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**Sunday 30 July 2023 to Sunday 6 August 2023**

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**In the end the bread will rise**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till all was leavened (Matthew 13:33 ESV).***

Read Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

God’s Word today invites us to contemplate the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. Our reading gives us four images to meditate on: the tiny mustard seed, the hidden leaven (or yeast), the treasure hidden in a field, and the merchant in search of that perfect pearl. These each offer us a peculiar way to consider the mystery of Christ’s power and reign over heaven and earth. The parables tell us that the kingdom of God is both hidden and life-giving—seemingly impossible to find, yet when discovered found to be of priceless worth.

So, what do we know about the kingdom of God? We know that Christ is the reigning King (2 Peter 1:11). We know that the kingdom of heaven has come in Jesus, and that we are called, like Him, to abide in the Father’s will so that we may enter it (Matthew 7:21). We also know that God’s kingdom bridges earth to eternity. It is not time-bound, neither is it limited to earthly things, nor is it set apart in a far-off spiritual realm (Revelation 11:15). It is both/and - temporal *and* eternal, now *and* forever.

If we only see things in an earthly sense, then God’s kingdom easily goes unnoticed. We know that the church is full of imperfect people who carry the scars of sin and struggle under the law. Nevertheless, like a pinch of yeast dispersed through a huge basin of flour the church ­– the scattered people of God – are called to be servants of the kingdom. For those with eyes to see, we know that that the yeast of God’s Word is working through the dough, growing God’s kingdom in faith and transforming all it touches. In the end the bread will rise. The church is called to receive and share God’s life-giving words of hope, peace and joy and to go out into the world with those same words. We bring Christ’s merciful gift of redemption to restore the world’s brokenness.

Christ’s kingdom reigns in his church in every time and place. As we honour God’s word, gladly hearing and learning it together, we can use it to pray for others, the world and ourselves. We pray that the Holy Spirit will bring God’s gift of grace and mercy to us. God’s word is the transforming agent. Let us be servants of the kingdom, dispersed through the world to bring God’s restorative mercy to His creation.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that your kingdom has come and grows in a hidden way like leaven in flour. Please bless us by your Word to grow our faith, hope and love. Through our reigning king, Jesus Christ, Amen.***

*Kimberley Pfeiffer is married to Joshua and they have four children. She is a member of the Lutheran Church of Australia and has served in various forms of churchwork. She is currently studying in the Graduate School at Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, USA. She is enjoying the challenge and the adventure abroad.*

Monday 31 July 2023

**Christ is the very ground on which we stand**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward (1 Corinthians 3:14).***

Read 1 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:15

In today’s reading, the Apostle Paul was writing to the people at the church in Corinth. Paul had been away for some time, and his sapling church was struggling along. Things weren’t going very well, and upon hearing about the quarrels and conflict, Paul sent this message to encourage them and lead them into the mysteries of God.

Paul wanted to reveal to them a deeper understanding of the wisdom and power of God in the cross of Christ, but first, he needed to show them that their thinking was not being ruled by the Spirit of God. Paul pointed this out as he reflected on their concerns about which leader to follow – Paul or Apollos. This matter was causing them great unrest. As in every generation, we do well to reflect on how this relates to us in the challenges we face in our own church.

Paul showed them that they were thinking about their problems in the wrong way. They were relying on human wisdom. He said that the only way forward for the church is to seek the wisdom of God with the help of the Holy Spirit, who reveals and teaches spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:10–13).

Paul opened their minds to the wisdom of Christ by helping them to look beyond what they could see in the human sense. He showed them that the cross is the only way, and this would require patient endurance in their spiritual growth as a church. They could only do this by putting their trust in Christ as their spiritual foundation, their stable base. Paul goes on to say that this will be hard because it will go against everything they thought they knew – after all, the way of the cross is folly to the world.

As we read God’s word today, we, too, can be reminded of the importance of placing our trust in Christ as our only foundation. One blessing from this is that we are set free to appreciate our pastors for who they are and not pick them apart for what they are not. We can thank God that we have them and that God has given them to us for our growth in faith and love as we learn with the saints to walk in the way of Christ.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to be your church’s firm foundation. Lord, you know how fragile our faith can be when we are fearful about the future. Teach us your ways, and raise up faithful servants to nourish your church with your life-giving word. We ask this with the help of the Holy Spirit and in Jesus’ name. Amen.***

Tuesday 1 August 2023

**Everything is taken care of in Christ**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***For God’s temple is holy and you are that temple (1 Corinthians 3:16).***

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–23

Today’s reading follows on from yesterday’s, with St Paul continuing to teach the young in faith at Corinth about growing in wisdom according to the Spirit of God. After reminding them that the very foundation of their lives rests on Christ, he now takes this further to show them how they ought to see themselves. Paul says, ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple?’, and goes on, ‘For God’s temple is holy and you are that temple’.

Temple imagery of the Old Testament is hard for any 21st-century person in Australia or New Zealand to understand, let alone the young and those new in the faith. When we rely on human wisdom alone, it becomes doubly difficult, if not impossible. Paul labours this point, saying that we should not deceive ourselves by thinking that we are wise; instead, he says that we must first become fools and trust in the word of the cross as the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

So, what is a more helpful way to reflect on this? One way is to turn to Christ and his word by considering how Jesus himself refers to the temple. In John 2:21, Jesus speaks of the raising of the temple of his body. Paul also wrote about the church as the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18) and encouraged the Ephesian church as they grew into the holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).

Sometimes in the church, we meditate on Jesus and his body in the sacrament without thinking about how this extends to us in our present and physical reality. Here, Paul is telling the people of God that God’s Spirit is present in the physical church and that, in Christ, they are a holy place, a holy people. The temple in the Old Testament was where God could be called upon for help and protection, and his blessings could be received. Knowing this, we can trust that when we, as the people of God, gather as the church to pray and receive God’s blessings, we are made holy.

Although it seems crazy to the world, St Paul reminds us again today that we are sanctified in Christ. Therefore, as baptised people who live and move and have our being in the word, we should trust that the Spirit dwells in us physically so that Christ can extend his merciful love to the world through us. Like the Corinthians, we should always remember, ‘We are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s’ (1 Corinthians 3:21–23).

***Dear Heavenly Father, in Christ, you have given us, your church, everything we need to live according to your will and walk in your ways. In faith, sanctify us by your Spirit of truth so that we can bring Christ’s grace, mercy and peace to your broken world with confident hope. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Wednesday 2 August 2023

**Servants who proclaim Christ’s saving word**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1).***

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1–7

How easy is it to get ahead of ourselves when we worry about the future? Even in the church, we can be at risk of having our minds run away from us with all kinds of forward planning, especially when we have a good cause for worry. Paul addresses this very issue in this letter to the Corinthian church.

So, what is the big problem for the Corinthians? We already know things were not ‘all roses in congregation land’. We read that there had been jealousy and strife (1 Corinthians 3:3) and that they had been trying to find a strong personality to follow (1 Corinthians 3:4), and it even seemed that they were looking for something more than what had been written to help them solve all their problems and navigate life.

Here Paul urges the congregation to regard himself, Apollos, and those called to the public ministry as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Why do you think he points to Christ and the mysteries of God and not to the person delivering the message? Perhaps it is because, without Christ, they have no reason to be doing anything at all.

Pastors are given to the church by God to proclaim Christ’s saving word and administer the sacraments faithfully for the people of God so that they can grow in faith, hope and love and enjoy God’s gifts. It seems that in Corinth, the body was moving before the head. The people seem to be seeking something or someone other than Christ, as revealed in God’s word. Therefore, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, Paul declares he or Apollos cannot take the church beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6) because doing so would disconnect the congregation from Christ.

No doubt those guided by worldly wisdom will think it is foolish to be guided by pastors who are often untrained in things like organisational management and business leadership. However, those who are led by the Spirit of God look to their pastor, knowing they will find Christ in his word as it is proclaimed, there with his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. Let us, therefore, thank God for those pastors who have been entrusted by God with his mysteries in Christ.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your servants into the harvest. We pray that the churches will continue to raise up servants who will teach according to your word of truth. Grant us with the help of your Holy Spirit to grow us in the truth of your written word so that we may be sanctified and receive the blessings of the mysteries of God now and eternally. Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.***

Thursday 3 August 2023

**Relentless chatter**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power (1 Corinthians 4:20).***

Read 1 Corinthians 4:8–21

We live in an age where we can hear opinions from more people than ever. With YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and more, we all could add to the relentless chatter of the internet if we so desire. We also know that the abundance of talk that can be found on social media platforms is not always helpful, especially when the subject matter is being discussed in a forum that has no power to do anything about it. People just start ranting and raving. We’ve all seen it.

I think Paul is getting at something like this in today’s reading. People in the congregation at Corinth had been wasting a lot of breath, scheming and huddling in little groups about how things should or could be done in the church. The problem is they had no actual power. So, what did they do? They got caught up in a relentless cycle of talk.

Meanwhile, Paul was in the mission field, so he let them know how he was going with building the kingdom of God. He told them that he had become like a man sentenced to death, labouring and working with his hands. As Paul wrote to them, he was hungry and thirsty, poorly dressed, buffeted and homeless. He said it was like he had become the scum of the world! He castigated the Christians at Corinth for acting like kings while he suffered to show them their arrogant ingratitude towards God’s blessings – blessings that they had received from God through Paul himself. They could not see that they had been blessed to reach beyond their church and were called to support and continue the growth of the kingdom of heaven. Instead, they were like selfish little children protecting their treasure, boasting about their good fortune and forgetting those who suffered for them.

Out of fatherly concern for his children in the gospel, Paul did not rebuke them in order to embarrass them but urged them to return to their lessons in the way of Christ. He promised to send Timothy to help them, so they could return to Christ and his word, to discover and remember that all the power in the church comes from Christ and his word alone.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending servants of your word to the church to teach the faith and grow the kingdom of God. As the people of God, help us to look past our own interests so that we can share your gift of grace, mercy and peace, so your kingdom may flourish. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.***

Friday 4 August 2023

**Cleansing dead dough**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (1 Corinthians 5:6b).***

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1–8

I always appreciate the concreteness of the illustrations Jesus gives us about the kingdom of heaven. On Sunday, we reflected on Matthew 13:33 and how the kingdom of God is like yeast hidden in three measures of flour. Today, Paul uses leaven or yeast to describe how badly immorality affects the community of saints in the church. I think this is important for our Western and post-modern sensibilities to hear. We all know how scandal can lead to destructive gossip and unrest in the church, and it becomes important how the leaders in the church handle such matters. When these things happen, members can fall away as they become spiritually discouraged because of this public hypocrisy. We must soberly recognise this risk.

Here, Paul is saying that immoral behaviour has such dire consequences on the spiritual unity of the body that the whole cannot live. He says it is so bad that the dough has no hope of ever being good again, so he recommends it be cleansed. I find this interesting because when it comes to bread-baking, dead yeast, even if mixed in dough, cannot be salvaged. It is better to get rid of the dough and start again.

Paul proposes that the church be cleansed from within. He recommends that the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth is the only fitting way to celebrate the final Passover feast. Jesus’ blood shed on the cross for us is the only thing that truly cleanses us and the world from sin. So when public sin enters the church – which it will ­­–­ we in the church are wise to consider God’s grace that was given to us through Christ’s sacrifice and to sincerely trust in it. We can ask Jesus in prayer and through his sacrament to cleanse the body of our community so that it can be healthy again. As Christians, we are called to live our lives as holy and sanctified members of Christ’s body, always remembering that we, too, have been cleansed and taking care not to hinder the light of God’s grace as revealed in our behaviour that is always on display in the church and world.

***Dear Heavenly Father, by your grace, you have redeemed us by the blood of Christ. Help us, by your Spirit, to live as your children in sincerity and truth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Saturday 5 August 2023

**Your creator’s care for you**

by Kimberley Pfeiffer

***The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18).***

Read Psalm 145:8,9,14–21

Psalm 145 gives us a glimpse into God’s character. The psalmist here is giving thanks to God, marvelling over God’s greatness, and returning blessings to God in prayer. It is no small thing to know who God is, what he is like, and what he thinks about us and the whole of his creation. As the post-Christian West continues to distance itself from the church, more and more people are growing up without the knowledge that the God who created the universe loves and cares for them in a way that gives life hope and ultimate meaning.

This psalm shares with God’s people about God’s goodness. The psalmist writes that God is gracious and merciful, full of power and the ruler of his glorious kingdom; the Lord is faithful and kind; the Lord preserves and raises up those who are brought low and feeds everyone who looks to him for their needs to be met; God provides for everyone who calls on the Lord in truth and cares for those who know, fear and trust in him.

Like the psalmist, we can give thanks to God for revealing himself to his people of old and us in the person of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us access to his goodness and mercy so that our prayers rise to the Father coupled with those of his very own Son. When we find ourselves afflicted and brought low in our life, we can know who we are and rest secure in God’s merciful hand. We know who we can turn to, cry to and call upon whenever we need help.

Pray like the psalmist and live with God. In Christ, who is truth, God our Heavenly Father hears our prayers as his own dearly loved child. We have nothing to fear because, in Christ, God’s everlasting and glorious kingdom is ours. Knowing this and trusting in God’s promises, we know that anything we suffer in this life cannot be compared to the glorious splendour of everlasting life with God that has already begun.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing yourself to us in your word in the prayers of the psalmists. By your grace, help us to pray to you by your Spirit through Christ so that we can endure suffering and grow in faith, enjoying the blessings of your kingdom. Amen.***

Sunday 6 August 2023

**Bring them here to me**

by Pastor Steve Liersch

***‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered. ‘Bring them here to me,’ he said (Matthew 14:17,18).***

Read Matthew 14:13–21

I was okay at maths during my school years, but to the best of my ability, five plus two doesn’t equal five thousand. I often wondered at the size of the fish and loaves in this story, thinking that the fish must have been massive and the loaves enormous. My mind would wonder about the person who brought them. Did the mother in their household represent the first Scout Leader who had the mantra, ‘always be prepared’, firmly etched in their thinking as they headed out each day?

How easy it is for us to enter any number of situations in life that seem overwhelming with a list of what to bring running through our minds? Think of what you might need as you enter a room full of strangers, knowing you have to cope with conversations with them. What will I talk about for two hours over the dinner table? How can I make the new person at the office feel more at home? What can I give to the neighbour in my street who has just moved in?

Being prepared is one thing – trusting God to provide us with what we need is often another. When Jesus gave directions for the people to be seated, he revealed something so wonderful about himself that should catch our attention also: Jesus turned to his (and our) Heavenly Father, gave thanks, and distributed what was necessary for the people in that situation, even if that meant those observing couldn’t see a logical or possible good outcome.

I can’t help but think of what little I often have when entering some of life’s overwhelming situations and how underprepared I am for the task ahead. It's wonderful to know that turning to our Heavenly Father to multiply our ‘little bit’ will provide enough for the best outcome. A smile, a flower or 10 minutes of our time can leave plenty of room for him to do what he does best – answer our prayers using that which we willingly offer him to bless those present in some way.

What resources, skills, gifts, talents and abilities do you have that God can multiply to bless others?

***Heavenly Father, thank you for taking what you have first given me to use to bless others in ways I could never have imagined. Please do it often so that you can be honoured and glorified. Amen.***

Pastor Steve and his wife Angelyn are virtually empty nesters living in the beautiful southern Perth coastal suburbs near Warnbro Sound beach. He likes gardening, watching sports, working on home projects and spending time with his wife and children. He is constantly seeking ways to help connect people to Jesus in a meaningful way.