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**Sunday 6 November 2022 to Sunday 13 November 2022**

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Sunday 6 November 2022

# From what we know to what will be known

by Joanne Corney

**And they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection (Luke 20:36).**

Read Luke 20:27–38

In my faith journey, I have found times of wonder and deep and rich benefits from investigating cultural and original language insights when reading the Bible. Wonderful also have been times when a liberating or comforting sense of elevation has come to me when contemplating the reading. Such times are a gift – often simpler, gentler, not driven by my effort but deep in the impact on my faith experience. Such a space has been mine as I’ve considered today’s reading.

In this reading, we see discussion stemming from a set line of questioning. A question set on a possible scenario involving a circumstance of marriage, widowhood, childlessness, enforced responsibility and ownership – a question that touches on both obligations for now and a wondering of how these subsequent actions reach forward for eternity. Seemingly valid questions of that time as influenced by social order, culture and the governmental model.

Nowhere, though, is it noted by the questioners about the human experience of being immersed in such circumstances – relational love and the loss of a brother or spouse, recurrent loss and grief to the woman and to themselves as brothers, the pain of childlessness if a child has been hoped for, or the two-way gift of kindness – and how it can bountifully bless the giver and receiver if kindness is responsive to need and not offered due to perceived obligation or as a transaction. The questioning seems to have been loaded, but innately, it launches from a platform of obligation – this was a focus, not the heart’s toll.

Jesus responds and takes it to a different platform – the space of eternity, of which we, as yet, have no firsthand experience. As we journey in faith in this life, eternity can be a space that can seem almost familiar but not quite. From this space, Jesus reminds us of what will be eternal. He puts eternity into descriptions that we can begin to grasp on some level as we all know something of death and, generally, we have a perception of angels and have each experienced childhood. He then amps up, taking our focus to God as Father and reminds us of the core place in the Christian faith of resurrection. What a wondersome lift from what we now know to what we believe will be known.

**Merciful God, in our burdens of responsibility and obligations, please help us to do well with what is before us. As it is of help to us, please bless us with comfort and hope from considering ‘always’ with you. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Joanne Corney is an active member of the LCANZ in Queensland. She has served over many years in voluntary parish pastoral care, ministry and development, and representative roles. During the past seven years, she has worked in the delivery of aged-care chaplaincy for Lutheran Services. Joanne’s areas of service in the church stem from her varied professional roles in healthcare and personal roles in life.

Monday 7 November 2022

# A one-off love – unshakable and immovable

by Joanne Corney

**Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed (Isaiah 54:10).**

Read Isaiah 54:10–17

When mountains around the world shake, we’re visually presented with news images. It may be through natural disasters like volcanic eruptions or events like explosions in war. When mountains or hills shake – whatever the cause – the impact is significant. Even only seeing these occurrences via visual media leaves me momentarily stunned and disquieted. I find my thoughts then run to the event’s victims and their fear and shock, their losses and grief, their probable sense of displacement and vulnerability, their brokenness of body, mind, home and family – devastation. 'Confronting and overwhelming' is too weak a description of what happens to people when the mountains they live with shake.

While sitting with the readings for today, I found myself attached to verse 10. I share my experience as it may be similar to yours. This Scripture reaches for an example we can identify and engage with on various levels just by imagining a mountain shaking. Imagining this event gives me shivers and a sharp, small dose of anxiety. But, straight away in this verse, the Scripture tells and reassures us that God’s unfailing love for us is not shakeable like the mountain or removable like the hill – this love will not be shaken. The description in this verse throws up a picture of something deeply disastrous – a mountain shaking or a hill removed – and implies the subsequent impacts. One starts to feel a response to this imagery. Then straight away, the verse redirects our minds. If what we think influences what we feel, this redirection of thought is closely followed by the response of one’s heart. Here then, on both mind and heart levels, this verse affirms that the absolute opposite of ‘mountains shaken or hills removed’ is what God’s love for us is like. The words of this verse carry us away from a ‘shaken’ to a ‘not shaken’ mindset and plant our focus on a one-off love. One like none other – the unfailing, unshakable love authored and given to us by God.

**Merciful God, amid our difficulties and burdens, thank you that you remind us of your unfailing and unshakable love for us. Please bless us in our experience of your love. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Tuesday 8 November 2022

# Our judgements and competitions – a finite experience

by Joanne Corney

**Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last (Luke 13:30).**

Read Luke 13:22–30

Do you like watching historical documentaries? My family does. These documentaries highlight the commonalities between the past and present. They show what’s been continuous through the ages – humankind. The common threads of human behaviour and experience are constant regardless of the time.

I gently observe that it is human to form assessments or judgements of situations, ourselves and/or others (known to us or not). I also notice the place of competition. It is not just a part of team sports or talent quests – it pops up in ourselves with ourselves and others. Both help us live our lives. It is partly our judgements and competition that can underpin our thoughts about who is (or should be) ‘first’ and ‘last’.

In this reading, we see Jesus on the move – connecting with and teaching many in villages and towns as he journeys to Jerusalem. I wonder who was ‘first’ and who was ‘last’ in these visits … how competition popped up in meetings with Jesus as he visited communities. I wonder how this played out alongside his intentional connection with all, regardless of age, gender, wealth, role, ability or popularity, as he lived out and embodied divine love in action.

In this reading, Jesus uses the imagery of a house, a homeowner and dreadful shock and grief in realising that one is not in a recognised relationship as previously thought – it shows a relational breakdown with the homeowner. To help make his point, Jesus sets a scene using these examples we know. He then springboards to unpacking a point regarding the eternal space of the kingdom of God. Jesus helps listeners understand what it means to be in a known relationship with the homeowner (God) and to be with him. Jesus shows that our judgements and competitive endeavours won’t influence who will be there. He infers these may leave us surprised as to who is present to share always with God. Jesus highlights those in heaven will be from all over the globe. In the eternal space, the earthly ranking of last or first is obsolete. The enduring point will be relationship with God. We can be grateful that God makes this possible for all.

**Merciful God, thank you that you help us to understand the divine and eternal mysteries by using examples of what we understand from our daily experiences. Please help us to know and grow in a known relationship with you. Help us to feel hope and know your love more deeply. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Wednesday 9 November 2022

# Starlight, star bright

by Joanne Corney

**Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault ... Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky (Philippians 2:14,15).**

Read Philippians 2:12–18

Do you like to gaze at the sky or stars? I’m often amazed by the light in the night sky. The moon grows from new to full and back again. Alongside this are the stars. They appear varied in size, in the intensity of light and in the speed of their twinkle. They pop against the black backdrop of night – the more you look, the more you see. Stars appear as little individual lights, but together they provide light in the night sky – starlight is consistent and persistent in its offering to the earth and universe.

The text says to do everything without grumbling or arguing. ‘Everything’ could be considered service – not only ‘big’ or ‘extra’ service but everyday giving in care and doing. Service to myself, my family, work and community (whatever shape that takes). From time to time, one can see grumbling and arguing arise alongside the doing – indeed, I’ve experienced it. I’ve grumbled when I’ve felt burdened; I’ve had too many serving demands, and the ‘light’ from my service has faded in me and from me.

To be ‘blameless and pure’ and allow my ‘starlight’ to shine, I’ve learnt to do what I can, where I am, when and how I can. In serving this way, my grumbling is calmed, and my joy and satisfaction in serving are real. I keep an eye out for my grumbling or arguing as a method of knowing that I’m under load and need to take stock.

There’s an old saying, ‘Flowers leave their fragrance on the hand that bestowed them’ (author unknown). Service can be like that. There can be a blessing to all involved – the server and recipient. I sense that ‘doing everything’ is not meant to be so hard that we react by arguing or grumbling internally or externally, nor should it be that we just absorb it and internalise these responses or reactions. The stars shine in the night sky, each doing what they can in their piece of space. Then collectively, their lights combine, sharing starlight, giving form to the night sky and providing navigational reference – stars bless. May we be able to shine like them and know blessings from both sides of service.

**Merciful God, thank you for the blessings of service – both being served and the opportunity to serve. Help us to know balance and joy in serving and accept the blessing of being served. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Thursday 10 November 2022

# This too will pass

by Joanne Corney

**You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions (Hebrews 10:34).**

Read Hebrews 10:32–39

Wearingly, conflict and suffering are experiences of life – some abide with us for short times and others for long periods. Sometimes we experience them as we journey alongside those in the thick of it. When you are in it, sometimes there doesn’t seem to be a way out of it – one endures it. It is a hard and heavy space. We share the experience of suffering, but the circumstances of it vary.

In this reading, the writer is using the past tense – it seems to highlight a time of great difficulty that has passed. It highlights how extreme, personal and public the experience was. We infer how costly it was to them personally, socially and financially.

From having known suffering, I find help from the words of this letter. Paul reminds the recipients that this particular suffering has passed. He acknowledges that it was very tough and costly, but that they are on the other side of it. Understandably, there appears to still be a toll on these people from their experience. And, with care for what they’ve weathered, Paul encourages, ‘So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded’. It reads that their ‘confidence’ was very important to them as they endured their unenviable circumstances. This ‘confidence’ from knowing and having experienced the gospel message of Christ is what helped them to persevere, hold to their belief and stand alongside others. Paul notes it was just as important after the suffering as in it. In fact, one could think they were ‘wobbly’ after the travail, and Paul reminds them to use their ‘confidence’ in the aftermath just as they did in the difficulties. It points to not throwing away ‘confidence’ or their belief in any circumstance.

Hopefully, we each can find the words of Paul to the Hebrews helpful, comforting, tender and supportive for times that arrive when one can only endure and wait for them to pass. As needed, may these words of Scripture gift help.

**Merciful God, thank you for the encouragement of Paul to remember our ‘confidence’. As the need arises, please help and encourage us in our faith, particularly in times of difficulty. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Friday 11 November 2022

# Wake-up calls

by Joanne Corney

**I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die (Revelation 3:1,2a).**

Read Revelation 3:1–6

Many people study the Book of Revelation intensely. They are scholars of Revelation. I am not. What speaks to me from this reading is based on curiosity about Sardis and its church.

For context, Sardis was once one of the greatest world cities, the capital of Lydia, in 6C BC, and it was enormously wealthy. It was built about 457 metres above the valley floor and considered virtually impregnable to military assault. Only twice did it fall to invasions – once by Persians and once by Greeks. Both victories were achieved via stealth and seemingly assisted by the city’s complacency. Sardis was so confident that it couldn’t be overcome because of its walls and geographical position that it reportedly did not guard its walls adequately. Conquer occurred at night, with enemy soldiers climbing up the ravine, entering via unwatched gates, and overthrowing the city.

In this reading, it is the church of Sardis that is directly confronted. A wake-up call is issued. In the space of one sentence, it’s plain that their deeds are noted, and their reputation for being alive is known, but this church is now evaluated as ‘dead’. Straight after this wake-up call is issued, they’re directed to honestly see where they are at, determine what they have left, strengthen this and work toward completing deeds unfinished. A plan for them to get on track and move forward is provided – they are to remember what they’ve received and heard, hold to it, and have sincere remorse that things went wrong. The reading then outlines what will happen if the wake-up call is not heeded.

Although this reading is pitched at the entity of a church, I’ve found a personal response to it. A wake-up call could apply to me at various times on various levels. One can only speak of one’s own response; mine began and concludes with curiosity aroused by this reading – it leaves me contemplative. Every blessing to you.

**Merciful God, please enliven us with your presence with us. Please inspire and strengthen us in our journey with you and in our service. Hold us close in your love for us. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Saturday 12 November 2022

# Reaching through the ages with joy

by Joanne Corney

**Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music … shout for joy before the Lord, the King (Psalm 98:4,6b).**

Read Psalm 98

Have you ever experienced reading or listening to words and instantaneously feeling the emotion of them? It can be wonderful if the words are full of joy and celebration.

This has been my experience of Psalm 98. I have found gifts in the poet’s imagery. It offers imaginative pathways that, with ease, bring forth images of people shining with jubilation, brimming with joy and subsequently using their voices to shout and sing and their musical talents to play harps, trumpets and ram horns. It is a positively intense scene of individuals expressing themselves musically and each offering combining to create one of giant joy! They are extroverted and energetically create and raise a jubilant song and sound, with hearts using the medium of music to put on the outside what is so big, it’s uncontainable within. They are inspired by their experience and knowledge of God doing marvellous things stemming from his love for them, his faithfulness and righteousness and their confidence in his salvation for them.

I appreciate the chance to imagine this scene and ‘look in’ on it, as it were. Their experience seems to reach forward in time and encourages me. It has reminded me of the joy that can be in knowing and journeying with God – the same God they rejoiced in. They remind me to be encouraged and joyful for the same reasons they were.

So many people have been encouraged through the generations in their joy in God by the words of Psalm 98. It has been a shared experience reaching forward through the ages. What a thought!

**Merciful God, thank you for your love and faithfulness and the joy that knowing this brings. Please encourage our hearts in our journey with you. In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Sunday 13 November 2022

# Christian life – a marathon, not a sprint

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**By your endurance you will gain your souls (Luke 21:19).**

Read Luke 21:5–19

Many of you would recognise the name Usain Bolt. He is the only person to have won the 100-metre and 200-metre gold medals at three consecutive Olympics. I imagine that very few of you, however, would recognise the names of Samuel Kamau Wanjiru, Stephen Kiprotich and Eliud Kipchoge. These were the gold medallists for the Olympic men’s marathon in the same years. Why does the sprint hold such a high status for us? Perhaps it is because we are so often drawn to what is immediate, exciting and dramatic rather than what is long-term, seemingly ordinary and gradual. There is something important to notice here in relation to our Christian life.

In the longer text for today, Jesus speaks to his disciples about the end of the temple and the end of the world. In either case, there is a need for Christians to be spiritually prepared for the great calamities of history and not be led astray by those who would deceive them. He encourages the disciples that he will help them bear witness by his Holy Spirit in the face of betrayal and persecution. Through all this, our Lord says there is a need for his disciples to have endurance. The trials Christians face in this life aren’t to be met by short bursts of spiritual energy but rather by the long-term durability of the ordinary Christian life. Following Christ is more like a marathon than a sprint.

We cannot, of course, endure by our own strength. We look to the one who, for us, ‘endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God’ (Hebrews 12:2). He sends us his Spirit, who works in us an abundance of hope (Romans 15:13), which pulls us forward when we feel like giving up – an experience every marathon runner feels at one time or another. In your struggles through personal spiritual growth, life in the church, vocations in the world, mission and evangelism, remember the big picture of the marathon we are in and hear the call to endurance. By it, you will gain your soul.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for protecting and providing for us amid trials and temptations. Encourage us when we are downhearted or afraid, and give us the gift of endurance. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Joshua is married to Kimberley. Together they have four children. He is a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia and previously served at St Paul’s, Nundah, in Queensland, and Bethlehem, Adelaide, in South Australia. Currently, he is pursuing doctoral studies at Concordia Seminary St Louis, USA, and enjoying the adventure. He posts videos on a YouTube channel called Kairos ([*www.youtube.com/JoshuaPfeiffer*](http://www.youtube.com/JoshuaPfeiffer)).