.**

Reid Matthias is the school pastor at St Andrews Lutheran College in Tallebudgera, Queensland. Reid is married to Christine, who is part of the Grow Ministries team. Together, they have raised three incredible daughters, Elsa, Josephine and Greta. Dedicated to the written word, Reid has recently published his fourth novel, Blank Spaces, maintains the blog [*ireid.blogspot.com*](https://ireid.blogspot.com/) and regularly contributes to The Lutheran magazine.