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**Sunday 8 November to Sunday 15 November**

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Sunday 8 November 2020

# God is our ‘good end’

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘The bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut’ (Matthew 25:10).**

Read Matthew 25:1–13

Even though I am confident that I have been redeemed and given new life in Christ, lines such as this one still disturb me. It forces me to ask myself: am I wise or foolish in God’s sight? Will I be one of the ready ones on that day? Will I have oil in my lamp at that time? Will my Lord let me into the marriage feast? Might it be that my Lord says to me, ‘I do not know you’? That’s frightening.

It is good to be ready for important events that are coming up, whether it is setting aside money for the electricity bill near due or keeping to the study plan for next week’s exam. We know that preparation is the work we do to keep us gearing toward, and hoping for, a good end.

In this parable, the good end Jesus is talking about is the good end. It is heaven. And by this parable, we learn that preparedness is the key. Christ is talking to the church, his bride, those who are baptised believers. It is a warning to prepare well but also an encouragement to take seriously being ready for heaven. So, how do we remain ready?

For us, being ready means practising the faith that God has given us. He has already prepared everything; we only have to join in. Church is where God nurtures our faith and provides the oil and the tools to trim our lamps. We trim our lamp and keep it filled with oil as we receive and trust in his word and remain connected to God in prayer. Through absolution, we check the fit of our wedding garment that covers our brokenness. We even practise entering into heavenly joy at church, praising God and having a taste of the feast that is coming. As we receive God’s word, it gives us all the spiritual resources we need now while we wait – wisdom, encouragement, and confidence. These spiritual resources keep us ‘ready’ and sustain us.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for preparing our way to heaven through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Strengthen us, your church, by the Holy Spirit, to teach us your ways and receive your gifts so that we remain confident on the path that leads to your door. Amen**.

Monday 9 November 2020

# God is our source of peace

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed’ (Isaiah 54:10).**

Read Isaiah 54:10–17

Do you ever dare wonder about the magnitude of God’s love for you? Do you ever wonder why he chooses to focus his steadfast love and compassion on you? Do you wonder why God wants you to prosper and for everything that comes from you, such as your children, to also flourish? Does it ever scare you a little and lead you to think, maybe God loves you more than you can love yourself?

In the text today, we are reminded that worldly calamities are real, and they can throw us off course. This text talks about natural disasters, violence, and oppression. Here, God offers comfort to the Israelite people, reminding them that his love is true stability and a source of peace.

When life throws us a curve ball, we tend to cling to visible things, usually people or possessions. But for us, the church, God has revealed himself as the true source of strength and stability. It is from him that we receive the very good gifts of stability and order in this world, such as loving families, safe homes, and peaceful communities.

When we look for comfort in the things of this world, we will ultimately be disappointed. But when we look to God for comfort, his steadfast love flows into our lives and transforms the way we perceive all reality – even a reality that is frightening. This is the peace that surpasses all understanding that keeps our hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing your true nature to us in the Holy Scriptures. Thank you for sending Christ to fulfil and be the way to your peace. Lord, strengthen us as we grow through hardship, joy, and ordinary times. Bless our hearts in our longing for rest in you. Amen.**

Tuesday 10 November 2020

# One way, one door

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able’ (Luke 13:24).**

Read Luke 13:22–30

How many paths are there to God? Some people are convinced that because there are many religions and many gods that there must be many ways.

In this text, Christ tells us explicitly that there is one way, one door, and it is the one he opens to us. He also says that it is not easy to pass through the door. It could be kind of uncomfortable; it may be a bit of a squeeze. Jesus, firmly but kindly, reminds us to take care when exploring the alternative paths and doors because they lead to an ultimately grim place.

Have you been called to follow Christ, but you struggle to get out of bed for the early morning training sessions that sanctify your spirit and push you to wrestle with your nature? Do you struggle to find confidence in knowing that Christ has so many gifts for you that you cannot fully appreciate or understand, including a great heavenly reward? How can you be sure that the owner of the house will recognise you and receive you on that day?

Striving to enter through the narrow door is a picture of the Christian life. We are encouraged because Christ and his Holy Spirit are with us and for us. He shows us the way (the path), the truth (the door), and the life (the ultimate joy). As we strive on this path, we enter into our relationship with God so that by the time that day comes, when we stand at his door, the person who we meet on the other side will be that old and dear friend who we have been longing to embrace as long as we can remember.

**Dear Heavenly Father, give us faith to trust in your goodness, strength, and sustenance as we strive to enter through the narrow door. Lord, send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen our spirit when our bodies and minds are failing. Lord, graciously share with us a glimpse of heavenly joy to encourage us as we grow in our longing for you and your kingdom. Through Christ, the door, Amen.**

Wednesday 11 November 2020

# God’s good pleasure is working with you

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure’ (Philippians 2:13).**

Read Philippians 2:12–18

Have you ever felt frozen about what God has called you to in your life? The particular form of fear I’m talking about is unique to Christians. I think the conflict arises when although we find great spiritual comfort in contemplating God through meditating on his word or in prayer, we still fear the hard, earthly work that God has called us to do. Maybe it is working through relationship problems, facing the mountainous inbox at work, or learning to be a parent. We ask ourselves, ‘Where do I begin? Why am I doing this? How am I to do this?’ Maybe we begin to despair, ‘I’m not great at this, I’m not cut out for this’. And at the bottom, we reflect, ‘Maybe I need to go back and pray and pray and pray’.

Now, I’m not saying that prayer is not the answer, because I think it actually is. But I do think that we sometimes deceive ourselves into believing that praying is limited to a posture of stillness. I received great encouragement in my faith when I realised that God has given me work as a way to pray. We can meditate while we labour, receiving the day’s work as a gift that God has set before us. We are even more fortunate because we don’t do our work alone. We have a teacher and helper in the Holy Spirit who is always with us and at work in us, enabling us both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

We may find the work to be a really hard slog at times, but remember, God is our loving father, and he is the head of our family business. Because of him, we can work peacefully and with joy. We may find that we need redeeming countless times as we make mistakes and need to learn new skills to improve and grow – but remember, Christ understands what it is like to be human and to struggle. He has compassion for you. So, remember to pray and ask for help when you feel you are at your physical or mental limits. It requires humility to do this. Jesus says, ‘Ask and it will be given to you’. Trust in him. It is his good pleasure to work with you!

**Heavenly Father, thank you for setting work before us each day. Help us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling so that we can work for your good pleasure. Help us to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ to do the same and that by holding fast to the word of life, we, like Paul, can boast on the day of Christ that we did not run or labour in vain but were glad and rejoiced over the offering of faith. In Christ’s work, Amen.**

Thursday 12 November 2020

# Joy in suffering

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved’ (Hebrews 10:39).**

Read Hebrews 10:32–39

Is something causing you grief, or are you struggling in some way, physically, mentally, or emotionally? Are you in a battle right now? Can the people around you see it? Or is it a spiritual battle that you are hiding from those you know and love? Spiritual battles are as real as any physical battle. The torments of the mind can eat away at our souls just as much as any physical battle with cancer can waste away our bodies.

Just because you’re a Christian doesn’t mean life is going to be easy. It’s a hard lesson that we all have to go through. For me, I think that in some ways, it seems that life is more difficult as a Christian. It’s as though we have been ‘woken up’ and can see the depths of endless suffering we face as broken people living in a broken world.

It takes courage and confidence to put our trust in our Lord, especially when we are suffering. Sometimes despair wants to take us down its spiral. But we are reminded today that suffering is our training, and our faith in Christ brings a great reward.

As Christians, we have a wonderful resource in Christ to endure suffering. For Lutherans, we call it ‘cross theology’. It is at the cross-point where God breaks into our lives. The weakness of our own cross is like a tear in the curtain through which Christ enters. In the battles we face, we have his name to call on. He comes to fight for us, through us, and with his spiritual army, the church. Oh, the battles the church has fought with prayer – its greatest weapon!

When we are suffering, it is hard to remember the battle has already been won for us by Christ on the cross. Faith teaches us to remember this so that in our suffering, we can rest and pray, rather than clench our fists, get angry, and prepare to fight. We call on the name of our Lord, who hears us and strengthens our spirit. As we do, we learn his plan, his fight, his victory, and his joy.

**Dear Heavenly Father, have mercy on us when we struggle in the battles of life. Send your Son, our Lord Jesus, into our battleground to strengthen us and restore our souls. By your Son, and because of his precious blood, hear the prayers of your church as we bring the needs of the world to your feet. Lord, in your mercy, Amen.**

Friday 13 November 2020

# All is not lost

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God’ (Revelation 3:2).**

Read Revelation 3:1–6

I don’t know what was going on in the church of Sardis at that time, but we know by these dire warnings, it definitely wasn’t good.

God has forgiven, redeemed, and restored us in Christ, and so when we read a frightening biblical text like this one, we ought to remember that, whether it be law or gospel, it is there to teach us as God’s dearly loved children for our good and God’s glory. Knowing this, we can look to find the hope that God offers here. In this text, I am encouraged by the words, ‘strengthen what remains’.

How often do we want to try to address a problem by casting great visions and looking to ideals with the plan of ‘working back’ until things are made right? Here, God’s hot tip is to look at what remains, what we already have, and to work with that.

Taking this latter path is truly a humbling experience and is much more difficult. It can seem so ho-hum at times. Facing the concrete realities of our predicament can feel like being chained to a lead balloon compared to abstract ideals – the possibilities, the potentials, the thought of where we will be in five or ten years. These thoughts, in contrast, make us feel like we are floating on clouds.

Yes, tuning into reality is definitely the harder road. Maybe we’ve made dire mistakes in the past that we need to deal with, or maybe we are forced to face the reality that we’ve wasted what time, people, or resources we have, and that there isn’t much left. It is hard to realise that there will be a long road ahead before we get back on track.

This text is oddly comforting. It encourages us to look to the good that remains because it is still good. Even if it is a little, it has still been given to us by God and is there so that we can prosper. All is not lost. Focus on what we have and work with that. God will join us as we call on him for his wisdom, strength, and the creative power to build his kingdom through his gospel.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us hope when all seems lost, especially in the good news of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Please help us by your Spirit to strengthen what remains in our broken communities, relationships, and lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

Saturday 14 November 2020

# God gives life as time

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**‘So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart’ (Psalm 90:12).**

Read Psalm 90:1–8(9–11),12

Today’s psalm reminds us to adopt a heavenly perspective on life and time. Do you ever make the connection between life and time? They deeply depend on each other. We call our life on earth our ‘lifetime’. Time is lived, and as we live it, we also receive it, and it becomes ours. But we do not possess it. We won’t live forever. This psalm reminds us to learn this, appreciate it, and thank God for it, so that we may become wise.

Do you ever reflect on the gift of time?

It is not particularly wise to only learn to revere time when it is running out. It’s like trying to start a relationship with someone when they are on their deathbed. The wise heart knows that one works on relationships in the present, soberly remembering that we don’t know when there will be no more tomorrows.

But let’s not see this as just another rule to follow. God created everything in love, and so, time is, in fact, a gift of God. God is our dwelling place in every way, including as we live within his gift of time. As creatures created in his image, we also then have the privilege to give our time to others, which is also an act of love.

We have a Saviour who opened up time eternally. Because of Christ, we have time to share with others and to love others. We don’t need to fear that there is not enough time, but we only need to remember to appreciate the time God gives us. If you are worried about getting started, be comforted by the one whose ultimate gift of life perfects all of our feeble attempts at loving people in our time.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of time. Please give us your wisdom to number our days so that we can grow in knowledge. As Christ has given his life for us, help us to grow in love for those to whom we give our lives. Amen.**

Sunday 15 November 2020

# Good and faithful servant

by Annie Duarte

**‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things’ (Matthew 25:21).**

Read Matthew 25:14–30

‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ Aren’t these the words we all long to hear the Lord speak to us when we arrive in eternity? We are all children longing to make our dad proud. As we run the race with endurance, this is the affirmation that awaits us at the finish line. The journey to heaven presents us with countless opportunities to serve Jesus and to make him proud each day.

Obedience is the key. It is faith in action. Real obedience happens when our trust in Jesus is so sure that we feel secure enough to act upon his instructions to us. We are called to not only be hearers of the word but also doers (James 1:22).

You may have found yourself asking God why he hasn’t entrusted you with your lifelong dream yet. When I consider the anointed saints of history, I ask, ‘Why, Lord, have you not called me to a great mission like that?’ But the Lord gently reminds me, ‘You wouldn’t be ready for your heart’s desire if I gave it to you now. You need to learn to obey me in the small things first’.

God is growing me through small acts of obedience. He is making me into the kind of servant he wants me to be little by little, day by day. Earthly parents do this all the time. I want to see that my child can care for a bicycle before I consider teaching her to drive. I want her to remember to feed the fish before we talk about getting a dog. Whatever the Lord has entrusted you with presently is such a gift. It is an opportunity to show him your love and obedience. Carefully consider what God is asking of you right now. He is surely using your current circumstance to build you up so that he can entrust more to you later.

**Jesus, I want to be a good and faithful servant. Holy Spirit, help me to listen and obey and to be a doer of your word for your glory. Amen.**