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**Sunday 21 March to Sunday 28 March**

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Sunday 21 March 2021

# A kernel of wheat

by Dianne Eckermann

**Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (John 12:24).**

Read John 12:20–33

This is not the only time during this Lenten season we hear Jesus talking about what will happen to him: his death and even an indicator of how he will die at the end of the passage.

Here in verse 33, he uses a rather beautiful image of a single seed of wheat becoming more than one seed after it falls to the ground, germinates, grows and produces so much more. One seed is a sacrifice for ongoing life. Similarly, Jesus sacrifices his life for so many so that through him, each of us has life, like a field of wheat growing and ripening in the sunlight.

During our lives in this world, we will have times of disappointment when our hopes and dreams do not go as planned. We could respond by only surviving, like a single kernel of wheat. But knowing that Jesus knew that his life and death had a purpose, we can live life fully sharing in the love of Jesus.

In verse 26, Jesus goes on to say: ‘Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be’. Living with Jesus is about being a part of his death and resurrection. It can be easy to focus on the resurrection and the joy of Easter. But without Jesus’ death, the resurrection not only could not occur, but it would also be meaningless, just as a full ear of wheat could not grow without the sacrifice of a seed. Through serving and following Jesus, we invite him into our lives. God is with us as we live our lives to the full through him.

**Jesus, we thank you that your life, suffering, death and resurrection was all for us so we can grow in your presence. Guide us each day as we share your love through our service to those around us. Amen.**

Monday 22 March 2021

# Festival of Tabernacles

by Dianne Eckermann

**Some said, ‘He is a good man.’ Others replied, ‘No, he deceives the people.’ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders (John 7:12,13).**

Read John 7:1–14

Fear is a powerful motivator. We only need to look at the way some coercive governments use the fear of arrest or violence to control people. Or we can look at the ways whisper campaigns can create fear by undermining a target. Even more prevalent is the fear of what might appear on social media posts.

In today’s reading, Jesus attends the Festival of Tabernacles secretly. He knew the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill him. But it was not fear of death that concerned Jesus. He attended in secret because he still had much to do, and it was not the time for the leaders to silence him. Attending an important festival would ensure Jesus had a large audience. So he began teaching at the temple partway through the festival, unafraid of the Jewish leaders.

He probably heard the whispers about him as he arrived at the week-long festival in secret. As he moved through the festival crowd, he would have heard comments from some people who thought he was a good man; some thought the opposite. The Jewish leaders did not want Jesus discussed at all, so the fear of the leaders may have subdued the comments. But the impact of Jesus’ teachings meant that he was a significant topic of discussion.

Fear itself did not dampen the discussions about Jesus. Fear did not stop those who thought he was a good man from praising him. Fear certainly did not stop Jesus from attending the festival or speaking in the temple. In our lives, we need to have no fear in speaking up for Jesus or in boldly proclaiming him as our Saviour.

**Dear Jesus, we thank you for the goodness you show towards us each day. We ask you to give us the strength to share your love boldly in your name wherever we see injustice, hurt or harm. Amen.**

Tuesday 23 March 2021

# Jesus, a sign from God

by Dianne Eckermann

**If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation (John 11:48).**

Read John 11:45–57

Today’s passage follows on from the raising of Lazarus. This very public and remarkable act astounded people who came to see the risen Lazarus. Many believed in Jesus from that time onwards. The threat Jesus posed to the powerful Jewish leaders was increasing day by day. Jesus was becoming popular, and that in itself was a threat; he was a threat to their power and even their existence.

While Rome was clearly in charge of its empire and could brutally put down any dissent, it generally had a relatively light touch when it came to local customs and religions. But the Jewish leaders were very worried they would lose their temple, and with that, their nation. Herod ruled only with the support of the Romans, and the Roman Pontius Pilate ruled Jerusalem, so their concerns were real. In fact, the temple was later razed by the Romans in 70 AD.

The Jewish people were always looking for signs that the Messiah was coming, but they did not expect Jesus to be the Messiah. They acknowledged him performing many signs. They acknowledged that many people believed in him, and they could only see this growing. But they did not explain why belief in Jesus would mean the loss of their nation. Despite the signs, they were blind to what this meant and to the nature of Jesus and so they feared the worst.

We can probably empathise with the chief priests and Pharisees as they voiced their concerns over the potential loss of their temple and nation. But it is more likely they felt concerned about their subsequent loss of personal power. They undoubtedly feared the political instability that the followers of Jesus might bring, but their only solution to this was to kill Jesus.

We can also understand emotions like fear, but we also have trust in God, knowing we are his children. Thus, we may live our lives based on this trust and not on fear.

**Heavenly Father, we come to you in trust and thank you for your guidance in our lives. May we let trust and love, not fear, be our support when needed. Amen.**

Wednesday 24 March 2021

# God, our comfort

by Dianne Eckermann

**For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ (2 Corinthians 1:5).**

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11

There will have been many times where we may have complained about suffering in our lives. In recent weeks, I have complained about the power going off unexpectedly, about the cost of repairs to a minor scrape on my car, and about feeling tired after work. Not once did I consider I was lucky to live in a country with a good, well, reasonable, power supply. Not once did I consider I was fortunate to own a car, nor did I consider I was lucky to be able to work. These are not really examples of suffering where I feel in need of comfort; they are merely inconveniences. There are others in much greater need.

Today’s verse begins by praising God for providing comfort. Christians are not miraculously protected from troubles or trials in their lives. This was something that Paul knew well as he suffered frequently from persecution for his faith. He was sustained by his faith and the comfort of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this letter to the Corinthians, Paul shares what seems to be a conflicting image of suffering and comfort. The city of Corinth, a seaport, was a tough place to live. No doubt, the diverse community saw considerable suffering. This was a needy community in many different ways; however, it was not a community that Paul left to suffer alone. It was a community he supported through his visits and letters. Here, he tells the people of Corinth that where there is suffering, there is also comfort.

When Paul thinks of Jesus on the cross, he shares in his suffering, but he also shares in the ongoing comfort that comes as a result of that incredible suffering. This is the glory of Christ crucified, the glory of the cross. God does not see our suffering from a distance and leave us to drag ourselves through it alone. Instead, God suffers with us; he carries us through hardship and shares his comfort with us.

**Dear God, we thank you for your continual presence, particularly during times when life seems harsh and unfair. Help us to understand that where there is suffering, there is also comfort. Support us as we share your comfort with those in need. Amen.**

Thursday 25 March 2021

# Fix your eyes on Jesus

by Dianne Eckermann

**Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest (Hebrews 3:1).**

Read Hebrews 3:1–8

I remember one sermon from when I was a small child. We had a guest preacher – an older, retired man who had grown up in Germany. I was fascinated by his German accent as well as the story he told. He spoke about his childhood where, even as a young boy, he had helped on his family’s small farm. It was such a small farm that there was very little machinery. He had learnt to plough a field with a horse and plough, not a tractor. In the distance, he could see his local village and the spire of the church. His father had taught him to keep his eyes on the church spire so that the furrow behind him would be straight and true. He used this story to explain the importance of fixing our thoughts on Jesus.

Today’s verse from Hebrews not only urges us to fix our thoughts on Jesus but also acknowledges Jesus as our apostle and high priest. I don’t often think about Jesus as an apostle. It is a title given to the original 12 disciples and also to Paul after he became a Christian. The word comes from a Greek word meaning ‘a person sent out’. This perfectly describes the ministry of Jesus in this world. He came with a message of good news, a message of salvation for all people, which is certainly something we can meditate on as we fix our thoughts on Jesus.

We can also fix our thoughts on Jesus as our high priest. One part of the role of the high priest was to offer sacrifices to God. Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice: himself. During the Lenten season, this sacrifice is uppermost in our minds. We know that through this sacrifice, we are offered grace, mercy and forgiveness. So, we can lift our eyes to Jesus, the apostle, the high priest and the sacrifice, a guide like the church spire, but so much more.

**Dear Jesus, we ask you to help us to fix our thoughts on you so we may understand your sacrifice and what it means for us. Help us also to understand the enormity of your grace and mercy that we do not deserve but you offer to us anyway. Amen.**

Friday 26 March 2021

# Our best life

by Dianne Eckermann

**For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28).**

Read Hebrews 7:23–28

Jesus is unique! We could spend a great deal of time exploring the many ways in which he is unique. Today’s passage tells us that Jesus has been made perfect forever; he is our high priest. He is not, however, like other high priests when he intercedes on our behalf. He is blameless and most significantly, he has overcome death. This changed something in our relationship with God.

We may not know much about high priests today, but what we do know is that Jesus, as our high priest, takes the focus away from the law, which we cannot by any means fulfil. Both law and gospel come from God. The law tells us what we should be and what we should do, while the gospel is the wonderful news that God forgives our sins, and we are made holy in Jesus. It sounds simple, but because of our human nature, we are exceptionally good at justifying ourselves and overlook the amazing gift of God’s grace offered freely to us.

I’ve lost count of the number of times I have heard people announcing, ‘I am living my best life’, or, from those who are still struggling to reach this pinnacle, ‘I just want to live my best life’. Just what a ‘best life’ looks like is unclear, but it would seem that it is something that, with a great deal of effort, we can all achieve.

Our best life is already there, on offer to us through Jesus, the high priest who sacrificed himself. We are not required to work towards this goal; it is offered to us. The law shows us that because we cannot help but sin, we are separated from God. But through our high priest, Jesus, who has been made perfect forever, and through the Holy Spirit, we can come to God – truly our best life.

**Father, thank you for providing us with Jesus and through him your precious gift of forgiveness. Help me to continue to grow in faith through the power of your gospel at work in me. Amen.**

Saturday 27 March 2021

# God is good

by Dianne Eckermann

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: for his steadfast love endures forever! (Psalm 118:1)**

Read Psalm 118:1,2,19–29

These words have been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I recall sitting around my grandparents’ kitchen table after meals (apple crumble was a favourite dessert). Before my grandfather would push his chair back, roll a cigarette and begin recounting the stories of his day, we would always give thanks. It’s not surprising I always associate this verse with a feeling of great comfort and thanksgiving: good food, the love of family and a special-occasion visit to my grandparents’ house.

This psalm begins and ends with the same words of thankfulness for God’s love and goodness. It is not the only psalm that includes these words, so we hear repeatedly that God is good and his love endures forever. Repetition of this message really emphasises its importance. So, we can confidently thank God for his amazing goodness towards all people.

We can also confidently offer thanks to God because his love endures forever. His love for his creation has always been in existence; it exists right now and will continue always. God’s love is so great that he sent Jesus to save each one of us. Jesus knowingly gave his life for us for the same reason.

Jesus refers to Psalm 118 in Matthew 21:42. He speaks of the stone that the builders rejected, the cornerstone. He knows that the great welcome he has received into Jerusalem will not last and that he will be rejected. But such is his great love for us that he will undergo a harsh and brutal death to save us. Unlike the fickle crowd who welcomed Jesus before turning on him, God’s love remains a constant in our lives. And for that, we can offer him great thanks.

**Heavenly Father, we can never thank you enough for your unchanging love or the great sacrifice of Jesus, your son. Please help us to appreciate this great sacrifice and truly understand the depths of your goodness. Amen.**

Sunday 28 March 2021

# Jesus, the king of the simple

by Darren Pope

**Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ‘Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!’ (John 12:14,15).**

Read John 12:12–16

I love the way Jesus does stuff that is so simple and so powerful as an example to those around him. He knew he couldn’t book an Uber to Jerusalem. He didn’t have a fancy entourage to provide luxurious transit, so he just got on with sorting out a lift for himself. The journey of Jesus in Passion Week echoes metaphorically in our lives each day.

It is too easy for us to overthink stuff, make extravagant plans or focus on the wrong things. Jesus hopping on a smelly, wobbly, obstinate and dead-slow little donkey allowed the journey to be the focus rather than a distraction for the ‘how, who, where or when’ of getting there. Jesus just gets about it. He knows what he has to do and keeps it simple. How good is it to know that no matter what, Jesus is coming! He’s on his way into our lives, our days, our relationships, our jobs, our streets and our homes. And he brings the simple message of hope and love in partnership with his Father, through the free gift of grace.

Jesus comes to us every day. Simple!

**Lord and king of simple, thank you for coming to me each day in grace. Amen.**