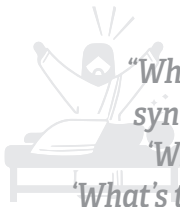
A hand is shown pouring water from a small, dark brown ceramic jug into a large, weathered brass pot. The water is captured mid-pour, creating a clear stream that falls into the pot. The pot is filled with a dark red liquid, likely representing the miracle of the water and wine at the wedding in Cana. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Miraculous JESUS

Lenten
Devotional
Booklet



“When the Sabbath came, Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

‘Where did this man get these things?’ they asked.

‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?’” Mark 6:2 (NIV)

Even back in Jesus’ time (2,000 years ago), people were asking the same questions we do today – **‘Who is this man Jesus?’** He was able to do things that no one else could. It was prophesised back before

He was born that things would happen to Him and there would be things He could do that would amaze us all. I have chosen the title **‘Miraculous Jesus’** for a reason. Through this season of Lent, we will go through each of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) in turn, discovering all the amazing miracles Jesus performed through His life and even into His death. Towards Easter we will also touch on the prophesies telling of Jesus’ life and how He would die.

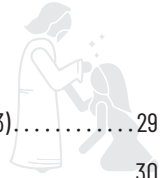
Jesus is God’s Son come to earth to heal, teach and show the love of God, His Father for all His children. I pray that you will be able to see the extent of God’s love for you in Him sending His only Son to earth to show the selfless servant in Jesus Christ. Jesus performed miraculous healings and signs of wonder in nature. He still does the same for us today, if we have eyes to see, faith to believe, and hearts to understand.

The Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday and goes right through to Easter Sunday – there are 40 days and 7 Sundays (culminating on Easter Sunday). This is a booklet of 47 short devotionals, Bible readings and prayers for each day during the Lenten Season (including Sundays).

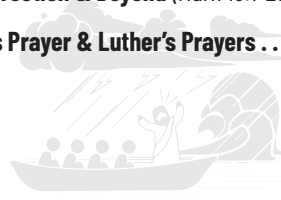
The Bible readings take you through different readings sharing the wondrous miracles of Jesus. Each day, we will walk through a devotion dwelling on the love of God, working through Jesus.

**Wonder in awe at the wisdom
and remarkable miracles!**

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A Soft Word

Ash Wednesday

Read: Matthew 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.”

Matthew 4:1 (NIV)

There is a quote by Oscar Wilde, “I can resist everything except temptation.” Have you found that if a block of chocolate or packet of biscuits or chips is opened it is much harder to resist to have just one more bite than if the packet had never been opened? Now, why is this? Temptation always offers the most delicious fruits. We have already failed in our resistance, so why not partake more? I can have a sealed packet of chocolate biscuits in the cupboard and not eat any. But as soon as I have just one... well soon the packet is empty.

Unlike me, Jesus could resist temptation. He was able to resist food when He had been fasting for forty days; He resisted absolute power when being shown all the kingdoms of the world; and He resisted having to prove to others His identity. The devil placed these temptations before Jesus, and we can see them as metaphors for the temptations that come to us regularly. Stones to bread is instant gratification as well as hunger relief. When showcasing the kingdoms of the world, the devil puts glory over authority – who of us doesn’t enjoy the ‘glory’ and spotlight? Lastly, the devil offers security both physical and spiritual, reducing God’s love to one of testing rather than trusting. The temptations were personal to Jesus and to us!

This story of Jesus has always encouraged me. Jesus was able to turn away the devil’s darts and arrows with a soft word of Scripture. Scripture turned away all temptations. Jesus did this throughout His ministry. This is an example for us, to memorise and take God’s Word to heart to help us in all and every situation. Every situation that we can find ourselves in, there is an answer in Scripture. This Lenten season, instead of perhaps ‘giving up’ chocolate, coffee or sweets, maybe try ‘taking up’ reading the Bible, memorising verses and praying daily. In this way we are protecting ourselves from any worldly temptations that may come our way.

A soft word of Scripture is all that is needed.

Prayer: Jesus my great example, you teach me constantly through the Bible how to live and conduct myself in my daily life. Help me daily to turn to you as my source of protection. Amen.



Willingness

2nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 8:1-4



“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.” Matthew 8:3 (NIV)

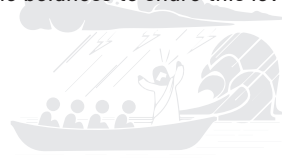
I have been reading into the disease of leprosy and why it was so feared. Maybe I should fear it as it is also known as ‘Hansen’s disease’. Basically, it is an infection caused by a bacterium that is very slow growing. This disease is not spread through casual contact with someone who has leprosy by hugging or shaking hands or sitting next to them, rather through prolonged contact over months with someone who has untreated leprosy. These days it is rare to contract leprosy, but it does still exist with most cases in Asia, Africa and South America.

In the time of Jesus, leprosy was described as a skin disease and was considered a sign of uncleanness or a sign of divine punishment on the person. The types of leprosy referred to in the Bible could be anything from the condition of psoriasis to actual leprosy (Hansen’s disease). To be struck with a skin disease was to be considered a social outcast for the rest of your life. We all have experienced a bit of this feeling during 2020 and contracting COVID-19. Only through showing healing and cleanness from the disease to the priests is to grant you access into any sort of normal social acceptance. So, upon hearing that there was a man called Jesus who could heal him, this leper, from the Bible reading, went to all lengths to be healed. With the man coming up to Jesus the people around him would have scattered, but Jesus didn’t.

Jesus touched the man and was willing to heal him. Immediately his leprosy was gone. Sometimes we might feel that our sin is like a leprosy... we are too sinful to come to church, to be with other Christians. Jesus is willing to reach out to heal and forgive us from all our wrongdoing. At church we receive this forgiveness and the willingness of Jesus to make us clean and acceptable before God. Knowing Jesus’ love to ‘touch’ me and ‘heal’ me brings comfort and confidence to live out each day with Jesus.

The touch from Jesus brings healing.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your unconditional love and forgiveness. You accept me and allow me to be clean and holy in your sight. Give me boldness to share this love with others. Amen.





Unworthy

3rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Matthew 8:5-13

“Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that moment.” Matthew 8:13 (NIV)

Have you ever been invited somewhere where you felt out of place, or not sure why you were there? A few years ago, when we first moved to Noosa, it was found out that I played flute and so soon enough the Noosa Orchestra conductor came to me and asked me to be in the orchestra. I told him that I wasn't as good as the others and he said, "You play what you can, and we will be happy to have you." So, I did and practised hard and enjoyed my three years with the orchestra, even though there were many more times I felt unworthy and inadequate.

I wonder what it would have been like to be walking around with Jesus. He was God's Son walking on the earth accepting all, healing all, there was no presumptuousness about him. There was no air of arrogance or pride, rather Jesus lifted others and lowered Himself in humility. In the above story of the centurion, he came to Jesus feeling humbled and unworthy in His presence, but in this he showed great respect, trust and faith in this Saviour of the World.

A centurion, who had distinction and rank, came asking for help for a servant. Who cared for servants? Let alone a centurion? This was remarkable. But he spoke humbly to Jesus speaking of his authority and power, but also his unworthiness. Jesus recognised this humility and faith and that he was a man who cared deeply for others. Jesus honoured the centurion's plea and healed the servant. Do we treat God with the respect deserved? Do we humble ourselves at His feet begging for mercy and knowing that we are not worthy for God's love and forgiveness? God does deserve our respect and honour, but He accepts us as we are and as we come to Him - we are forgiven and loved!

Healing takes place in all forms – body, soul and spirit!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord God, for showing me your love and forgiveness every day. I am not worthy of this, but you lift me up and promise me your gift of grace. Amen.



Touch of Love

4th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Matthew 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39



“He [Jesus] touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.” Matthew 8:15 (NIV)

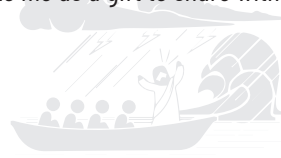
I have yet to be a mother-in-law, but as of last Friday, I will be one after Easter this year. Being a mother-in-law means that you care for the one who is caring for your child – an important job! In Jesus’ time women and widows were always cared for by a son, but Peter showed compassion for his wife’s mother in caring for her, as it appears that the mother-in-law is living with Simon Peter and her daughter. Peter’s brother Andrew and possibly children are also living there, so we can assume she is a widow. The mother-in-law would be helping her daughter with the family and household and caring for all who came to visit.

When someone is ill, everyone gets involved in the care. Back in Jesus’ day they were also classed as unclean and could not be touched unless the carer also wanted to be classed as unclean (being unclean meant being apart from others for a couple weeks and then presenting oneself to a priest to be declared clean and allowed in public – reminds me also of COVID). In most of the healings Jesus performed, he always touched those who were sick. Touch brings about a closeness, an empathy with the one unwell, most of all it conveys care and love. This healing was no different. Jesus touched the woman and helped her to her feet – she was healed.

She immediately went to her duties to serve the visitors who had come to the house. Interestingly, just as Jesus broke the Jewish law by healing on the Sabbath, this faithful woman also got up immediately and prepared a meal. It was her gratitude that made her also break the Sabbath law and serve Jesus and others who were hungry. Not only had Jesus helped the mother-in-law, but he also helped Peter’s wife to still have her mother around to help when both Peter and Andrew followed Jesus as disciples. Serving and caring touch are something we can do for others out of gratitude for all Jesus does for us.

A loving touch and care can show more than expensive gifts.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to touch and heal the lives of those who were sick in body or spirit. Your Word is powerful, and you have given it to me as a gift to share with others. Amen.





Do You Believe?

1st Sunday during Lent

Read: Matthew 9:27-31

“Then he [Jesus] touched their eyes and said, ‘According to your faith let it be done to you’” Matthew 9:29 (NIV)

Magic defies reason. When a magician does a trick, even though you may be watching ever so carefully, you do not see the sleight of hand that makes the trick appear magic. Our eyes see one thing, but another occurs. Is it real? Our reason says no, but we cannot prove it! A magician wants people to marvel at their gifts. What if we could not see it? Would it then still be magic? There is the idiom: ‘I’ll believe it when I see it’ or ‘Seeing is believing’. But what if you can’t see it, yet you believe. Is this a stronger faith?

The two blind men in the story above in Matthew obviously believed that Jesus could heal them from their blindness. Their faith came, not by seeing Jesus perform miracles, but from hearing the stories about what Jesus had done. These two wanted the mercy of Jesus and so believed in His power to be able to open the eyes of the blind. It seems that their faith was the one condition that granted their healing request. It is interesting that this healing happened inside and out of sight of the public – for *“they went right into the house”*. After they were healed Jesus also told them, *“See that no one knows about this.”*

While Jesus is all powerful, his power was used to show his compassion and care and not to show off as a magician would do. He didn’t want to gain notoriety with people just wanting to see His miracles. In the Gospel of Matthew, we are reminded over and over that following Jesus is about following His commands and words that bring life, health and healing in body, mind and spirit. Jesus, as God, is all about teaching about the Kingdom of God and showing compassion to all. This is something we can all do this Lenten season – share about Jesus’ love and care for those around us!

Jesus’ act of forgiveness is not magic, it is a gift of love and grace!

Prayer: My Loving Jesus, you showed me the need for my healing from the wrongs I do. Your forgiveness and love are all I need. I trust you and have faith that you hold me in your hands. Amen.



It's Amazing!

5th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Matthew 9:32-34



“And when the demon was driven out, the man who was mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, ‘Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.’” Matthew 9:33 (NIV)

I am amazed and astounded by happenings that changed history and the way of life for humanity. There are 15 things that start with the letter ‘A’ that have been achievements contributing to human progress: The Acropolis, The Apollo 11 Moon Landing, Airplane Invention, The Atomic Bomb, The Abolition of Slavery, Automobile Invention, The Aswan High Dam, Antibiotics Discovery, The Alhambra, The American Revolution, The Aztec Empire, the Adoption of Agriculture, The Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, The signing of the Armistice and The Apollo 13 Mission. These events have all left an indelible mark on human history. You may need to research as to what each meant to the whole of the world, I sure needed to!

Amazing and incredible! Just as I am amazed, so people in the time of Jesus were amazed at the events that seemed to follow Jesus wherever he went. Jesus was changing the world at that time with His teachings and all the astonishing miracles he was performing. God had been silent for 400 years since Malachi and now He was appearing as a man with the power to perform the most unbelievable things. To cast out a demon is no small feat. The Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus by saying He was a prince of demons to be able to do this. But why would a demon want to cast out a demon?

Once the demon was cast out, the mute man could speak. Amazing! God is the only one who has the power over the happenings in our world. God has given people incredible gifts to achieve amazing things, but it is only God who has the power over what is unseen! Jesus being God’s Son also has the power to change the impossible. As we enter the Lenten season we come to God with our needs, concerns and wants. God knows what we need, and, in His time, He can do all things – just believe He can!

People have limitations, but with God, nothing is impossible!

Prayer: I praise you Lord for your incredible creation and the gifts you have given your people. Work in my heart and mind to know that with you nothing is impossible, and you have all things in your hands. Amen.





Lord, Save Me!!

6th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Matthew 14:22-33

***“Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried, ‘Lord, save me!’”
Matthew 14:29b-30 (NIV)***

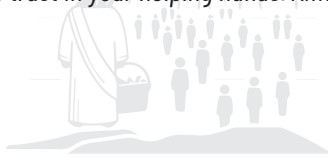
Our crew of the ‘Vivid’ were rounding a marker for a race off Outer Harbour in South Australia. The seas were wild, and we had a harness on to keep ourselves clipped to the 44ft yacht. None of the crew wore a lifejacket as it restricted our movements to winch and pull sails. Orders were being barked out by the captain, and I was asked to get to the winch... just then a huge wave hit, and I had not refastened my harness – I was headed off the boat when another crew member reached out and grabbed at my harness saving me from being washed overboard.

It is frightening being in an angry sea. The sea of Galilee was prone to storms as the warm air from the Mediterranean Sea moved east and passed over the mountains mixing with the cool air. The disciples were sent out by Jesus into a boat while He dismissed the crowds and went to pray by Himself. A storm hit during the night and the waves washed into the boat. The disciples were probably tired, hungry, wet and frightened when they saw in the twilight before dawn a figure walking towards them. A ghost? Jesus called out that it was He and not to be scared. Peter was the first to recover and asked to come out to Jesus on the waves, but fear overtook him.

Peter placed more faith in the wind and the waves than in his Lord and Saviour. But Jesus reached out His hand to help Peter and questioned why he didn't believe and keep his eyes fixed on Him. The winds ceased as soon as Jesus stepped into the boat. Like Peter, we will always try other means before asking for help from God. The presence of Jesus brings peace. With Jesus, there is safety and there is no fear. Jesus is our lifeline and our harness to keep us safe. Look to the cross and the saving power of Jesus as we focus on His presence in our lives this Lenten season.

Keep your eyes focussed on Jesus and He will save you!

Prayer: My Lord and Saviour, help me to keep my eyes focussed on you. When everything around me starts to frighten me, give me the faith to trust in your helping hands. Amen.



Persistence

7th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Matthew 15:21-28



“Then Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed at that moment.” Matthew 15:28 (NIV)

I really enjoy making greeting cards. I love to take a blank piece of card and with creativity and persistence, a card is created for someone whom I love. I think that over the years I have gotten better, and my creativity has expanded as well as all the tools of the trade I have gathered in my little (or not so little) cupboard. I have been to craft shows, workshops and listened and watched friends to gain more ideas and courage to try something different. Because it is something I am passionate about and really enjoy I try to squeeze in time to make them for others. When we are passionate about something, we can become quite persistent and relentless in getting it right.

A woman came to Jesus asking for help. She was not a Jewish woman, but a Canaanite woman, who at that time meant she was a pagan and unclean to the Jewish people. When you read this story, at first, it appears that Jesus insulted this woman when he appeared to call her a ‘dog’. However, in this metaphor, Jesus was at this time trying to explain the priorities in His ministry as well as teaching His disciples. Non-Jews were known as Gentiles and were considered so unspiritual that even being in their presence could make a person unclean. Then Jesus explained that His duty was to the people of Israel and changing this would be like a father taking food from his children and giving it to the pets.

Jesus was sent to turn everything upside down. The woman said she understood for that was within the cultural norms but had the persistence to keep asking. She believed Jesus could heal her daughter. Jesus then tested her intentions and her faith in Him. Do we have the faith and convictions in our Saviour to keep asking and to keep persisting in our prayers? Are the things we are asking for something Jesus could do for yours or others well-being?

Persistence takes an effort and great faith!

Prayer: Loving Father, keep me asking, keep me searching for your truths in this world. Help me to have the faith that you will answer all my prayers. Amen.





Societal Rules

8th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 17:24-27

“Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.” Matthew 17:27b (NIV)

A couple years ago I started playing social ‘pickleball’. It has different rules and strange terms and uses a type of beach bat and waffle ball. One rule is you need to stay out of the ‘kitchen’ area and the only time you can go in there is when the hard waffle ball bounces in there. To participate in this sport and others, there are rules that need to be followed. When I got my first part-time job I learned about taxes. No one is exempt who is of age, and you give a tax according to your salary for the successful running of the country and society.

Jesus doesn’t often talk about money, but there are a couple times when Jesus is asked questions about taxes. This story is one of them. He is in a temple in Capernaum and there they have a temple tax for each person of 2 drachma (this is less than 1c in AUD). Some temple officials asked Peter if Jesus pays this tax. Jesus turns it back to Peter asking him whether kings get their taxes from their own children or others. When Peter replied, “Others”, Jesus said, “So the children are free?” – referring to the fact that our salvation as God’s children has been paid.

Jesus was thinking way too deeply for Peter and so said that they would pay their temple taxes to the officials so that they wouldn’t offend the system. They didn’t have the money for the taxes for them both – four drachmas, so Jesus performed a miracle telling Peter to go fishing and get the coins out of the mouth of the first fish caught. If only paying our taxes were that easy!! But it is this easy. Jesus was the one who paid all our debts for us when He went to the cross for our sake to forgive us all our wrongdoing. We will still have to pay taxes in this life, but our eternal life and freedom has been paid for.

Our debt was paid on the cross!

Prayer: My loving Saviour, thank you for paying the debt owed for my salvation. You shower me with blessings every day, please help me to not take the gifts of life and love for granted. Amen.



Bearing Fruit?

9th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Matthew 21:18-22



**Jesus said: "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
Matthew 21:22 (NIV)**

When we left Loxton, I took with me a big rhubarb plant which had provided me through the years with lovely rhubarb pies, stewed rhubarb and rhubarb yeast cake. It produced abundantly. So I dug it up and potted it. When arriving in Noosa I made a lovely new raised garden bed, planted my rhubarb, fed it, watered it regularly and covered it from the digging bush turkeys. It did well for a while and then stopped producing the lovely leaves. I tried giving it more attention, but to no avail... it perished! I wondered what had caused it to die but dug up the roots and the plant to rework the soil when I discovered the source of the death. There were huge white grubs chomping on my rhubarb's roots. The foundation of the plant was literally being eaten.

Reading through the miracle of Jesus in Matthew 21:18-22, I couldn't help but think of my rhubarb. The roots and foundation were gone, there was nothing that could now give it sustenance to produce fruity stems. Jesus discovered this with a fig tree. One thing about a fig tree, if it has leaves it should have fruit. Jesus wanted some breakfast as He was hungry, but as there were no figs, He cursed the tree and immediately it withered. The disciples were amazed!

Faith and trust are the roots and foundation of being a disciple of Jesus. He tells us that even a small amount of faith can move a mountain or wither a fig tree. It is very easy as we live and move through our lives to have this faith and trust eaten away and eroded and doubts begin to creep in. No matter how much we water and feed our faith – if we doubt that Jesus is Lord – our faith and lives will not produce the fruit that God wants us to: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Belief comes from faith and trust!

Prayer: Merciful God, grow faith into my life. Help me to believe you always and know that you are the Lord of my life. In you I trust. Amen.





Authority

10th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Mark 1:21-28

“The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.’” Mark 1:27 (NIV)

A schoolteacher injured his back and had to wear a plaster cast around the upper part of his body. It fit under his shirt and was not noticeable at all. On the first day of term, still with the cast under his shirt, he found himself assigned to the toughest students in school. Walking confidently into the rowdy classroom, he opened the window as wide as possible and then busied himself with desk work. When a strong breeze made his tie flap, he took the desk stapler and stapled the tie to his chest. He had no trouble with discipline that term.

Jesus was great teacher. He taught with authority from God. He had personal experience about His Heavenly Father and the Kingdom of God. He was able to enforce the power of nature to acknowledge His sovereignty. In Jesus’ day, there were a lot of religious teachers who taught about God’s Word, but Jesus came clearly knowing what God wanted to say to His people. Jesus being part of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) came to earth with first-hand knowledge of God’s will. In Jesus we find God himself proclaiming His Word to His people. There was no uncertainty, there were no questions, and His testimony was clear and to the point.

When a man with a demon came shouting about who Jesus was. This was truth, not blasphemy, but Jesus didn’t need acknowledgement from a demon – He has ruling authority over Satan and so commanded it to be quiet and it comes screaming out of the man. Now, that is authority! The ultimate authority over death and Satan came on the cross. Jesus battled Satan and won the victory of eternal life and forgiveness for us. Jesus rose from the dead and reigns in Heaven with His Father – our Father!

Defeating Satan is what Jesus does best!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have ultimate authority over all, yet you chose to come to me to listen, love and forgive me. Thank you for being my Saviour. Amen.



Unbelievable

2nd Sunday during Lent

Read: Mark 2:1-12



“So he said to the man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’” Mark 2: 10b-12 (NIV)

There’s a familiar old story that’s told about a tightrope walker who did incredible stunts. All over Paris, he would do tightrope acts at tremendously scary heights. Then, he would do it blindfolded, pushing a wheelbarrow. As the story goes, there was an American promoter who read about this in the newspapers and wrote a letter to the tightrope walker, saying, “Tightrope walker, I don’t believe you can do it, but I’m willing to make you an offer. For a very substantial sum of money, besides all your transportation fees, I would like to challenge you to do your act over Niagara Falls.” The tightrope walker wrote back and said, “Sir, I’d love to come.” Well, after a lot of promotion and setting the whole thing up, a crowd of people came to see the event. The tightrope walker was to start on the Canadian side and come over to the American side on this rope suspended over the falls. After a suspenseful drum roll, he came across blindfolded.

The crowds went wild, and he came to the promoter and says, “Well, Mr. Promoter, now do you believe I can do it?” He said, “Well of course I do. I mean, I just saw you do it.” “No,” said the tightrope walker, “do you really believe I can do it?” “Well of course I do, you just did it.” “No, no, no,” said the tightrope walker, “do you believe I can do it?” “Yes,” said Mr. Promoter, “I believe you can do it.” “Good,” said the tightrope walker, “then get in the wheelbarrow.”

Many people in the house saw Jesus heal the paralytic. The man got up from his mat and walked. But Jesus did more than that; as well as healing the man physically, Jesus healed him from his sins. This offended many and they could not believe it. Jesus has the ability to heal and forgive all our wrongdoings and sins and we can go ahead each day with a clean slate. Do you believe this?

Would you get into Jesus’ wheelbarrow?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know that you love me. I know that you forgive me all my sins each and every day. Give me the faith to trust and believe it. Amen.





Rebelling

11th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Mark 3:1-6

“Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent.” Mark 3:4 (NIV)

I think that God makes teenagers rebellious on purpose. To assert their stance on issues just enough to see if the parents will rise to the occasion and stand up for what they have been telling the child is important. This rebellion makes parents think and look at what is necessary for their child. A child wants to rebel by not wearing a bike helmet – that is non-negotiable. A child doesn't want to have dinner with parents but rather have it in their room – some parents would allow this. It is hard to be a parent, it seems that there is always something to work out or discuss with growing children. Society's rules do not always agree with the house rules either.

Jesus was presented with a quandary... how would He deal with it? A man suffering with a shrivelled hand was at the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath. He needed healing by Jesus, but Jesus knew people were watching Him to see whether He was going to break any Jewish laws, particularly the one of healing on the Sabbath. So instead of doing it quietly, Jesus made it a teaching moment, by asking the accusing leaders whether it is better to do good or evil on the Sabbath. They knew they were stuck between a rock and a hard place and didn't answer. So, Jesus healed the man right in front of them all. He broke the social norms of the day and chose the better thing to do.

As parents we also feel that we are sometimes stuck between a rock and a hard place with the guiding and leading of our children. Jesus always did what was right, even if others didn't agree. Society says one thing and our children are guided by peers and social norms, so it is up to us to stand up for Jesus and help our children know that following Him is the better way. God is always with us and will help when we ask for it.

Following Jesus' way is not always the easy way!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for standing up when faced with opposition to your Word. Guide me and help me to be able to follow you and your example of living. Amen.



Stormy Seas

12th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Mark 4:35-41



“He [Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and was completely calm.” Mark 4:35-41 (NIV)

There is something about canoeing. Being on the water of a lake or a river and gliding quietly through the reeds and listening to the birds and rustling of the wind in the trees. I went on several canoe trips while at school down the Coorong in South Australia. During one adventure, our group was paddling a distance to the next campground when the wind picked up and the quiet waters were turned into a washing machine with waves and paddling was extremely taxing and difficult. We all finally made it to shore, rather wet and shaken, where we set up camp until the next day when the water was calm again.

From what I have read about the Sea of Galilee, is that it is rather large and known for weather changes that happen quite quickly and without warning. Jesus was tired. He had spent long days healing and teaching so that with the rocking of the boat He fell asleep. Then the wind picked up and the waves started lashing the boat, but tired Jesus just slept on. These were experienced fishermen who called out in fear to their teacher – the night, winds and waves were just too much for them. It didn’t seem right that this caring teacher and master would sleep through their urgent crisis.

So comes their call, “Don’t you care if we drown?” Panic had set in. Sometimes in my life I feel that Jesus just needs to be woken to help me in my troubles. He’s got the power. I know He loves me. So why do I need to suffer? But Jesus is there. He is not asleep, and, in this miracle, we can see that Jesus demonstrates His authority over nature itself and only God can do this! Jesus didn’t let the disciples perish and neither will He let us. We will live forever because we believe that Jesus has the power not just over nature but over death itself and we will live with Him eternally.

Jesus tells us, “Peace! Be still!” for He is in the boat with us.

Prayer: My Saviour, I know you care. I know that you never sleep and are always there in any problems and troubles I have. Thank you for being in the boat with me. Amen.





Witnesses

13th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Mark 5:1-20

“So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” Mark 5:20 (NIV)

There is so much we could focus on in this miracle. How did this man get infected with so many demons? Why did they choose him? How did the man cope with being tormented day and night? Wouldn't he have mental health issues now that Jesus had saved him and the demons were gone? Why did Jesus choose to cast the demons into a herd of pigs, which was a person's livelihood? I can surmise and read other theories, but I will never truly know until I meet Jesus in heaven and start bombarding Him with all my questions.

I bet the people in Jesus' time had so many questions and even more. Those who witnessed these miracles would have no explanations rather than just believing that Jesus is Lord over all creation and the laws of nature. In this miracle, the witnesses were actually afraid and frightened by Jesus' power over the demons. If Jesus can cast out demons into two thousand pigs which rush down off a cliff and drown in the lake, what could He do to me? It is frightening. If we didn't know Jesus as the loving Lord and Saviour who cared and loved all, it is easy to understand how frightening His power would appear.

The man who had the demons cast out was so thankful to Jesus that he wanted to follow Him with the disciples, but Jesus told the man to go back into his town and be a witness there. We don't have to go to far off places to be witnesses for Jesus – we can be a witness in our own town, city or suburb. Be a friend, be real to your neighbours and those you meet and work with and then with the help of the Holy Spirit show them Jesus through what you say and do. Make sure you do say – actions are not enough... we need to speak that Jesus is the love and Lord over our lives through His death and resurrection and share the hope we have of eternal life.

Live for Jesus but speak the promise we have!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, your incredible power is hard to understand. Help me to know and believe that you are God's Son and then be a witness to others of this hope. Amen.



Just Believe

14th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Mark 5:22-24, 35-43



“When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, ‘Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.’” Mark 5:38-39 (NIV)

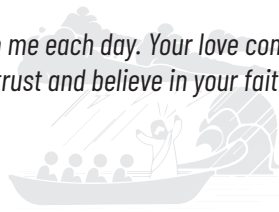
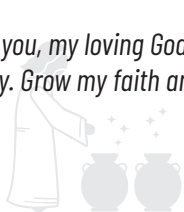
While we were at St Peter’s Lutheran Church in Loxton, there were major productions held every few years. John Gladigau, a talented script writer, has a production company called ‘Little Town’. Usually, the productions were held around Christmas, hence ‘Little Town’ (of Bethlehem) but for a couple years we had productions over Easter. Many from the town of Loxton, the congregation and surrounds joined in the production team – actors, musicians, or behind-the-scenes. In 2011, ‘Anna’s Hope’ was written and performed. It was a poignant depiction of the story of Jairus and his encounter with Jesus through his little daughter Anna.

In the play the background story was presented with Jesus stirring up the towns that He visited. There were those who believed, those who were skeptical and those who hated Him. Jairus being a synagogue leader was torn between his role as temple official and that of a father, especially when his precious daughter Anna became ill. He tried everything to have his child healed, but then he went against the Jewish teachings and came pleading to Jesus, knowing that Jesus could heal her. Jesus was waylaid and Jairus’ daughter died. But Jesus told him to have faith and believe. In private with just the parents and a couple disciples, Jesus brought Anna back to life.

When the six performances were held, there were people ready to pray with those who may have been affected by the portrayal of such an intense situation. We can think, ‘I have faith, I believe, so why wasn’t my loved one healed, instead they died.’ We don’t know the mind of God, nor should we try to understand why one lives and the other dies. All that we need remember is that God is a God of grace and mercy who does all things for good. God had His own Son suffer a horrible death and die for all of humankind. That was in His plan from the beginning. Don’t let your hearts be troubled with the whys and wherefores.

Just have faith and believe!

Prayer: Thank you, my loving God, for your blessings to me each day. Your love comes to me unconditionally. Grow my faith and help me to always trust and believe in your faithfulness. Amen.





Freed

15th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Mark 5:24b-34

"[Jesus] said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'" Mark 5:34 (NIV)

For the last 17 years our family has had a pet turtle, Frank. He is the pet of our son who got him when he was eight years old. At the time we didn't look at the lifespan of a turtle. Anyway, we let Frank out of his turtle tank to wander the house every so often. Usually, he just sits for a while to get his bearings and then takes off on an expedition. If he is not watched and his whereabouts assessed, Frank, in the freedom of the huge house, gets lost (to us). One time I remember we searched and searched to find him before discovering him under a computer table amongst the cords in a pile of fluff.

Freedom can be a scary thing. Children when they are given freedom in a playground, run and run, but you do notice them looking back making sure that there is a secure adult still there watching and caring. In Mark 5 we read a story about a woman in bondage to her illness. She had been suffering from bleeding for twelve years and had tried most things but was not getting better. In Jesus' time, when a woman was bleeding, she was considered unclean and not permitted out the house or to go to worship in the synagogue, or to touch another person. She was considered contaminated and treated as worthless and unclean.

This woman had heard about Jesus and ventured out, probably trying to hide herself among the crowd, or they might turn on her. Her thought was to just touch Jesus' clothes, and she would be healed, and this is exactly what happened. There were people all around Jesus, jostling and bumping Him, why would Jesus mention just one person who touched Him? There was a difference between her and all the others around Him. Jesus acknowledged this woman's need and faith with His blessing of healing. She believed Jesus had the power to heal and it was her faith that healed her. Knowing and believing in Jesus freed this woman from what kept her in bondage.

Faith in Jesus brings freedom!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I come to you having the faith that you can heal me in body and soul. Touch my life to free me from all the stresses and issues that plague me. Only in you is true freedom. Amen.



Abundance

16th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Mark 6:30-44



“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.” Mark 6:42-43 (NIV)

How many of us when preparing a meal for family and friends work out exactly how much each person will eat, to have just enough food for everyone. Leftovers are a sign of abundance. The food from Jesus is always in abundance. Jesus was tired, his cousin John the Baptist had just been beheaded, and he was peopled out. He needed a quiet place to go with His close friends where no one could find Him. The wilderness on a boat could be considered a good place to be alone. But the people were needy and needed Jesus to heal and teach them, for they were hungry for the truth.

I know that when someone is hungry in my house, I feed them and provide enough and more to satisfy them. Jesus saw how these people hungered for knowing about the Kingdom of God. Even though He was tired, He fed them with His words. But then they became physically hungry. What to do? No shops around nor any farms to go gather food, just a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. Definitely not enough for five thousand men and just as many women and children. But, with God nothing is impossible. The food is blessed, and all eat to their fill and still there is more left over. God is an abundantly generous God.

God’s generosity is never just enough. And God doesn’t give leftovers. Our loving Father gave His best – His one and only Son – this is the nature of our God... He always gives His best. All the multitude had eaten their fill, and our God of abundance didn’t stop there for He multiplied the loaves and fishes to the point that there were also twelve baskets left over! God is not a God of leftovers, but when He provides for His children, there is always enough left over! When God says He will provide for all your needs, just wait for the abundance and more. He loves you so much.

God will provide all you need in abundance!

Prayer: Dear God, you provide me with all I need from day to day and more. Help me to be thankful for your generosity and abundance and be willing to also share with those around me. Amen.





Ephphatha!

3rd Sunday during Lent

Read: Mark 7:31-37

"[Jesus] looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means 'Be opened!') At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly." Mark 7:34-35 (NIV)

The poor man who was brought to Jesus lived a very lonely existence. He could not hear a sound, but neither could he communicate with speech except for a grunt or two. To live like this would be in a cocoon – no hearing or speech! It doesn't tell us how he communicated with others as there was no official sign language nor whether he was literate and could read or write. He would have depended on the other senses: touch, sight and smell, but even so it would be as if living in an isolation chamber of absolute silence.

Think then of the extreme joy of this man, through the love of his friends who brought him to Jesus and was healed. He probably had no idea where he had been taken nor anything about this man Jesus. But with the touch of Jesus he could hear and speak, his life was truly reborn. He was set free to enter the world of sound and free to hear the voice of his Saviour. He was also free to tell others about Jesus and to also praise Him. It all happened when Jesus uttered the one word: "Ephphatha" (pronounced 'aff-ar-tha'). It is an Aramaic word which translates to – "Be opened!" With this 'deep sigh' from Jesus the man's life went beyond physical healing; it was an opening up towards a true healing of the soul.

This is such a beautiful story of being set free from what bound this man. To apply it to us, we also are in bondage to the constraints and social norms in our world. Jesus set us free through His death and resurrection to have a true healing of our souls. The freedom Jesus offers is an emancipation from all that keeps us from sharing and being who God wants us to be; living how God wants us to live and knowing that in Jesus we are freed and forgiven from all our wrong doings.

'Ephphatha' – be opened to hear and see and feel God's mercy and love.

Prayer: Merciful God and our loving Saviour Jesus Christ, you have opened my heart and life to all the possibilities you have in store for me. Help me to know that in you I have true freedom. Amen.



Compassion

17th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Mark 8:1-10



“Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.’” Mark 8:1b-3 (NIV)

Sympathy looks in and says, “I’m sorry.”

Compassion goes in and says, “I’m with you.”

Sympathy looks in and says, “I would like to help.”

Compassion goes in and says, “I am here to help.”

Sympathy says, “I wish I could carry your burden.”

Compassion says, “Cast your burden on me.”

Sympathy often irritates many words.

Compassion helps and hears in quietness and understanding.

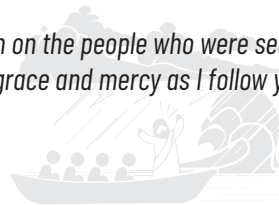
~ Author Unknown

Jesus had shown His compassion when feeding the five thousand men earlier in Mark 6. Now, more people had gathered to hear Jesus preach in a remote place and from what is written they were there three days listening without food. Jesus’ words were the food and water to sustain their souls. But now they needed to return home and Jesus thought of their physical needs. Again, He asked His disciples to feed them and again they found bread and fish. After Jesus gave thanks for what God had provided, the food was distributed to the four thousand people and seven basketfuls were left over. A sign of God’s abundance and love!

Compassion is a character trait that is present in everyone. However, it is also a trait that sometimes gets forgotten. It is both innate and can be learned and enhanced. It is something you can develop with practice, and it involves two things: intention and action. The intention is simply opening your heart to others; the action is what you do about it.

Mother Teresa reminds us, “We cannot always do great things on this earth. We can only do small things with great love.”

Prayer: My loving Father God, you had such compassion on the people who were searching for your love. Have compassion on me and show me love, grace and mercy as I follow you. Amen.





Walking Trees

18th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Mark 8:22-26

“He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” Mark 8:24-25 (NIV)

There is an actual ‘walking palm tree’ (*Socratea exorrhiza*) so named because of its long roots which raises the trunk off the ground. It is said to be able to haul itself out of the shade into sunnier spots by growing more roots on one side and losing them on the other. In 2015, a Russian biologist claimed that one of these trees had moved up to 20m in two years. The fact that the man in the above scripture said ‘walking trees’ points to his blindness and not knowing what things look like in real life.

The miracle of Jesus healing the blind man from Bethsaida, is one miracle that was performed in stages, it wasn’t an immediate healing. After Jesus’ first touch of the man, he could only partially see. It was only after the second touch that the man was able to see everything clearly. No one really knows why Jesus took this man aside with only a couple disciples and spat on his eyes. In other healings Jesus just touches with his hands. There was obviously something about this man that made Jesus act differently, or maybe it was to be a real teaching time for His disciples.

Jesus treats us all differently. He knows what is best for each of us and in the timing that He chooses. Healing can happen immediately, or it can be a process where things are fuzzy, and we are not seeing anything quite clearly. Can Jesus heal? Absolutely! Do we know how, when or where? No – Jesus has His own reasons and time for each of us. What we can be certain of is the love and grace of Jesus in the compassion He shows to all His children. God sent His Son to earth to show the whole of the world how much He loved and cared for all creation. Come to Jesus daily with your concerns and leave it to His timing.

Allow Jesus to touch your life!

Prayer: Dear Lord God, thank you for your love that you give me each day. Help me to leave my life and its concerns in your hands, for you know what is best for my life. Amen.



Help My Unbelief

19th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Mark 9:14-29



“If you can?” said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’” Mark 9:23-24 (NIV)

Scepticism is quite rife in our world. Promises are made by politicians, but will they actually be kept? Promises of interest rates going down, price of living becoming more manageable. It actually gets to the point of people now saying: “When I see it, I’ll believe it!” I love to read historical fiction books, but the writers are so clever that it is hard to tell what fact is and what is license by the writer. We see pictures and videos on our phones on social media, but is this the actual person and have they said it, or is it AI (Artificial Intelligence)? What can we believe and what do we question?

Jesus was walking around the towns and cities preaching about the Kingdom of God and the love He has for all His people. He was also healing and forgiving. The Israelites had been told the stories from the Old Testament for hundreds of years, passed down from generation to generation. A Messiah was coming, but who is this man? At this time in history, gods were people’s answer to the unknown. Was Jesus just another god? His teaching was so radical and here was a man healing and forgiving – no god could do that except the one true God – the Maker of heaven and earth! It is understandable to hear the unbelief of the people, but Jesus berates them for it, calling them *‘You unbelieving generation!’*

Jesus spoke with authority and had the Spirit of God in Him – He is God’s Son after all! The evil spirits recognised Jesus immediately and tried to kill the boy, but Jesus commanded the spirits to come out of the boy and they obeyed. Jesus is the one true God. Through Jesus rising at the resurrection, we can know that He is the Son of God with power to overcome death and all evil. We can say with the father of the boy: *“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*

Jesus is God, He is the real deal! Believe it!

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, you are my Saviour and the Son of God! I believe this with all my heart and soul. Help me with my doubts and guide me in your way of Truth. Amen.





Have Mercy on Me!

20th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Mark 10:46-52

“When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” Mark 10:47-48 (NIV)

*I was hungry and you formed a humanities club to discuss my hunger. Thank you.
I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel to pray for my release. Nice.
I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance. What good did that do?*

*I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health. But I needed you.
I was homeless and you preached to me of the shelter of the love of God. I wish you'd taken me home.*

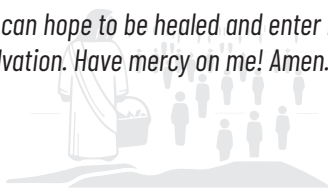
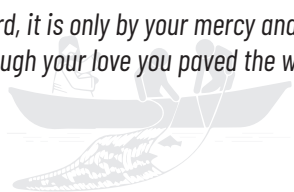
*I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me. Why didn't you stay?
You seem so holy, so close to God; but I'm still very hungry, lonely, cold, and still in pain.
~Anonymous*

I feel so guilty reading the above poem. How often do I give to a charity to make myself feel better but then think no more about it. I haven't really investigated the meaning of the word 'mercy' - I have always thought it had something to do with compassion, sympathy, care and forgiveness. But there is more to this word 'mercy'. It means 'compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.' [Oxford Dictionary] Help is given instead of hurt.

The disciples were sick of this man Bartimaeus calling out for mercy and were trying to ignore him and told him off. But Jesus showed mercy. He asked the man what his need was - 'Rabbi, I want to see.' Plain and simple and he knew that Jesus had mercy on the sick and hurt, which is why he came to Jesus and Jesus didn't disappoint him. Rather he was commended on his faith and subsequently followed Jesus. Jesus has mercy on all His children. He will never hurt which is why in church we also pray to the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) for mercy. To forgive and heal us, body and soul.

Have mercy on me, loving Saviour and my Lord.

Prayer: Lord, it is only by your mercy and grace that I can hope to be healed and enter Heaven. Jesus through your love you paved the way for my salvation. Have mercy on me! Amen.



Obedience

21st Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Luke 5:1-11



“Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’” Luke 5:5 (NIV)

There is something about fishing that you either really enjoy, or you don't. There is not much of a middle ground. To catch a fish requires patience, quietness and perseverance. If you don't have these qualities, maybe fishing is not your thing to do. When I was a little girl and we went for holidays to Marion Bay on Yorke Peninsula, South Australia we always brought our fishing reels. It was September, so rather chilly, but on most days, you would find at least one or more of the Gerhardys trying their best to catch a fish or squid.

I enjoyed the fishing. It was peaceful, quiet and you could do nothing else but sit there with your thoughts and hopefully a fish or two. To be a professional fisherman would require a huge amount of patience and perseverance. It seems that these disciples-to-be had a lot of both of these qualities. But after a whole night of fishing and nothing to show for it, they were done. They were obviously men who listened and learned for they knew that Jesus was preaching and teaching important things to all the people and that He spoke with authority, for Simon called Jesus, 'Master'. I think I would have done a bit more arguing when Jesus told them all to go out again, but because Jesus said so - they went!

What a miracle to then have their nets filled to the brim with fish, and overflowing. What does surprise me is Simon's response, *'Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man!'* Instead of joy, Simon was afraid and fearful for he felt he was sinful and unworthy when in the presence of one who can command nature. But Jesus assured Simon not to be afraid for he will now help Him in the Kingdom work for God. Note the fishermen's next move - they immediately left everything and followed Jesus.

Listen and be obedient to God's leading and guiding!

Prayer: My loving Saviour, thank you for guiding, teaching and leading me with patience. Help me to be obedient to your calling and to listen for where you are leading me. Amen.





Don't Cry!

22nd Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Luke 7:11-17

“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and said, ‘Don’t cry.’” Luke 7:13 (NIV)

A mother's and father's hearts have to be strong when dealing with little ones who get hurt, otherwise their hearts would break. I recently read the saddest and shortest story ever. It was by Ernest Hemingway:

For Sale: Baby shoes. Never worn.

Just reading this causes my heart to break on behalf of these poor parents. I am sure we have all experienced times of heartbreak, heartache and when it seems that we have no more tears to cry. Yet, we know that there is a loving God who has experienced losing a child in the most horrific way. I wonder if God cried when Jesus died!

Jesus has the heart of God: loving, caring, compassionate and wanting all to come home to Him. When He was on earth, He tried to show His love of people and demonstrate that He understood their hurts and concerns. Jesus was walking around, teaching, preaching and healing when He came across a funeral procession. A widow's only son had died. She had already lost her husband and now her son and she was destitute and without anyone to care for her. She was heartbroken and obviously filled with extreme grief. Jesus' heart went out to her and just touching the bier (the platform holding the coffin), He told the young man to get up. The widow's son was now no longer dead and so he got up and started talking – makes me wonder what he said to everyone around him!

With joy, Jesus gave the young man back to his mother. There were no more tears of sadness, rather tears of joy. The people praised God for His care for all His people. When we have our sorrows, bring them to one who understands and knows what it is to lose someone. Someone who knows your grief and heartache. Our God is a God of compassion and love!

“God has come to help his people.” (Luke 7:16b)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you know grief. You know what it is to have a child hurt and killed. Help me to bring my tears and grief to you, knowing you hear, understand and hold me in your loving arms. Amen.



No Middle Ground



4th Sunday during Lent

Read: Luke 11:14-23

“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: ‘Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.’” Luke 11:17 (NIV)

The only thing that can keep Satan out is to keep Christ in!!

There is a story about Christian converts in Southern Asia who were once Buddhist. Before they were converted, there had never been a murder in the village, never any thefts or fights. But after conversion, the people began to act ‘evil’, and crime started to happen. Years after the missionary who converted them had left, he ran into one of the people from the village. The person told him about all that had happened in the village. The missionary expected that the former Buddhist was going to blame Christianity for all their problems. Instead, he said that it was all proof that God was working in their lives and the truth of Jesus Christ. For as long as Satan is served, he keeps his peace.

In healing the demon that was mute in the man, Jesus was charged with being a demon himself by some witnesses, but Jesus stated that it makes no sense for a demon to cast out a demon. Someone who is working for God is filled with God. The devil’s weapons cannot be used against God. There is no middle ground, for Jesus says, *“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”* (Luke 11:23) In our world today, one of the greatest lies is that of neutrality or indifference. This indifference does not realise the evil of evil, or the good of good!

Casting out the evil is not good enough Jesus says, one must be filled with God and all that is good. The devil will fight back, but the reality is that Christ is so much stronger, and that Jesus won the victory over the devil once and for all on the cross. At our baptisms we were named and claimed by Jesus, and nothing can take us out of His hands. Our place is with God, and we have a place reserved for us in Heaven. But now, we live in His grace and presence on Earth.

Keep your life filled with Christ!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for filling my life with you and every good thing. My life has been claimed by you so let my focus be always on you, for there is no middle ground. Amen.





Unbound

23rd Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Luke 13:10-17

“When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.” Luke 13:12-13 (NIV)

This story gets straight to the heart of Jesus’ ministry. *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18-19 NIV)* In this healing miracle, the woman is described as bound and needing to be set free from her crippling illness. She needs liberation from the spirit that has bound her for eighteen years. When Jesus performed miracles, He was very clever in using His healing actions to also teach His disciples and those around Him (and the Pharisees) the new law of freedom with God.

In the Old Testament the Israelites were bound by the 613 laws that were given to the people at that time. Laws that bound them from doing things rather than freeing them. The Sabbath was meant as a time to refresh the body and the soul, but according to the Pharisees, the Sabbath was a day to do nothing and if you did anything you were breaking the law. Good laws should give boundaries for living, a security to work within. Jesus was trying to show that in God there is freedom for all those who are captive in sin. God is not bound by the laws of people.

How are you bound? Are you bound to your work, sport, family? It becomes a burden when things are done out of obligation rather than with joy and love. Take a step back, review your own situation and try to set yourself free from all that binds you. Find time to be released into the love, joy and peace of a loving Heavenly Father who doesn’t want to constrain you with laws, but free you in your faith by His grace. Jesus came to earth to set us free and forgive us from all our wrongdoings. Let go of the guilt. Let go of the burdens and find release.

Live in the freedom that Jesus gave on the cross!

Prayer: I am unbound. I am set free from everything that constrains me – thank you Lord Jesus! Help me to share the grace and freedom that only you can give. Amen.



A Sabbath

24th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Luke 14:1-6



“Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?’ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.” Luke 14:1-6 (NIV)

Just this last year, we had a young woman come to stay with us for an extended weekend. She was a friend of our daughter and told us that she just needed to have some time to have a Sabbath and Noosa was a great place to rest, recuperate and read God’s Word. Have our lives become so busy that we can’t take a Sabbath (time for God) every week – rather we need to book it in as one would a holiday? I remember as a youth, no shops were open on a Sunday and closed at lunchtime on a Saturday, which allowed people to have a forced break from shopping at least!

Sabbath in Jesus’ day was regimented. The Pharisees and leaders of the Law required that no one do anything on the Sabbath – no cooking, cleaning, working, or preparing anything. These laws were to give people a day of rest from their everyday work and remember that it was God who saved them. The Old Testament people were prone to forget God which is why God had remembering the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments. (Maybe we need reminding of this!) When Jesus came, he brought a new law to spend the Sabbath in spiritual rest and in God’s work – God would come to His people and bring them His life and forgiveness. It was a day for God’s people to rest in Him.

Jesus came to turn all the laws upside down and bring them back to the original purpose of living as God intended. God wants us to spend time with Him but not to the detriment of helping those in need. This is what Jesus was teaching His disciples. The man with ‘dropsy’, or excess fluid was in danger of a heart attack and needed help – not tomorrow when it wasn’t the Sabbath, but today. Jesus asks us to listen, to rest and to be with Him. He also asks us to help those in need.

Find your Sabbath day and spend it with God and listen to His leading!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, use my hands in service to you. You have given me the opportunity to spend time with you, also help me to see the needs of those around me and help them as you would. Amen.





Thank You

25th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Luke 17:11-19

***“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan.”
Luke 17:15-16 (NIV)***

♪ “Ten unclean and nowhere to go. Ten men cleansed as clean as snow.

One returned to give God thanks, but nine went away.

God gives gifts to us every day. Favors His people in every way.

Hope restored and pain relieved. Do you ever give thanks for a gift received?”

~ Medical Mission Sisters

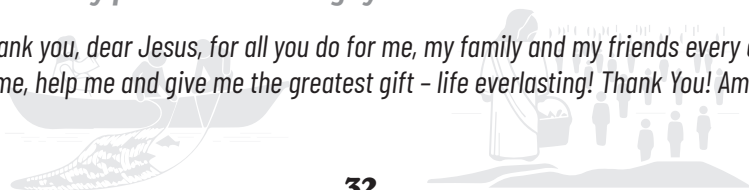
I often wonder why I remember the words from songs I heard as a child, but when I hear the words to other songs today – they don't stick. The song above was played quite often on a record when I was growing up and it had quite a rousing tune (maybe not by today's standards – reminds me now of 'Sister Act'). As you can see it was all about the ten lepers who came to Jesus asking for cleansing so that they could return to society. They were told by Jesus to show themselves to the priest, and on the way, they were healed. Ten percent of those healed returned to thank Jesus.

The Bible has a lot to say about 'giving thanks.' So, obviously it is an important part of our Christian living. In fact, it's one of the most powerful things we can do! Why? Because a thankful person is focussed on God... and all the good things He does in our lives and in those around us. People have a need to be appreciated and be encouraged by words of appreciation. Imagine then how God would feel when someone remembers that it is God who actually gives and provides us with all we need for daily life.

Jesus heals and helps every one of us each day. Don't forget it is God who brings these blessings. Jesus asked the one leper who was cleansed where the other nine were. It wasn't like Jesus wasn't going to then heal the other nine, but He responds with joy to the one who comes and thanks Him. Jesus mentions the man's faith... for it is through our faith that we recognise that every good gift comes from our Heavenly Father.

Thank God today for all the blessings you have received!

Prayer: Thank you, dear Jesus, for all you do for me, my family and my friends every day. You bless me, help me and give me the greatest gift – life everlasting! Thank You! Amen.



Following Directions



26th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: John 2:1-11

“Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water’; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.’” John 2:6-8 (NIV)

When living in Adelaide, the Barossa Valley became a wonderful place to visit when we had overseas visitors. Each winery has different wines with unique flavours and for different tastes. It is fun to discover which one is to your liking. St Paul does tell us in 1 Timothy 5:23: *“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.” (NIV)* Of course we need to take this in the context of the day – the water around was not filtered nor spring fed. It was not always the best to drink and caused stomach illnesses.

This miracle of Jesus turning the water into wine was the first one recorded. The weddings in Jesus’ day could last up to a week and it was up to the families to make sure there was enough wine and food for all the guests. Those getting married must have been close to Jesus’ family as Mary (Jesus’ mother) was helping with the serving. She would have been horrified for the family that the wine had run out. It would have been a huge shame on them. Remember back to Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem with all the visitors and all the things that happened – Mary kept and pondered over all these things. So, it was not surprising for Mary to tell the servants to do everything Jesus may tell them to do.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we also followed all the directions that Jesus tells us to do in the Bible. Maybe during this Lenten season and as we get closer to the cross – Do whatever Jesus tells you! He told the servants to fill the jars to the brim and we are told they were huge jars. Jesus doesn’t do little things – He gives in abundance, full to overflowing. As we fill our lives with Jesus and His words of life, remember that He blesses abundantly.

You will be filled to overflowing with His grace and love!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, fill my life to overflowing with your grace, love and peace so that I may overflow with these blessings and pass them on to those around me. Amen.





At Jesus' Word

27th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: John 4:43-53

“Go’, Jesus replied, ‘Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.” John 4:50-51 (NIV)

In 2010 our family was travelling by subway to a baseball game in the Bronx – New York Yankees vs Philadelphia Phillies. We had our Yankees shirts on and felt quite at home amongst the other NY Yankee supporters. Then a voice came over the loudspeaker and we didn't quite get it, but immediately the carriage emptied of all NY followers – one person said that the trainline is not running to the game now. So, everyone jumped out of one train and into the doors of the train next to us, which was about to leave. What do we do? We each grabbed the children by hand and followed, without even questioning the train we were getting on. It was frantic, but we trusted this man we didn't know, that he was leading us in the right direction.

How often do we take a big breath and just follow blindly someone we don't really know and hope that they will take us in the right direction. We hear of other religions and TV evangelists, we hear advertisements on the best weight loss regime, we hear that everyone is getting iPhones so that must be the best. So, when Jesus says that He is the only way to heaven, do we take Him at His word and just follow Him? In this miracle, the royal official was desperate for his son's life. He begged Jesus to heal him. Then Jesus responds in a scolding manner, saying people only believe if they see signs and wonders. Still the official begs and when Jesus says the boy will live – the man believed.

He journeyed home finding that at the exact time Jesus said, *'your son will live'* was the very time his son got better. Not only was the official's son saved, but the whole household! They took Jesus at His word. Jesus speaks to us through His Word, in our prayers and through the Holy Spirit. Believe His Word and be assured that in Jesus, we have all we need for everyday living and beyond.

Jesus' Word brings life!

Prayer: Help me Lord Jesus to hear your voice speaking to me and guiding me. I will take you at Your word that you know what is best for me – help me in my unbelief! Amen.



Pick Up Your Mat

28th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: John 5:1-15



"Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.'" At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked." John 5:8-9 (NIV)

I have a routine each day, not that I have to do each of the things in turn, but as I go through my morning it follows a pattern. I'm sure each of us follows some sort of routine. When holidays come, or family comes home, my routine is disturbed – I love it, but it all just happens differently. Every day for 38 years a man had been coming to the pool of Bethesda. This pool was known by the sick and infirm to heal the first person touching the water after it had been disturbed. It was said that an angel's wings touched the waters, disturbing them. So many sick and ailing sat there day after day just to be the first to touch the water to be healed.

In the meantime, all those who sat there begged for money, food and survival. It was what they did, day after day - their routine! This man had the same routine for 38 years and obviously made enough money begging to make a living. When Jesus asked: *"Do you want to get well?"*, the man didn't leap at the chance rather he was more cautious telling Jesus no one was there to help him when the water was stirred. For, after 38 years being there, if he was well, how would he earn a living?

Jesus asked no more, rather told him to *'Pick up your mat and walk.'* No therapy or physio recommended. No take it easy, just a 'Get up!' The muscle and tone of his legs would have fully wasted away, but with Jesus anything is possible! But Jesus wasn't just worried about his physical healing, He wanted the man to be spiritually healed and become a man of God. Begging wasn't the routine he should continue; the man needed to now earn a living and live according to God's ways. *'Pick up your mat and walk,'* says Jesus to us as well. He has a new way of living for each of us.

Live a new routine with Jesus guiding and leading!

Prayer: Loving Saviour, daily you offer me forgiveness and a renewal of my life. Help me not to fall into a routine but live a life of newness with you. Amen.





Open Eyes

5th Sunday during Lent

Read: John 9:1-11

“He replied, ‘The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.’” John 9:11 (NIV)

We probably know of the Fred Hollows Foundation which restores sight to people affected by cataracts. Blindness changes the lives of not just the person themselves but everyone who cares for them. In Tonga, a man named Ngu had developed cataracts through an accident. He could no longer farm, his wife had to work longer, and his young daughter was the constant caregiver – giving up sports and playing with friends. Ngu had the cataract surgery and when the bandages were removed, he looked to the sky, raised his arms and exclaimed, “Praise be to God!”

Reading the Bible story of Jesus healing the man born blind – we don’t hear of his joy and exclamations when healed, but we can read of him trying to understand what had happened. Basically, he was blind, Jesus touched his eyes with some mud, he washed his eyes, and he could see!! Not much more to say, but obviously those who were against Jesus tried to discount the miracle by saying it wasn’t the man and he wasn’t born blind. Read further through this chapter (John 9:12-41) to read the lengths that the Pharisees went to in trying to discredit Jesus – even calling on the man’s parents for confirmation that this was their son, and he really was born blind.

I love the formerly blind man’s response: *“Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” [John 9:30-33]* The opening of the man’s eyes made him truly see who it was who had healed him, and he was bold in stating his convictions. Open your spiritual eyes this Lent and see God at work around you and be bold in sharing His love.

Don’t be blind to God at work in your life – open your eyes!

Prayer: My dear Jesus, open my eyes to see you at work in the world and my life. Help me to be bold in sharing your love and grace that others may see you and your saving action on the cross. Amen.



Power Over Death

29th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: John 11:1-44



“Jesus said to [Martha], ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ John 11:25-26 (NIV)

As a child I remember watching the ‘Super Cartoon Show’ immediately when coming home from school. It went for about half an hour and my brothers and I watched about 3-4 cartoons. I remember the Road Runner and Coyote cartoon – no matter what was done to the coyote, he just wouldn’t die! Tweety Bird was able to be eaten and squashed, Sylvester the Cat could have an anvil dropped on his head, Bugs Bunny could be shot and Elmer Fudd dropped from a height and still none of them would ever die. Death just did not happen on the cartoons! They had this superpower that resisted any form of death.

This was not the case with Lazarus, and John (the Gospel writer) went to great lengths to prove it to those reading this story that Lazarus did die. Jesus even made sure of it by waiting two more days before going to visit the family. There could be no doubt that when Jesus got there, Lazarus had been dead and in the tomb for four days. His body would have already begun the process of decomposition. So why did Jesus wait so long and why didn’t he come immediately so that rather than raising Lazarus from death he could have just healed him from a sickness?

Basically, Jesus was proving to all around that not only could He heal, but He had the power over death. Jesus was raised from death by our Heavenly Father after three days, but Jesus was also showing that He had the same power – He was truly God’s Son, not just someone subservient to God who could do some things and not others. Jesus has the power to heal and the power over death itself. Won’t He then have the power to hear your prayers and your concerns and help you? Faith in Jesus is the key to all that He promises... eternal life!

The power of Jesus is incredible, don’t underestimate it or His love!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, so often I don’t ask for your help thinking that you can’t. Forgive me for underestimating your power and love for me. Give me a faith that moves mountains! Amen.



One Hundred and Fifty-Three Fish



30th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: John 21:1-14

***“He [Jesus] said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”
John 21:6 (NIV)***

As I mentioned in an earlier devotion, our family used to go to Marion Bay (on Yorke Peninsula, SA) for holidays when I was a child. My father had holidays in September so that is when we went – water was freezing and the weather cold, but we were near the beach and the jetty and that meant fishing. Sometimes we caught a squid or two, leatherjackets, rock cod and maybe a couple snook. The memories of just sitting quietly, getting a nibble or two and hopefully a couple fish to eat for our dinner are quite vivid. Many times, we walked home without any fish, but other times we had a feast!

Fishing requires patience. Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to the disciples, and the disciples were just waiting around to see what would happen next and what Jesus would tell them to do. Simon Peter was an impatient and impetuous man (makes you wonder if he was a good fisherman). He wanted something to happen so instead of sitting around, he decided to do something. So, six of Jesus’ disciples went out fishing – all night.

“Throw your nets over the right side”, called out Jesus from the shore. (This had happened to them before with amazing results). The disciples did that and were rewarded with 153 fish. Simon (being impetuous) jumped into the sea and swam to Jesus. Jesus had a fire going and they cooked some of the fish for breakfast. Jesus had risen and he used fish to prove to them that He was Jesus Christ, God’s Son and Saviour! There are at least 153 reasons to believe that Jesus is who He said He was! He has given us His Word and His life to feast on. Now, go out and do some fishing for Jesus – be bold, do something different, throw the net on the other side, and grow your faith and in doing so grow the faith of others around you!

Throw your net on the other side, be patient and feast on Jesus’ breakfast!

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for showing me that you are risen from the dead. You have shown the disciples how to fish and the results of listening to you. Help me to do the same. Amen.



Miraculous Jesus

31st Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Isaiah 35:3-7



***“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.”
Isaiah 35:5 (NIV)***

Isaiah served as God’s prophet in Jerusalem from about 740-701 B.C. He lived during the latter half of Israel’s kingdom period and spoke to the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah on God’s behalf. He constantly warned them about God’s judgement and to turn to Him, but he also prophesied about the Saviour who was to come. He gave them hope and comfort that a Saviour was coming who was to be *“Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)* In our Bible verse above Isaiah also foretold of what the people could expect when Jesus came to His ministry. As we have read from the other devotions this prophecy has been fulfilled.

Interestingly though this prophecy isn’t just about Jesus and the miracles He performed; it is also about the end times on Judgement Day, when all believers will enter heaven *“... with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” (Isaiah 35:10)* Sure sounds like a wonderful time. But until that time, Isaiah gave the people hope in a Saviour who heals, who cares, has compassion and provides for everyday needs. We also have this hope and comfort that a Saviour who cared back then is also able to care and help us in all our needs today.

Our Miraculous Jesus has been given the power of His Heavenly Father. He is Lord and shows loving kindnesses to all His children. It is hard not to be in awe and somewhat fear of this power – like a child appearing before the principal. But our God comes to forgive us from ourselves and the wrongs we do each and every day – that is a loving God and Saviour. *“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come... he will come to save you.” (Isaiah 35:4)*

Isaiah prophesied a healing loving Saviour, that Saviour still does these things today!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to heal and save. Thank you for all you have done for me. Continue to grow my faith and help me to look forward to your coming again with joy. Amen.





Descendants of God

32nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Isaiah 11:1-5

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him” Isaiah 11:1-2a (NIV)

Last year, my husband and I went on long-service leave. Neither of us had been to Europe since the early 1990's and so we decided to revisit it, but this time together. As part of our wanting to see different parts of Europe we also wanted to trace our family lines and see what we could find. Part of our trip included Silesia, Poland, Lautenthal, Germany and Nykøbing, Denmark. In so many of my family books, family from Germany and Poland, the history was unknown before they immigrated and I wanted to know why. We found, in Poland, WW2 changed everything – Lutheran churches were reclaimed as Catholic or destroyed along with any records, and any German headstones in cemeteries were reduced to rubble. Much of what I was hoping to find was wiped out.

We though did discover that in 2010, the Catholic church acknowledged the Evangelicals and memorials were erected where the cemeteries or churches had been. Bishop Paul Smith made mention of the memorial of Fritsche's church in the town of Trzciel in a previous issue of 'The Lutheran'. This memorial and ruins of the church were all that were left of a thriving church. We explored Kavel's church (now a Catholic church), the memorials in Züllichau, Chlastawe and Chichagora. Knowing where my ancestors lived and their surrounds had to satisfy me, as there was nothing else to be found. (I will share another time what we found in Germany and Denmark.)

Just like myself, the people of Israel wanted to know where they were from, which is why so much genealogy is included in the Bible. Isaiah foretold that a descendant of Jesse would come, and the Spirit of God would rest on Him. This gave comfort to the people of Israel knowing that God had not forgotten them and this person was to be someone special given by God. This man Jesus was the Son of God who was more than special, He is miraculous!

You are chosen and planned for by God. Your history is found in the Bible!

Prayer: Loving God, you have always loved me, and my family history is tied up in your Holy Word. Thank you for choosing me as your special child. Amen.



Greater than Moses



33rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Deuteronomy 18:15-18

Moses said: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV)

How did Moses know about Jesus? The book of Deuteronomy was supposedly written about 1406 B.C. Moses described the person to come as someone like him. Both Moses and Jesus were delivered from the threat of death as babies. They were both born during a time of ruling oppression (the Egyptians and the Romans). Both were adopted – Moses by the Pharaoh and Jesus by Joseph. They both performed miracles: Moses – parting of the Red Sea, water from the rock, and Jesus – with all the healings and miracles you have just read about in these devotions. There are many other similarities, but one of the biggest was that they both interceded for the people with God.

There are important differences also: Moses was a sinful human and Jesus was sinless, fully human and fully God. Jesus is a part of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Back to my question, how did Moses know about Jesus as the Messiah? He prophesied what God told him. Jesus was the longed-for Messiah whom the Old Testament people had been waiting for. There are so many prophecies in the Old Testament pointing to Jesus coming to be the Saviour of the World. During this Lenten season we have looked at the miracles that point to Jesus as being God's Son. As God's Son, His greatest miracle was to give Himself up to death to atone for our wrongdoings.

We remember our Saviour's path to this final miracle in rising from the dead. We have seen the love and compassion Jesus showed in healing those sick, helping those in need, using everyday food and drink to feed multitudes. Just as Moses predicted Jesus coming to the world, so we can know with certainty the life that He has prepared for us in Heaven – it has also been foretold. God has prepared a wonderful future for us, and it is up to us to share this future with as many as possible.

Our lives are not predestined, but with Jesus they are certain!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are my Saviour and the Lord of my life. In the Bible and through the prophets you have shared with me the plan of your Father's from the beginning. Guide me and teach me. Amen.





Scripture is Fulfilled

34th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21

Jesus said: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...” Luke 4:18 (NIV)

What does it mean in the saying: ‘You can never go home again’? Growing up and moving out of home I just assumed things would always stay the same at home. But when I left for overseas, my parents bought a new house, and I didn’t have ‘my room’ anymore! Nothing was the same. My world was rocked for a day or two. Think deeper though. Going home again also brings back other feelings of things you may have experienced as a child, ways that you acted with family, ways that the family acted towards you. Going home means possibly these old habits resurfacing again. This happened for Jesus.

Jesus returned to Nazareth (home) after having been out in the world, healing, helping, forgiving. His life had changed since He was a boy in Nazareth. But the community had not necessarily changed, and they still saw Him as a young boy helping His father, holding His mother’s hand, playing with His brothers and sisters. Since then, Jesus had been baptised by the Holy Spirit and was given His job to do for His Heavenly Father. Isaiah had prophesied back over 400 years ago that Jesus was going to do the things He did in His adult life, but the people of Nazareth just didn’t get it.

So, Jesus stood up in the temple and read from the Old Testament what had been foretold about Himself. (Is this a type of déjà vu?) The people would have known this Scripture but not known that it applied to their hometown boy from Nazareth. Then to hear Jesus say: *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21b)*, the people would have gasped at Jesus’ arrogance. The Gospel writer Luke wanted us to know that Jesus’ ministry was Spirit-anointed, Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered and Spirit-fulfilled. His ministry was no accident it was miraculous and was prophesied years ago through the prophets by the Spirit. Jesus is God’s Son, come to save all people and open for them eternal life.

Prepare to go one day to your eternal home – have faith and believe!

Prayer: My dear Saviour, you have prepared a place in heaven for me. I know that it will be a place where you will be there to welcome me, and I will finally be home. Thank you. Amen.



Kingship

Palm/ Passion Sunday

Read: Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-11



***“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
Zechariah 9:9 (NIV)***

The prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 talks of a humble King who will bring peace and justice to the world. When Jesus entered Jerusalem in Matthew 21:1-11, he was fulfilling this prophecy and claiming the Kingship as the promised Messiah. This confirmed Jesus' identity and established His mission to bring salvation to all as we will experience next week on Easter Sunday. But for now, our Jesus is proclaimed as King by the people as they live out the prophecy of Zechariah from around 500 B.C. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem which proclaimed Jesus as King also gives credence to the apostles' teaching after Jesus had died and risen from the dead.

The acknowledgement of the Kingship of Jesus seems to have happened backwards. For it happened after He had been anointed at His baptism by the Holy Spirit, performed incredible miracles, told parables of the Kingdom of God and taught many about God's Kingdom, acknowledged as King and was finally crowned on Good Friday to then be put to death as a pauper. Aren't kings normally crowned first and then perform all the wonderful deeds to then be loved by the people? Rather, His body was secretly placed in a borrowed tomb without pomp and ceremony. Is this really our King?

In Denmark we went to the Roskilde Cathedral where all the Kings and Queens of Denmark are buried back to 986AD of Harald Bluetooth. The tombs and chapels of all the Kings and Queens are extravagant and have decorated tombs relating to how much they were loved. Queen Margrete II's tomb has been erected before she has even died. Our Jesus was a King without a tomb. He didn't need one as God raised Him where He sits beside His Heavenly Father.

My Jesus is a humble King but deserving of all the love of the world!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you love me with an everlasting love. I worship you as King of my life and over the whole earth. May your name always be praised with Hallelujahs. Amen.





Prophecies

35th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 22:1-11,16-18; John 19:23-24

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” Psalm 22:1a, 18 (NIV)

This Holy Week we are going to be reading about the prophecies made by Old Testament prophets concerning the events which happened to Jesus in the last week of His life on earth. At each Maundy Thursday service that I have attended it closes with the stripping of the altar signifying abandonment. During this time when all is taken from the sanctuary, Psalm 22 is usually read. This Psalm is prophetic in nature and written by King David (who was close to God's heart). The beginning of this Psalm is a quote that Jesus also says from the cross: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46b)* and there are other references to Jesus' hands and feet being pierced (Psalm 22:16b) and His clothes and robe being gambled for (Psalm 22:18).

King David reigned as the King of Israel 1010 – 970 B.C. so it was written about 1,000 years before Jesus. Psalm 22 describes with amazing accuracy the means of death and other significant details surrounding Jesus' death. Humans are unable to predict the future, only our God can. I am reading a book by Liane Moriarty, 'Here One Moment' for a book club. It tells the story of a woman who predicts the time and means of death of a whole planeload of people and the fallout from these predictions. Being halfway through this book, I can see the danger in knowing the future as it becomes a determinant to all actions and behaviours. You can be bound by the prophecy.

God knows our future and all that it entails. Jesus knew from the beginning that He was to suffer and die and that did not determine how He acted or saw people with total and absolute love in His heart. He could have changed His mind at the last moment and renounced He was God – but that would have changed our future!

God loves you so much that He lets us live one day at a time. Live it for Him!

Prayer: My loving Father, thank you that you hold my future and life in your hands, and you lead me where I should go. Help me to live my life in a way that brings glory to you. Amen.



Understanding

36th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Isaiah 53



“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought him peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5 (NIV)

I recently went and saw the new movie – ‘Wicked’. Years ago, I saw it as a musical in Melbourne and loved it and so was not sure how it could be portrayed as a movie. I was impressed (with the first part released so far) as it told more of the background leading up to the story of the ‘Wizard of Oz’. It explained how and why the characters then behaved in such a manner to others and the story behind the scarecrow, tinman and lion. I won’t spoil it, but I do recommend it.

To understand the whole crucifixion and why Jesus came to die for all of humankind, we need to understand the background and the stories in the Bible from the beginning of time when God created the world. Seeing and hearing just the story of Easter is like just seeing the musical, leaves you wanting to know more of the background. God wanted all His people to come to believe and love Him, not because we are forced to, but out of our free will. Things went sour with Adam and Eve and humankind didn’t improve. So, from the beginning God had a plan of salvation for us and it was through His beloved Son.

God waited until the right time to send His Son into the world to be the sacrifice for all our sins. We would no longer be condemned to our wrongdoings but be set free through the rising of Jesus from the dead – He beat the devil who now has no power over us. Through the Old Testament, God sets out His plan as to why He chose to save us in this manner. We see the nature of a loving Father who wants all to follow Him and love Him by sending His Son to die for the sins of the world so that we can enter heaven. When we understand the backstory of our salvation, we can fully realise the extent of God’s love for us.

God loves us so much that He gave up everything for our eternal life!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me your story of salvation so that I can understand the extent of your love. Help me to continue to learn and grow more in understanding. Amen.





Communion Instituted

37th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Luke 22:7-23

“And [Jesus] said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’”
Luke 22:15-16 (NIV)

Jesus spoke prophetically and in riddles to His disciples. No wonder these poor fishermen had troubles understanding what Jesus was talking about or trying to teach them. They understood Passover – it had been celebrated since the Israelites were taken from captivity in Egypt by Moses in 1440 B.C. It was here that God told the people to eat a lamb, unleavened bread and put blood on the door of their houses to escape the angel of death (Exodus 12:1-14). Since that time, the Orthodox Jewish community still celebrate God's deliverance, so it was not unusual to the disciples to celebrate this festival time.

However, Jesus changed the storyline. He changed the meaning. No longer are the disciples or us to celebrate the deliverance from Egypt, rather we as Christians (followers of Christ) are now to celebrate our deliverance from death through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus came to change our way of thinking and set us free from the old laws and introduce us to freedom and salvation. Every time we partake of Holy Communion, we celebrate God's love and grace for us through the gift He gave of His Son. As Lutherans we partake of Jesus' death in His body and blood given as bread and wine. Jesus comes to us with love and forgiveness every time we celebrate communion.

Traditions and ‘this is the way we always do it’ mind-sets are hard to change. The Jewish people of Jesus' time could not understand this new way Jesus was instituting, which is why they put Him to death. The Jewish Passover was commemorating an act of the past. The Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) is a celebration of the living Jesus in the hearts and lives of all believers until He returns. It is a power that lives in us that is made possible through Jesus' actions on the cross. It is a promise of God's presence always!

Celebrate God's gift of love and grace in Holy Communion!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me the gift and promise of your presence every time I take Holy Communion. You gave up so much so that I can live in your forgiveness. Amen.



Last Miracle Recorded

38th Day in Lent (Maundy Thursday)

Read: Luke 22:49-51



“And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear... And [Jesus] touched the man’s ear and healed him.” Luke 22:50, 51b (NIV)

Each of the four Gospels record this event happening at the time when Jesus was arrested. But it is only in the Gospel of Luke that it says that Jesus healed the high priest’s servant. This is the last recorded miracle of Jesus as a man... the next is the resurrection of the Son of God. Only in the Gospel of John, is the disciple named as Simon Peter who committed the crime, and Malchus as the name of the high priest servant. Sometimes I am asked why are there four Gospels telling the same thing? It is only through looking at all four Gospels that we can get a more complete picture of who this Jesus is who performs all these miracles. When an accident happens, police ask as many eyewitnesses as possible to get a greater understanding of what happened. Each person views things through different eyes and opinions.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John looked at Jesus differently. Matthew was writing as a Jew for the Jewish people trying to convince them that Jesus is also their Messiah. Mark was a reporter, evangelist and a friend of Peter and wrote for the Gentiles (Romans). Luke was a doctor, a physician and many of his stories are about healings. He wrote for the Greeks. John is known as the disciple at the foot of the cross who then cared for Jesus’ mother. He wrote for the Christian community sharing what he saw and experienced.

Through these four Gospels we learn about Jesus’ love and compassion for His people. Even as He was arrested, He cared for Malchus by healing his ear. As you learn about Jesus, reading the Gospels gives a fuller understanding of the true man/true God nature of Jesus. None of the Gospels contradict, rather, together they describe Jesus’ birth, His sinless life, His death and resurrection, forgiveness given and that He is God’s only Son, the Saviour of the World and our Messiah and King.

Reading the Bible produces a greater understanding of our miraculous Jesus!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me as I read about your life and understand about the miraculous God you are. Help me to also share what I learn with others. All people need to know you! Amen.





Scourged

39th Day in Lent (Good Friday)

Read: Isaiah 50:5-8; Isaiah 52:14

“Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they struck Him with their hands.” John 19:1-3 (NKJV)

If Jesus was innocent, He should have been set free. If Jesus was guilty, He should have just been crucified; but to scourge Jesus was unlawful, and Pilate ordered this to please the Jews. It seems that the soldiers took this opportunity to then have fun with Jesus before He was crucified as He had caused them so much trouble during His ministry. ‘A scourge is a whip or lash, especially a multi-thong type made of leather, used to inflict severe corporal punishment.’ [Wikipedia] A scourging of the prisoner’s back usually means that much of the flesh is removed by the thrashing of the whip and sometimes metal ends with barbs are added to the lashings.

This just makes my stomach turn to think of anyone being treated in this sub-human way. In the two verses from Isaiah above, it was prophesied that the coming Messiah would be subject to absolute horror and not a word would he speak. His face and appearance would also be so disfigured that He would no longer look human. Jesus knew of this prophecy and yet He obeyed His Heavenly Father so that the prophecies would come to pass. If I were Jesus, I would have had a good case to argue with God that this wasn’t fair, nor was I prepared to have this done to me. Fortunately for our salvation I am not Jesus.

In Isaiah 53:7 it was prophesied: *“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* This was foretold 700 years before Jesus’ birth. God had a plan for our salvation from the very beginning and it was through sending His willing Son to the cross to bear all the pain that our sins hold on us, that we can now come into God’s presence and spend eternity with Him.

God’s love for humankind is greater than we could ever imagine!

Prayer: Our loving Saviour, thank you for being prepared to suffer and die for me and all the wrong I do every day. I am sorry for my sins and thank you for your forgiveness. Amen.



Assurance

40th Day in Lent (Holy Saturday)

Read: Matthew 27:45-56



“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.” Matthew 27:51-52 (NIV)

I do not enjoy horror movies. Scary things give me nightmares. I still have nightmares from when I was a child and went into the TV room when my brothers were watching “The Blob”. These days with CGI and everything that movie is pretty lame, but to a child, very impacting and I looked under my bed for many nights after. Jesus performed many miracles and healings through His life on earth and to the people of the day (even for us). The people of the day were unsure about who this Jesus was, but if He could help their family, they would believe in Him. Throughout the Old Testament, God performed miracles through the prophets. But at Jesus’ death, God performs a miracle that many times is glossed over.

When Jesus took His last breath on the cross, we hear that the temple curtain was torn in two, signifying we now have access to God through Jesus and not through all the Jewish leaders and priests – our access is direct. But in the Gospel of Matthew, we read of another miracle. Read again the above verse: *“The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.”* What power and an incredible witness to the people of that time and to us today. Yes, it was scary, but God raised those who believed in Him that they might also be witnesses to the power of Jesus and His Father God.

These raised people were not zombies but restored people of God. After Jesus’ resurrection (not before), they went out into Jerusalem and appeared to many. What an amazing gift of life God gave to the people of that time and also to us today. This is proof that Jesus has now conquered death. We can be confident through the death and rising of our Saviour Jesus, that we too will be raised on the last day to live for eternity in heaven.

Through Jesus our eternity is assured!

Prayer: Thank you for assuring me of my eternal life in Heaven in your conquering death itself. I welcome seeing you and experiencing this joy one day with you. Amen.





Resurrection & Beyond

Easter Sunday

Read: Mark 16:1-20

***Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation"
Mark 16:15 (NIV)***

Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!

Easter Sunday is such a celebration day after the sombre time leading up to this day with Jesus' suffering and death. Today is a day to break open the chocolate Easter eggs because Jesus also broke out of the tomb. God performed the most miraculous miracle today. He brought His one and only Son back to life after so many witnessed His most gruesome death. He had even laid dead in a grave for three days with a battered, pierced body. That is truly the most wondrous miracle of all. With this also, God not only raised Jesus, but through Jesus, He assured our relationship with Him. What a blessing for us!

We read in the Gospels that Jesus was not only raised but he appeared to over 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). This gave Him many witnesses to God's amazing miracle that they could testify first-hand. People can be so sceptical. Last year, while travelling through Europe, my husband and myself, went to the city of Trier (the oldest German town) which had Roman ruins from the 170 A.D. There was a Porto Nigra (city gate), amphitheatre and Roman baths from that time period. Even seeing it, it was so hard to believe that these things were built just 150 years after Christ. How is this possible?

We see things, and then we tell others that they too might believe and want to know more. That is what Jesus has commissioned us to do. We have the testimony of all these witnesses to God's love and His saving actions through Jesus in the Bible. Now we need to go out to the whole world and do the same. As we share the Good News of Easter Sunday to one person, they would hopefully do the same with another, and so on! This is how Christianity spread back in the first century. How about we try it again this year and beyond. Jesus rose for the people back then, also for you and me today.

Go out into the world, your neighbourhood, and share this Good News!

Prayer: My risen Lord and Saviour, you rose from the dead and showed yourself to so many witnesses. Help me also to be a witness for you. Amen.



The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask you to keep me this day too, from all sin and evil, so that in all my thoughts, words and deeds I may please you. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive all my sin and the wrong which I have done, and graciously keep me this night. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen.



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