****

**Sunday 31 March 2024 to**

**Sunday 7 April 2024**

****

Sunday 31 March 2024

**What just happened?**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed (John 20:8).***

Read [John 20:1–18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A1-18&version=NRSVUE)

It started with a sprint between a slower athlete and a faster one.

As you read this, you might think, ‘Ah, yes, the race to the tomb’. Brought on by Mary Magdalene’s revelation of the empty grave, the two disciples dashed off to see for themselves. Perhaps Mary’s words, ‘They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb’, were frightening enough that they needed to run. Maybe their thoughts started with, ‘What just happened?’

I’ve thought those words before, too.

Steven Bradbury was the oldest racer in the 1,000-metre speed skating field. After four races, he had nothing left in the tank for the final. His coach, Ann Zhang, told Bradbury, ‘Look, you are the slowest skater in the field, but the others might make a mistake and crash. Stay behind them and, if the opportunity arises, you could win a medal’.

Zhang’s words were prophetic. Bradbury won gold after the others crashed. In 2002, he also became the first athlete from the southern hemisphere to win a gold at the Winter Olympics.

I remember watching the replay of that race and thinking, ‘What just happened?’ I saw it with my own eyes, but I didn’t understand it.

Like Peter and John on the very first Easter, do you ever feel like that nowadays? Have you experienced the pageantry and pomp, the lilies and triumphant songs, and yet felt a sense of … ‘What just happened? Do I really understand it?’

Maybe this Easter, for the first time, you might experience the true, earthshaking relevance of the empty tomb, the risen Christ – he who was reviled and crucified, the one who seemed to finish dead last – proclaimed as the ultimate victor. When everyone and everything else has crashed, Christ has won, and we are the recipients of his golden deed. And as we ask that question, ‘What just happened?’, Jesus responds, ‘Resurrection. What was once thought dead is now alive. Victory’.

God bless you on this victorious Easter as Jesus, once again, raises his hands and celebrates with us. Death, sin and the devil have no more power. They have crashed.

God wins.

***Heavenly Father, through your son, Jesus, the victorious risen Saviour, we have eternal life – here and now and then. Thank you. Amen.***

*Reid Matthias is the school pastor at St Andrews Lutheran College in Tallebudgera, Queensland. Reid is married to Christine, who, together with their three incredible daughters, Elsa, Josephine, and Greta, have created a Spotify channel (A 13) where they have recorded music. Reid has recently published his seventh novel, A Miserable Antagonist, maintains the blog* [*ireid.blogspot.com*](https://ireid.blogspot.com/) *and regularly contributes to The Lutheran magazine.*

Monday 1 April 2024

**Hearts on fire**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?’ (Luke 24:32b).***

Read [Luke 24:13-49](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24%3A13-49&version=NRSVUE)

On January 12, 2007, an amazing thing happened near the Metro station in Washington D.C. A young man wearing jeans and a long-sleeved t-shirt, began to play the violin. It was evident to all who passed, and especially those who paused, that the young man had talent. He played for 45 minutes, enjoyed the hearty applause from the select few who stopped and, when finished, he picked up his violin case and deposited the handful of coins – 32 dollars worth – that had been unceremoniously chucked into it, into his pocket and whistled his way away from the station.

Some would have walked away wondering why their hearts had burned with beauty after the young man’s performance. Amazingly, if they would have shown up at the Boston Symphony Hall three days earlier, they would have paid 100 dollars to hear Josh Bell, one of the preeminent violinists on the planet, play his 1713 Stradivarius.

Hundreds had the opportunity to stop and hear the master, Josh Bell, play for free, but most were too busy and missed out on the opportunity to have their hearts set on fire.

When Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, they had no idea it was the Master of all Creation walking with them. Without cost and without reservation, Jesus ‘sang’ the Music of Salvation and the Song of Hope to these men. While so many in Israel had passed Jesus by, these two had front row seats to the masterpiece.

And when they had finished, and Jesus had disappeared from their midst, it almost sounds as though they were breathless. ‘Were not our hearts burning within us…?’

This is what the risen Jesus does for all of humanity. He offers himself free of charge, and the time we spend with him is full of beauty and the majesty of the Father’s Song of Salvation. Have you heard the song lately?

Question: When was the last time your heart burned within you for the sake of faith?

***Thank you, Jesus, for your miraculous gift of salvation. For the free gift of grace through your life, death and resurrection, I am overwhelmed and grateful. Thank you. Amen.***

Tuesday 2 April 2024

**Passing the peace**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***‘When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house”. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them. If not, it will return to you’ (Luke 10:5,6).***

Read [Luke 10:1-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A1-17&version=NRSVUE)

Before COVID-19, there was a part of the service I called ‘The Introvert’s Worst Recurring Dream’. In church terms, the bulletin read … PASSING THE PEACE.

Typically, extroverts would turn en masse to the nearest people and shake hands or (worst case scenario) open their arms for a hug. This ‘passing of the peace’ would last for agonising minutes – lots of ‘Hello’s’ and ‘How are ya’s’, maybe a recap of the week, and finally – mercifully – the pastor would jovially proclaim, ‘All right, you can all go back to your seats now’.

I sometimes wondered what the point was. What was ‘passing the peace’?

In our scripture today, Jesus sends out 72 willing, able, and (presumably) peaceful servants who will act as ambassadors for Jesus as they go ahead of him to the towns, to individual homes, to share his peace. As they enter houses, they are to pass the peace (of Jesus) to the inhabitants and, if the residents are promoters of peace, it will stay. If not, it bounces back, I guess.

Is this what happens in churches? Do we herald the peace of Jesus? Do we share this peace which entails confession, forgiveness, grace and all the fruits of the Spirit, or is it simply a catch-up time for those who might have been late for the service?

I’m tempted to think that the designation of peace, and the passing of it, was to prepare others for Jesus’ coming. As you are promoting peace, think about the words that facilitate the grace of God coming to individual houses. While small talk might be necessary, maybe this phrase could be a later follow-up: ‘No matter what you are feeling or going through at this moment, may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.’

 ***Holy Spirit, let your peace be upon me. Help me to be a promoter of peace and one who passes it on to others. Help me not only to feel peace, but to be peaceful. Amen.***

Wednesday 3 April 2024

**The kids are all right**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children’ (Luke 10:21).***

Read [Luke 10:17-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A17-24&version=NRSVUE)

Seventy-two adults returned from their apprenticeships as ambassadors of peace and healers of the sick. The scripture does not say how long they were away, only what they were to do, and that they went ahead of Jesus. As Luke describes it, I picture the reunion like kids who, when figuring out how to ride a bike, or fly a kite, or do something they previously thought unimaginable, they came screaming up to Jesus: ‘You’re not going to believe what we just did!’

Even though Luke doesn’t describe the minute details, I can’t help but imagine a smirk on Jesus’ face, a hand on their backs, (You know, like what your mum or dad did when you succeeded at something) and says to them, ‘Okay, okay, that was fun, I know. Calm down. Don’t let your joy be overrun by what you did; think about the big picture. Your names are written in the Book of Life because of what God is doing. Nothing can get at you. Ever.’

Jesus thinks of the disciples as God’s children. They were excited. Though it was amazing to the disciples that they were given power over the spirits, it would be God’s work in Jesus that would be the final blow to Satan and all his schemes. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s saving work on the cross, every believer, saint and sinner alike, escaped the clutches of sin, death and the devil.

This Easter season, rejoice that the work of Jesus reveals your name in the Book of Life. Nothing can get at you. Ever.

Describe one time in your life when you used your gifts to bring about goodness. How would you imagine Jesus responding?

***Thank you, Jesus, for writing my name in the Book of Life. Give me bold strength to use your gifts in the world. Amen.***

Thursday 4 April 2024

**The Master at work**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***But (the expert in the law) wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘Who then is my neighbour?’ (Luke 10:29).***

Read [Luke 10:25-37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A25-37&version=NRSVUE)

‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’

The expert asks a masterful question; the Master responds expertly. This scenario is pure Jesus and a masterclass on engaging with people about faith.

1. **Jesus returns the expert’s serve with a question**. Instead of answering and closing the book on the question, Jesus invites the expert into a conversation and relationship. That’s what questions do. ‘What does the Law say? How do you read it?’ (vs. 26)
2. **Jesus acknowledges the expert’s opinion.** (vs. 28) Jesus doesn’t shut him down even when the expert tries to justify himself. When we acknowledge different opinions, even if we don’t agree with them, we build a bridge for continued relationship.
3. **Jesus invites the expert into a story.** (vs. 30-37) It would have been quite simple for Jesus to humiliate the expert’s racism, superiority and arrogance, but instead, Jesus told a story to help the expert draw the right conclusions. As I read the end of the story, I don’t get a sense that the expert went away angry, offended, or ready to retaliate on social media. It feels like he leaves to chew on what he has been taught.

Perhaps the question for us is, are we prepared to ask questions of those whose opinions differ? Are we willing to hear the thoughts and ideas of others? Are we willing to invite people into the story of faith using everyday symbols that allow others to draw their own conclusions?

 ***Holy Spirit, thank you for bringing people into my life who ask great questions. Help me to be curious, listen and hear their stories as we journey through life together. Amen.***

Friday 5 April 2024

**Sit with him**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to (Jesus) and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’ (Luke 10:40).***

Read [Luke 10:38-42](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A38-42&version=NRSVUE)

Admit it. Every one of us has either spoken those words aloud or shouted them inside our heads when one of our siblings, cousins, or workmates has taken the easy (read ‘lazy’) way out. We address an authority to come down hard and make that person help, right? And while they’re at it, can that authority give me some accolades for doing all the tough work?

Here’s another admission. Martha’s words don’t just apply to cleaning or cooking or working, I have at times said this to Jesus when it feels like super-martyr-me is doing all the God stuff while everyone else is going to the beach. ‘Jesus, don’t you care that everybody else is slacking off while I work by myself? Tell them to help me!’ And while you’re at it, can you announce to them when they come back that I’ve been the most faithful one all along?

When I read this Bible story about Jesus’ closest friends, two sisters and their brother Lazarus, I secretly cheer for Martha every time. It’s the fairest way of looking at things. Once the work is done, THEN we can all settle in for story time with Jesus.

Thankfully, Jesus does not berate Martha, but he gives a different perspective, one that she can hold onto. Only one thing is needed and important at that moment: to be with Jesus. All the other good works that feel important, the religious tasks, slaving over devotions, cooking up some good prayers, cleaning out the spiritual closets, serving worship at church – all these are great things – but only one thing is needed to experience eternal life: Him.

Set down your good works for a while and sit with Jesus. Be with Jesus. Listen to him. It’s a restful new perspective.

***Jesus, your words and life are amazing. Give me hope and rest as I listen and search for you. Amen.***

Saturday 6 April 2024

**Dripping with blessing**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1).***

Read [Psalm 133](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+133&version=NRSVUE)

Imagine going to your favourite restaurant, and sitting at an adjacent table was a bearded man stuffing large pieces of oily pizza into his mouth. And then, as you watched, the grease from the pizza dripped down his beard and onto his clothes. Revolting, right?

Now listen to these first two verses of our reading today: How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe.

To our 21st century imaginations, revolting, right?

Aaron, though, the anointed spokesman of Israel, had oil poured from the top of his head where it flowed down – down to his beard, and down to his collar. The blessing of unity is from above and moves from head to heart.

In theory, I get the metaphor – anointing oil, blessing from above… check. I believe there are better metaphors for unity, not to change the wording of the scriptures, but to offer a modern equivalent.

How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity. It is like an emptied bottle of champagne at the wedding of loved ones, pouring down into crystal glasses, toasted to God’s blessing and for long life and happiness for the couple.

Have you been to a celebration like that? Unity is the symbol of weddings and, as the gathering joyously celebrates, they recognise that God is in the very centre of the proceedings.

When is the last time you felt unity among God’s people? What is another metaphor you might use for unity?

 ***Heavenly Father, thank you for your blessing from above. Help me to be unified with other Christians and enjoy that blessing. Amen.***

Sunday 7 April 2024

**'Ruach' - Spirit, breath or wind**

by Sal Huckel

***Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’. And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:21,22).***

Read [John 20:19-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A19-31&version=NRSVUE)

We probably cannot comprehend the traumatic effects on the disciples of the death of Jesus and the disappearance of his body. It’s hardly surprising that even after the account of Mary Magdalene they are still locked away in a private place in fear of their own lives.

Reflect for a moment on the healing effect of the words of Jesus: ‘Peace be with you …’ he breathed on them, and repeated it.

They are not just words, they bring the Holy Spirit and healing. Physical and spiritual healing.

We can forgive Thomas. We don’t know why he wasn’t there. We read nothing to show that Mary’s account was believed by the disciples either. Thomas wanted to experience Jesus himself. In his trauma how can he believe anything right now?

Yet with Jesus’ grace for Thomas, we also read: ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’.

That’s us. That’s you and me. We don’t have what we might feel is the ‘luxury’ of the post-resurrection sightings of Jesus but we have the Holy Spirit in us through our baptism, we have the word of God in the Holy Scriptures and we have God’s promises and all of these accounts through which our faith is nurtured. We don’t need to hide away in upper rooms. We are not in danger of our lives when we are identified as God’s people. We have the responsibility to share our faith with others; we are instructed, like the disciples, to forgive the sins of others: ‘ … if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’.

Outside the upper room, what are we doing with our freedom? Just as Thomas was no good isolated and alone, neither are we. Nurture your faith. We have freedom to worship in our church family every week and the responsibility to share our faith and God’s love in our daily lives.

***Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do. Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure, until my will is one with yours, to do and to endure. Amen. (Edwin Hatch 1878)***

*Sal is married to Pastor Matthew Huckel, and they live in Victoria with their six children. Music, theology, literature and languages are passions the family share and explore together. Sal loves writing, speaking and walking to the beach at every opportunity.*