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**Sunday 11 July 2021 to Sunday 18 July 2021**

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Sunday 11 July 2021

# The gift of a clear conscience

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**But when Herod heard of it, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised’ (Mark 6:16).**

Read Mark 6:14–29

I doubt that a modern person would jump quite as quickly to ‘he’s been raised from the dead’ as an explanation for something unexplainable as Herod does in today’s reading. This is especially so when we remember that John died by beheading. We can be quite certain that people do not come back from that kind of death. So why does this thought get at Herod and become so convincing in his mind?

Herod clearly has a disturbed conscience about killing John the Baptist and all the events that led to it. The reading tells us that Herod liked to listen to John, although he was perplexed by what John had to say. John’s integrity as a ‘righteous and holy man’ was well known. His words were good and true. It was the very truth of his words that stirred up John’s conscience as he pointed out Herod’s unlawful relationship with his brother’s wife, Herodias. Herod knew that the murder of John was unjustified.

The conscience is the place in the human soul where we can fully realise the grip of sin. Through a complex interplay that involves reflection on action, imagination, conscious and unconscious thought, we consider our past actions and intentions for the future, our triumphs and mistakes, and the role we play in life and before God.

A good or clear conscience is something we all long for. None of us is entitled to a clear conscience; we live in a broken world that is tarnished by sin. Yet, we know what a clear conscience is by what it is not. It doesn’t haunt us at night, it doesn’t replay our regrets, and it doesn’t hold us back from taking healthy risks in life with confidence and hope.

Through the shed blood of Christ, our peace has been restored with God, and our conscience is cleansed. As we receive that underserved gospel gift of Christ’s power over death, the devil and all his works, in our baptism and again and again through the word and sacrament, Christ calms the furies of our conscience. That same power by the Holy Spirit enables us to look at our earthly reality. We may have to face the consequences from the past, but in so doing, we have hope because the eternal consequences are no longer. This frees us to live in hope, joining in his Spirit as we face, embrace and find joy in our earthly vocations.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Christ to be the sacrifice that cleanses us from sin. Renew us as we daily receive your gospel gift that sets us free from sin’s power. Give us hope in your Spirit that sustains us as we face the messiness of life and the peace that surpasses all understanding, keeping our hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Monday 12 July 2021

# Christian integrity

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper (Genesis 39:23).**

Read Genesis 39:6–23

Integrity. That’s the quality that comes to mind when I think of Joseph. Joseph earned his master’s trust and served him so well that eventually, he became his right-hand man. Why and how did he do the right thing? Especially with such ability, even when he was wronged and put in prison? Was it because he was ruthless, cunning, competitive, driven, ambitious, or striving after money and power?

No, his motivation didn’t come from the worldly kingdom at all. It came from the kingdom of God, from God himself. As a Hebrew person, Joseph had special access to God through the promise of his forefathers. He knew God’s love for him; it was reflected toward him by his father Israel’s love. Joseph also knew that to sin against his master on earth was also to commit a far graver sin, to sin against his master in heaven. The two kingdoms were intimately connected in his every meditation and decision. Joseph was living with his God, ‘the Lord was with him, and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper’.

In Christ, we, like Joseph, are given special access to God. You may have struggled in your efforts at integrity in your life. If so, take heart – in Christ, you are also given a straight path towards it. Not by focusing on the tasks set before you, but by focusing on God through his Son. By the power of the gospel, we are forgiven all our sins and renewed. As we keep our eyes on Christ, we are helped along by the Spirit to turn away from the temptations that block our path. When we slip, we are picked up and set back on the path by his word and sacrament. Simultaneously, we are strengthened and renewed again and again to enter into our earthly vocations by his grace. As we grow, we, like Joseph, are given the joy of living in God’s radiant light, knowing that the Lord is with us in all that we do and is blessing the work of our hands.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus into the world to open to us a door to your gracious and unfailing love. Lord, have mercy on me and help me in my weakness. Forgive my sins against you and the ones you have called me to love and serve. Please help sustain me by your word and sacrament so I can live in peace with you now and into eternity. In Christ, Amen.**

Tuesday 13 July 2021

# Confession for spiritual health

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, ‘As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die’ (2 Samuel 12:5).**

2 Samuel 12:5–13

David – what a mess! Even he could see that it was bad. He got angry, and it sounds like he would have served the death penalty to anyone else for doing what he did. The prophet Nathan certainly had a clever way of stirring up repentance in his impenitent king.

The story of David’s sin, the lust in his heart that turned into coveting, adultery and eventually murder, reminds us of God’s commandments. David would have known them, yet he grew lazy, complacent, and they fell from his sight. David forgot that the commandments are a gift for our good, to keep us out of trouble. The first three are about our relationship with God, and the other seven help us live a God-pleasing life with those around us. We, like David, can’t say we don’t know what they are. Even David, who was blessed beyond measure, couldn’t deny them when he was confronted by Nathan.

Christians today hold up the Ten Commandments as a guide for living a godly life. Without them, things can fall apart pretty quickly. Martin Luther went to great lengths to teach the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism. The commandments help us to realise our sin, where we fall short and our need to ask for God’s saving grace and forgiveness. Not because we lack worth, but for exactly the opposite reason: because we are so dearly loved by God, who is invested in us and plans to keep us in his love. As often as we practise repentance, we enjoy the benefits of being released from the burden of sin. It’s actually a healthy spiritual practice!

David, realising the severity of his sin, repented. He received the Lord’s forgiveness, although he still had to face the consequences of his actions. The Lord has forgiveness for you too. If you find you have a sin weighing you down, consider unloading it on the cross of Christ through confession and absolution next time you are at church. If you have a particular sin plaguing you, you may find it beneficial to ask your pastor to take you through the rite of private confession. It will be Christ’s joy to release you from that burden. After all, that’s what he came for.

**Lord, have mercy on me, a poor helpless sinner. I confess to you all my sins. I am sorry for the ways I have displeased you and ask you, for the sake of your dear Son Jesus, to take them from me and give me new life. Create in me a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within me. Grant me the faith that longs for eternity in your presence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 14 July 2021

# Contentment as a gift from God

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him … He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat (1 Kings 21:4).**

Read 1 Kings 21:1–21

As a mother of young children, I am extremely familiar with the effect that not getting what you want can have on a person. Sometimes, I am called to remind my children about some of life’s harsh realities. I find myself saying, ‘Yes, I can see how much you want “X”, but it is not yours to have’. Our children remind us of our own feelings of disappointment as we watch them wrestle with and express their dissatisfaction: whether it be by tantrum, tears, angry outbursts, sulking or even the cold shoulder. King Ahab here masters the art of sulking.

His wife Jezebel, out of a desire to please her husband, thought up a plan to get him exactly what he wanted. She carried out her plan that involved forgery, fabrication, false testimony and resulted in murder. After all, she only wanted Ahab to be happy. I don’t doubt that in her mind, overcoming the obstacle of Naboth and his vineyard was an act of true love, albeit far from an honourable one.

In Christ, we are able to discover that God’s plan for our life is good and unlike his plan for anyone else. Everything you have has been given to you out of God’s abundant goodness and mercy. Your possessions, your family, your community, and even your faith in God is a gift. When we give thanks to God for his gifts, we are reminded about who he is, his goodness and his love for us. We are freed from looking over our shoulders at what other people have. Then we can find contentment in the circumstance that sets the stage of our own story.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me faith in you through Christ that gives me eyes to see you and the gifts that come from you. Please help me to find peace and contentment in the gifts you have given me and the life you have called me to lead. Please hear my prayers when I struggle to sort out the desires of my heart. Help me to desire good things that are according to your will and flow out of your merciful goodness. In Jesus Christ, Amen.**

Thursday 15 July 2021

# Do you know what your spirit truly needs?

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming … He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16).**

Read Luke 3:7–20

I have always found John the Baptist to be a peculiar character in the Bible. His role as a forerunner to Christ, his off-beat style, unusual diet, and abrupt manner with people, rebuking people by calling them a ‘brood of vipers’. But for his every oddity, he draws me in. I don’t doubt that his peculiarities had a way of making his message stand out.

He brought a baptism of repentance, stirring people’s spirit so that they were ready to receive Christ. Part of that included reminding people to seek contentment. He urged people to consider the greed in their hearts and not strive after what does not belong to them. It was likely that this message upset King Herod and landed John in prison. For King Herod had another man’s wife, and he had no intention of returning her.

Asking people to seek contentment can be tough for many in our church and in the world today. It seems the world has commodified so much in our lives that it is as though there is a proverbial social media thread that exists to brand and sell back to us all the images of the life that we think we want. It is filled with people and things that all appear to be exactly what we want, but perhaps it is just a little too good to be true. Christians are humans, too, and can be drawn in by the messages of the world. We know deep down that striving after worldly ideals won’t satisfy but will only make us hungry for more.

So, what does repentance have to do with Jesus? As we wake up and realise that there are things that have a hold on us and begin to turn away from them, we realise we don’t really know what we want or need. Repentance creates room for us to shift our focus from the things of the world to something else. That something else is God, and we find God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Finally, it is essential to remember that John the Baptist’s message didn’t end with repentance. He always pointed to the one mightier than he, Christ our Saviour and Lord, in whom we have everything we need now and for eternity.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending John the Baptist to show us that repentance prepares the way for Christ to enter our hearts. Fill us with all that we need in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Friday 16 July 2021

# Christ: the great change agent

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**Live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God (1 Peter 4:2).**

Read 1 Peter 4:1–11

Have you ever had to make the call, ‘Enough! I’m done!’? Has life ever felt like you are on a train that you can see is going nowhere, or worse, going somewhere you don’t want to go? If this is where you find yourself, this reading is for you.

We are encouraged to remember that Christ has suffered for the whole world, yet in today’s reading, we are called to take on suffering, too, because ‘whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin’ (1 Peter 1). How good does it sound to be finished with sin?

Here, Peter says that as a Christian, you will need to be prepared to suffer. The suffering he is referring to is in fearlessly rejecting old habits and behaviours and entering into a new life – the life that God has called you to grow into, according to his will.

This text is also extremely practical. It says that you should be ‘serious and discipline yourself for the sake of your prayers’. Here, he is saying that now you have been given access to God and have received the gift of prayer, don’t take it for granted. Reorder your life so that the precious gift of faith in God is paramount. By putting God first, you allow for God’s love to flow through your relationship with him and into your earthly relationships.

So, discipline yourself to remain in Christ. Go to church to hear the word and receive the sacrament, read the Bible and pray and let go of the things that threaten to hold you back. If you are able, hang out with Christians. You may be invited to enjoy some Christian hospitality. You may also come to realise that all Christians are imperfect, simultaneously saint and sinners, just like you. But you’ll also discover that, like you, they are being transformed daily by Christ as they grow in faith in God and in love for others – a love that ‘covers a multitude of sins’ (1 Peter 4:8). It is good to realise that all Christians are on their way to their heavenly home – no-one has arrived. Knowing that the victorious work of Christ is finished on the cross and that the end of all things is near, we can find hope as we continue on the journey leading us into God’s glory.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for extending your grace to all people and by your mercy revealing to us your will for our lives. Send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us so that you may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belongs the glory and power forever and ever (1 Peter 4:11). Amen.**

Saturday 17 July 2021

# Christ’s abundant love meets our every need

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want (Psalm 23:1).**

Read Psalm 23

Do you ever think about why ‘I shall not want’ comes after ‘The Lord is my shepherd’?

Often when we think of Christ as our Good Shepherd, we imagine ourselves as his sheep. Maybe we are prone to getting into trouble or wandering off, and we remember Jesus, our shepherd, who guides and protects us, keeping us on a safe path. The Good Shepherd also provides for the sheep so that they lack nothing. In this prayer, we also receive the gift of contentment that we find in Christ, as we have discovered in several of our readings this week. Contentment in God is opened up for us in Christ.

In Christ, you are given a new life where you walk with God. What does this mean? It means that every morning as you rise, God’s blessings are made new. God is with you on the days you dread giving you courage; the days filled with sadness giving you hope; sounding the heavenly choir with you on the joyous days; and comforting you when you are grieved. God is faithful; he can do no other, and he wants to give you everything you need at the proper time. So, as you pray this psalm, give thanks to God for his goodness and mercy and his love that is always shining on you. Thanks be to God for all the gifts that come out of his abundant mercy: life, love, peace, courage, faithfulness and joy, to name a few. They certainly make any worldly wants seem pretty minor by comparison.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for opening up to us the abundance of your love in Christ. Send us your Spirit so that we can faithfully look to you when we find ourselves in want. Please send your Holy Spirit to help us when we are tempted to find satisfaction in worldly things. Help us to grow in your love so that we can share your gifts with those you have called us to love and serve. In Christ, our Lord, Amen.**

Sunday 18 July 2021

# Are we afraid to disturb God?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them (Mark 6:34).**

Read Mark 6:30–34,53–56

When looking at the passages for this week, I was drawn to a common thread about God’s compassion and faithfulness to us, who are often faithless.

Our passage this morning occurs before the feeding of the 5000. It concludes after Jesus walks on water (well worth reading all of Mark 6:30–56). Matthew indicates that Jesus and his disciples are almost overwhelmed by the number of people, and so they escape via boat to a quiet place – they (including Jesus) just need a break from the crowds. However, the large crowd gets there before them. Does Jesus lose his temper? Does he tell his disciples to send them away? No! He has compassion for them. He sees their need, and he teaches them (and as the story continues, he miraculously feeds them).

Are we at times afraid to disturb God? Are we worried that he may be too busy? Or perhaps we don’t think we really matter to him, and thus, we shouldn’t bother him? These are the sort of suggestions the evil one throws up. Our God, the God of the Bible, has compassion on us; he hears us. We should be like the crowd and race to get time with our God. We should be eager to spend time with God praying, reading his word and spending time worshipping with fellow believers. In our need, are we prepared to let God teach us, as Jesus taught the crowd?

Jesus died for you. Through his death and resurrection, you are a child of God. Your Heavenly Father wants to hear from you, and you can be assured that as with his dear Son, he will have compassion on you!

**Heavenly Father, renew in me the joy of your salvation. Help me to better hear your Holy Spirit as he encourages me to come to you. Forgive me for doubting your compassion. I need your help to better see who you are through your beloved Son, Jesus. Amen.**