

40 days

a Lent Devotional and Prayer guide



LUTHERAN
CHURCH
OF AUSTRALIA

INTERNATIONAL MISSION

This year the *40 Days - a Lent Devotional and Prayer guide* devotions have been written by members of our partner churches focussing on the theme '40 days with the Storyteller'.

Many of them are based on Jesus' parables and, as you know, the parables are some of the most well-known and much-loved words of Christ. Just as they did with their original listeners, the relatable stories which Jesus told, continue to communicate the heart of God. But that doesn't mean the parables are necessarily easy to understand or simplistic in their meaning. We would suggest the reality is quite the opposite.

Seemingly simple stories are used to convey profound truths that begin to open our eyes to the marvellous reality of God's kingdom of love. Whether it is a farmer sowing the seed of God's Word with abandon, or the hated Samaritan showing mercy at his own expense, or tales of lost objects and the joy of finding them. All the parables point us to the reality that God's kingdom is not what we might at first expect. It is a kingdom of undeserved mercy, of overwhelming joy and of extravagant grace that considers no cost too great if it gathers one more soul into its midst. When we see Jesus at the centre of his stories and parables, they are transformed from potentially moralistic tales into the magnificent proclamation of forgiveness and life in his name.

While some of Jesus' teachings are meant to challenge us and call us to a better way as God's beloved people, their primary purpose is to point us to Christ and his love for us lost ones. All too often we can read Jesus' words as crippling moralistic tales intended to encourage us to be a better person. While he does reveal aspects of the Christian life, even more so he reveals the depth of his love for us.

As you ponder on the Holy Spirit's words shared through the voices of our partners in mission, we pray your eyes will be focused on Jesus, strengthened in the knowledge that his kingdom is one in which repentant sinners are embraced by their Heavenly Father who runs to receive them. This kingdom is a place where there is great joy over a single lost person being found, and one where Jesus himself has paid the price to heal our wounds and restore our souls.

Lenten blessings to you all!

Pastor Matt Anker and Erin Kerber
- LCA International Mission

DAY ONE

He said to them, "Come and you will see." John 1:38-39

In the Melanesian communal perspective, an invitation from someone means two things: participation and celebration. Invitations are made only for significant occasions, with specific tasks assigned to engage both host and guests. When everyone is participating from the time of preparation to celebration, the event becomes successful and satisfying.

The passage for this meditation tells us about two disciples who began to follow Jesus for their own reasons. But then Jesus asked them, "what do you want?" Their answer was far from profound, but Jesus gave them a simple invitation, "come and see." That invitation is an invitation for a journey with Jesus. It is not a simple journey to undergo only spiritual experiences, but an invitation of responding to Jesus' call throughout the whole of life. From the enthusiasm of youth to the maturity of old age, the discipleship of Jesus makes obedience to the master's call the central priority - a special journey of discipleship formation.

When Jesus began to call his disciples, they already knew what kind of person he was (John 1:35-41). They already knew he was inviting them for a purpose, and they were willing to follow him although they did not understand the meaning of the invitation. Jesus told Peter and John to leave their fishing business and "fish for men", to help others come to Jesus. Jesus was calling them away from their productive trades to be productive spiritually. It is a call to journey into a complete transformation of life witnessing to the gospel. The gospel like a net, lifting people from dark waters into the light of day and transforming their lives.

This invitation begins with asking ourselves, "what am I seeking?" To follow Christ for our own purposes would be asking Christ to follow us – to align with us, to support us and advance our cause, not his.

Christ's invitation is a journey of radical transformation that affects our job, our lifestyle, our values, our goals, or aspects of our beliefs. Although it took time for Jesus' call and his message to get through, the disciples followed. In the same way we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus. As we are about to journey in this Lenten season, take a moment to pause and reflect. What are you really seeking?

Will you commit to seek Jesus and continue to journey with him for the next 40 days?

- Giesa Panpan, Ministerial Training Department Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG)

Please pray for: The ELC-PNG Ministerial Training Department, as they train leaders to serve those in their care with a holistic approach, ensuring they know their identity, accept themselves as a gift from their creator and love and respect their fellow neighbours.

DAY TWO

But the lawyer said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Luke 10: 25-37

Trust a lawyer to use the law to start a debate! For Luke's community, the law is not esoteric knowledge, but the tendency to obey it in one's heart. As I listen to these words my heart is challenged by 'who is my neighbour?' Jesus was dealing with the racial and religious prejudice that Luke's community knew well. The second part of the commandment follows on from "You shall love the Lord your God..." This text is Jesus' 'hands-on' teaching about the role of a Christian.

We can live like the good Samaritan only through God's grace, noticing a lonely look, a teardrop fall, a lip quiver. Lent challenges Christians to notice, be aware and attentive. We need God's grace to dialogue. We need to notice and be aware and attentive to ourselves before we can impart this gift to others.

I may never be exposed to the situation presented in this gospel, but even in my heart, I can't ignore one who is needy. Do I notice the lonely look, teardrops falling, lips quivering? Or do I miss these signs on the faces of my brothers and sisters? There is always someone who needs my attention, awareness, and inclusion. There is always someone who needs the healing of the gospel of our Lord Jesus as they face life's troubles.

This Lent, I invite you to meet the challenge of awareness, attentiveness, and inclusion. Resist tuning out the voices of others who want to share their joys or sorrows. This Lent, enjoy watching children playing, couples walking hand in hand, a dog fetching a ball for its owner, a gardener working on their garden. This Lent, make the world a better place.

My mother had many friends of different backgrounds and religions. She attended sewing and cake-making classes, and these friends enriched her life. She didn't have a problem with a person who was divorced or had been rejected from their family or community. Instead, she invited them home and often had morning tea with them. Inclusion, awareness, and attentiveness summed up her beauty.

This Lent, may the grace of God and the courage of Jesus give you the faith to notice, to be aware and to be attentive to yourself and your neighbours, not because it is the law, but because we have heard and live by this Word by all we say, think and do.

- Paul De Tullio, Director of Service Learning, Immanuel College, Novar Gardens

Please pray for: Immanuel College, who recently celebrated the completion of their partnership with Bethany Home, Malaysia, which challenged their students to remember the value of the most vulnerable in our communities.

DAY THREE

Stay awake- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. Stay awake." Mark 13:35-37

"Stay awake!"

Why? Certainly, I don't need to stay awake for God to be with me. I am already always, totally in the presence of God. What is missing is being aware; aware that each time I take another breath, God is choosing and holding me. Being aware can be hard in the Australian culture. We are brainwashed to be relentlessly doing and achieving and consuming, and to live day by day without thinking or reflecting. In a strange contradiction, we can be incredibly busy as we aimlessly sleepwalk through life. Being awake is stopping for a break. It involves being still, turning off the noise, noticing what is already here. It is recognising the value of what I have been given. Simple and hard. There must be something I can do: go to a more lively church, find a charismatic pastor or a meditation trainer. There is nothing wrong with any of these. The peril is that this makes awareness into a skill, an achievement. Staying awake means letting go. It is grace alone all the way. I am okay, I belong, I no longer need to justify my existence or persuade God to notice me and like me. Fears make staying awake very hard. I can be burdened with fearful loads of illness and family strife, economic and political confusion. So, I long for evening when I can escape into the nothingness of sleep.

"Stay awake."

I don't need to sleep, for God is with me. I am already always totally in the presence of God. So why succumb to fear? Why waste my life speculating on the master's timetable? I have better things to do. The master may drop back this evening. Then again maybe it will be my great, great, great grandchild's grandchild who gets the visit. So, I have plenty to do.

I can begin with living out my awareness of grace and sometimes talking about it. Maybe I have been entrusted with the wonder of our earth and called to care and sustain it for my great grandchildren's grandchildren.

"Stay awake."

The best sort of waiting is when you sit down to have a drink or watch a bit of television as you wait for your guest to arrive. Everything that needs to be done has been done - the house is spotless, the wine is uncorked, you have phoned for a few pizzas. Waiting in peace because everything has been put in order.

- Geoff Burger, volunteer, online English program for STT Abdi Sabda, Indonesia

Please pray for: The continued development and implementation of gospel-centered curriculum in literacy and education programs, which can be used to support LCA NZ partner churches.

DAY FOUR

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.
Luke 16:19-31

When I read the text about the rich man and Lazarus in the gospel of Luke, it made me think about a story that happened at a small village in a rural area of Thailand. It was about thirty years ago, when I was young. The village had only twenty families, no electricity, no water system, and no social media. Moreover, the village was on the Laos border where the communist area was. When fighting happened, it was a risky area for the people. The Thai government had a rescue point in that area to protect people in the village and the region. I remember that a soldier from the rescue point came to my house every day to help with food and pharmacy. This story helps me to think that we can have peace, warm hearts, and love when we give our hands to help people who are suffering in their life. The story of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us how to use wealth, talent and time to rescue and protect the poor and those who suffer in the world. But even more than that, it reminds us of the importance of placing our trust in Jesus for forgiveness and life.

The text also reminds us to think about the purpose of life when we are in the world. We should seek the heavenly treasure from our Father that is never lost. We should find and share faith, love, peace and hope to all people.

I pray that the Father of peace, love and fellowship gives a blessing on our hearts, to see, hear and listen to the voices of people who are in pain, worry, fear and depression.

Lord, have mercy on us. Amen

- Khun Pim, Lua evangelist, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand

Please pray for: The Lua evangelists serving district 5 in Nan, as they make disciples through teaching and ministering to those living in the communities in Northern Thailand.

DAY FIVE

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. Luke 12:42-48

I have known, loved, and farewelled three godly people – a couple and their adopted son. The lives of these individuals exemplify the faithful and wise servant. For each, the Lord was central in everything they did. Being early missionaries in Papua New Guinea (PNG), their experience was far removed from what a newly married couple would expect today. There was no shiny new house, no two-car garage and no local shopping centre. The young wife was the first fair-skinned woman that many of the local native population had ever seen. However, this blessed couple had everything they needed – strong faith and a knowledge of their Lord and Saviour. Outside of this, they knew God would provide. And He did. Contending with limited communication, tribal attitudes and tropical weather, concerns of danger and safety were ever-present. But despite not knowing what lay ahead on the trail or across the other side of the river, this couple remained firm in their faith and ready to do God's will. During their early years, many locals still engaged in traditional practices, including warring as tribes, cannibalism and worship of spirits and gods. Yet these practices also provided ample opportunities for this couple to share their God and his love and peace. Many hundreds of people came to know Christ and were baptised. By attending the schools this couple established, these 'natives' were able to hear about God's love for them. They learnt to read about it for themselves and then take God's love into their huts and villages to share with their families and neighbours. Despite raising their own three children, there was always room at their table. One seat was filled with a regular who became a brother to their own children – attending school with them, worshipping with them, and even returning with them to Australia to complete his schooling. Returning to PNG, and despite becoming an influential businessman, his heart likewise remained true and faithful to the Lord. Although we may not experience such primitive encounters, each one of us does not know what is around the next corner in life. However, when we remain true in our faith in Christ, we will keep our eyes open to the ways in which he will bless us more richly than we can even imagine.

- Allyson Dutschke, member, Golden Grove Lutheran church

Please pray for: The Golden Grove Lutheran Church and Primary School, as they partner with the schools at Asaroka, in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea and are mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

DAY SIX

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Matthew 25:1-13

This parable admonishes us to be ever watchful for the bridegroom's coming. But how does one keep watch?

For some Christian interpreters, it means being vigilant by keeping oneself holy, being obedient to God's laws and commands in Scripture every day. For others, it means to be the watchman, speaking publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling out for social justice and proclaiming God's love for the world.

While the theology of the cross does speak much about suffering. It is also certainly true that in Christ, God enters into our suffering and death. But that suffering is not about God entering into solidarity with us but, rather, comes about because we are at odds with God and are trying to rush headlong into some sort of cozy identification with him.

Lutheran theologian, Gerhard O. Forde, finds it distasteful that the theology of the cross is sentimentalised in an age so concerned with social injustice and victimisation. The theology of the cross is about justification of the sinful human being.

Luther is concerned to point out that God and his Christ are the operators in the matter, not the ones operated upon.

In the gospel of John, Jesus is concerned to point out that no one takes his life from him but that he lays it down of his own accord (John 10:18). In the end, Jesus suffers and dies because nobody identified with him. The people cried, "Crucify him!" One of his disciples betrayed him, another denied him, the rest forsook him and fled. He died alone, forsaken even by God.

So, how do we keep watch? Robert Farrar Capon says, "if we trust, we become trusters, and we enter into the sure possession of him whom we trust. If we distrust, we become distrusters and close out the only relationship with reality ever offered to us."

That closure is the note on which the parable ends...He does not say, "I never called you." He does not say, "I never loved you." He does not say, "I never drew you to myself." He only says, "I never knew you—because you never bothered to know me."

- Martin Yee, Assistant to the Bishop, Lutheran Church in Singapore

Please pray for: The Lutheran Church in Singapore, as they continue to work together in unity and serve God's ministry and his kingdom together.

DAY SEVEN

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. Matthew 18:23-35

Do you find, as I do, that the ways of the world today have impacted your life in some way that can be hard to understand and articulate to others, let alone yourself? Sin has manifested itself in so many aspects of our lives that we often find ourselves in sheer disbelief at things happening in the world around us. God's plans of good from the beginning of creation have indeed been compromised.

For starters, let us look at the family unit - the God-designed framework for his people to live joyful lives as a functional society. Father, mother, brothers, sisters, [great] grand-parents, [great] grand-children are the training grounds which allow us to fulfil Jesus' new commandment, 'to love others, as he first loved us.'

Perhaps you know of situations that bear the scars of this brokenness from the sin of unforgiveness? Divorced parents, children displaced with little exposure to God's plans of fulfillment meant for us in family. The resulting battle lines are forged from hurt, shame, and unforgiveness. Brother against brother - the love of Christ is lost. What if Absalom, the third and favourite son of David, had the opportunity to hear this advice of unforgiveness from Jesus? How different would his story have been?

I have good news - it comes from the power of God in his Word where he commands our heartfelt forgiveness for each other; one where the enemy has no power to extinguish the light of Christ in us and through us.

Jesus Christ, God in the flesh...a love truly like no other.

Jesus teaches us here that forgiveness has no limits for those who repent. Ask yourself this, have you ever withheld forgiveness from someone who has wholeheartedly sought it from you, but in your own sin you have failed to give it? When we respect the Word of God, it will change our attitude to sin.

We are God's faithful church, together - the hospital for the sin of this world.

Are we weakened by our unforgiveness? Brothers and sisters, in celebrating Jesus' coming there is an opportunity to exercise our childlike faith. Who comes to mind that you can forgive today? Let us have the compassion of heart to forgive, doing so in the grace that we have also been forgiven.

- John Bolitho, member, LCA International Mission committee

Please pray for: The LCA International Mission committee, as they act as mentors and advisors, guiding LCA International Mission staff in their interactions with their overseas partners.

DAY EIGHT

'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'
Luke 13:6-9

For some of us, God gives another chance. In his infinite wisdom and out of a heart of compassion, even as he watches us live avidly in the world, he gives a hard tug, a wake-up call.

It happened to my husband and I while we were in the midst of building our family and careers. An unplanned but fortuitous screening led to a diagnosis of stage 2-3 breast cancer for me. Everything came to an abrupt halt and our world caved. We had expended our time and energy building a better life for our family. We had little or almost nothing to do with the God to whom we owe everything. Shaken to the core, we repented and rushed back to the Father before it was too late.

In the parable of the unfruitful fig tree, we cannot fault the vineyard owner who had planted it. He had patiently and constantly checked on it for three long years. Every time, he turned away disappointed that there were no fruits, not even a single one.

Do we also cause our heavenly Father grief and disappointment for producing nothing for him? Do we just use the time and gifts we have been blessed with to adorn ourselves with lush leaves? Do we just want to spread our branches to get more sunshine to brighten our lives? Do we forget about bearing fruits for our owner until we are almost to be cut down?

At this juncture, where would we be if it were not for our blessed vinedresser? He is Jesus our great high priest, who intercedes for us unto God. He patiently digs to loosen the tangles. He puts enriching people and situations in our paths. He hopes that we will soon bear bountiful fruit for his and our God. It is our Lord's desire that we be listed on the 'well and good' page rather than the 'cut it down' one.

Let us remember therefore, that everyone is given a set period of time to produce fruit for the glory of God. It is the only way to live fulfilled lives. We can rest assured that our Heavenly Father wants only good for us always.

- Shu Ying, Lutheran Education Malaysia

Please pray for: Lutheran Education Malaysia, as they share God's love with the students and their families who are part of their kindergartens and schools.

DAY NINE

He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. Luke 5:36

When I was younger, I purchased a beautiful cashmere cardigan. I loved wearing it, but it wasn't long before it needed a wash.

It was in the days before Google, so I didn't research how to best care for it. The label read 'dry in shade' but it was winter and I knew it would take a week to dry that way, so I thought it wouldn't hurt to lay it in the sun for 'just a little while'. Well, sadly, you can guess what happened...the cardigan shrank, and I was never able to wear it again!

This is the image which comes to mind when I read this passage from Luke. If only Jesus had given me some laundry tips about my cardigan, I would still be wearing it today!

But of course, Jesus isn't just sharing domestic wisdom here. He's talking about the old and new covenants and, ultimately, his fulfillment of both.

We glean this by reading before and after these verses, seeing that Jesus was in an ongoing dialogue with the Pharisees, who kept holding him and his followers to the old covenant – a covenant marked by a posture of 'doing'. To be fair, it was all they knew (they didn't have Google either!) but time and again, Jesus patiently, yet authoritatively, tried to help them understand that he was standing in their midst to herald and fulfill a new covenant – one marked by a posture of 'being'.

Jesus was saying that some things are simply incompatible. Humans cannot fulfil the law; humans cannot honour the old covenant. Yet, he was inviting them, and continues to invite us, to be in relationship with him, to delight in his company, and trust in his capacity to do what we cannot.

- Gayla Mathews, chaplain, Immanuel Lutheran College, Buderim

Please pray for: Immanuel Lutheran College and their partnership with SMA HKBP Parapat, Indonesia, as they support one another through targeted financial assistance, resource provision, improving access to technology and developing governance capacity.

DAY TEN

Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. Luke 6:47-49

In this parable, Jesus uses something that is very important in a human's life - a house and the way to build it. A house means independence, safety from dangers, readiness to face life...

In this text, Jesus compares building a physical house to a spiritual house. From John 14:3 we know that Jesus has already built a place for us believers and wherever he is, we will be with him. The house he is talking about in this text is our spiritual life. Let us look to how a wise person builds a house.

We have three steps to follow here:

1- The first step is to come to Jesus Christ. Human beings do not know how to come to Jesus by themselves. It is a calling and a choice put in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is why there are missionaries and evangelists who work as a bell, reminding people about God's calling. This step is the work of evangelism.

2- The second step is to hear his words. If there are people talking around us, we can hear them whether we want to or not. We can choose to listen to the conversation or not; we can place importance on it or not. But if we are interested in something and we want to hear it clearly, we have to turn off the other sounds around us and pay attention. There are many people who come to Jesus but are they really interested in his words? Do they place importance on it? Do they know how to listen to his words? This step refers to the edification work.

3- The third step is to do. Here, there is a decision to make; it is not a passive action but an active step. It is the step of doing and practicing the words. There are many people who make a decision about their life and leave bad habits to adopt a new life. Some even have to leave their family, culture, house and village and even their country to show respect to the words. This step refers to spiritual maturity.

These are the steps to take for a wise person to build his spiritual house, his safe and independent spiritual life. The one who has a strong foundation will resist all obstacles and they will not use God's Word to fit their own ideas and their own convictions but instead be shaped by God's Word and have his forgiveness and love as the foundation for all they do.

- Rovaso Harivony Razafindrabe, doctor and missionary, Malagasy Lutheran Church, Madagascar

Please pray for: The Malagasy Lutheran Church, as they send missionaries into Asia, Europe and North America, bringing the news of true gospel of Jesus, his forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

DAY ELEVEN

The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. Matthew 22:1-14

We are all born knowing there is a debt between us and the Creator. We have not lived up to his expectations and we feel deeply in our soul that we need to do something to make it up to him. But what and how can we know when we've done enough?

In this parable a king is providing a wedding feast for his son but those on the guest list are too busy to come - they have work to do, along with other excuses. So he sends his servants into the streets to find anyone and everyone to invite to the banquet until the wedding hall is filled. It is filled – with the good and bad. What standing did these people have in the kingdom to be invited to such an ornate affair? None. What had these people done to deserve to be attendance? Nothing. Why, then, were they brought to the banquet?

You and I are those people that were not on the guest list and yet are called. We are called in different ways. Perhaps it was in the waters of baptism or maybe a friend invited us to go to church. Regardless of how, God called us by his Word. Whether we have known his love and forgiveness for minutes or decades, God's undeserved love calls us to the wedding feast.

Jesus made sure this happened when he died for us. Every sin of thought, word, and action that you and I have ever committed is gone in the blood shed for us.

You do not need to provide a life well-lived to enter heaven. Jesus gives mercy and forgiveness freely to all. We have the certainty of eternal life because of our Saviour. You will be seated at that eternal feast in the right clothes because you will be - and are - clothed in your Saviour.

Because of his unending and undeserved love, your eternal King has called you to the wedding banquet. You did not deserve or earn it, but you will be safe and protected forever because he has forgiven you. Thanks be to God! Amen.

- Grace Kroehn, president, Lutheran Women of Australia

Please pray for: The Lutheran Women of Australia, as they grow in faith through studying God's Word, are stimulated through being with other Christian women of all ages from many walks of life, and put their faith into action through service.

DAY TWELVE

“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:8-10

This parable is the second in a series that Jesus shared. The first parable speaks of the lost sheep, followed by this one on the lost coin, and then the story of the prodigal son.

The lost sheep sheds light on a lone sheep straying away from its fenced yard, representing 1 out of 100. The parable of the lost coin centres on a valuable coin that goes missing within a house. And the story of the prodigal son recounts the journey of a wayward son who leaves home and later returns.

Our focus today is the parable of the lost coin. This story exemplifies God’s sentiment towards his people who have strayed from his path, breaking their communion with him.

Jesus initiated the parable with a rhetorical question, asking, “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” The anticipated response is evident: any person in that situation would undoubtedly search diligently until they recovered the lost treasure.

The determination of the woman in the parable is noteworthy. Despite challenges, she persisted in her search. Her thoughts constantly lingered on the lost coin, even amidst her daily tasks. We remain uninformed about the duration of her search, yet her unyielding spirit is evident. In her quest, she not only looked for the coin but also might have organised her home, making it shine with cleanliness and order.

This highlights the significance of purity in our hearts and the importance of teaching our children God’s words, urging them to abide by his teachings and to respect one another.

We can relate to the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son in many ways. They remind us to think about our actions, apologise for our mistakes, and truly welcome Jesus into our lives.

It is likely that the woman in Jesus’ parable was a widow. The ten silver coins, possibly her only inheritance from her late husband, represented her livelihood. The loss of even one coin, therefore, was significant. Her frantic search and the joy upon finding the coin symbolise the heavenly rejoicing that occurs when a sinner repents and restores their relationship with God.

- Dumuh Gidik, Radio Presenter, Kristen Redio, Papua New Guinea

Please pray for: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea ICT and Communications division of the Corporate Services sector, as they support the church’s departments, districts, health centres, primary schools, high schools, teacher training college, nursing college, girls’ Bible schools, seminaries, and training centre for evangelists.

DAY THIRTEEN

Are you there, Lord? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Luke 18:1-8

Who of us hasn't been downhearted when we call on the Lord with concerns of our heart, and yet it seems that he either doesn't hear or care for our situation? So often we ache just for some acknowledgement that God has heard our cry. Even if the Lord, in his wisdom, is not intervening to bring relief, it would be soothing for us to get a response. It is to this situation that Jesus gives us the parable of the persistent widow.

Jesus tells us clearly, right at the beginning, that this parable is designed to bring encouragement. It is about not giving up even if it seems that our efforts go unrewarded. Just as the widow knew that her persistence would bring a positive change eventually, we can be confident that God will bring change to us and our circumstances in his timing.

We see that the widow did not give up for two reasons. Firstly, the judge had the power to make something happen. It is pointless bringing a petition if the recipient has no authority. The widow was not tempted to look elsewhere for resolution or even take matters into her own hands; she knew that the judge was the answer. Secondly, she had confidence that the response from the judge, if it ever came, would be to her advantage. The judge would not punish her for her persistence. The very worst that could happen for the widow would be no change.

In our dark times, we are encouraged to remember the authority that our God has and to believe in his character. Just as Peter declared, 'to whom should we go? You have the words to eternal life', we know that the only place we can go with confidence is the presence of the living God. We acknowledge that no power in heaven or earth can equal that of our God. Not only does Jesus have the words to eternal life, he has authority over all creation. The discipline of growing closer to Jesus in tough times is often a blessing in itself.

Through scripture and our own experience, we know that God is for us and his nature is to bring life and hope. We can doubt, that is natural. In those times God's Holy Spirit lifts our gaze and our hearts toward the love and grace of God. We trust that he is at work in our tough situations even if it is hard for us to see. May we worship him, declaring his authority in our life and praising his goodness.

- Greg Fowler, Pastor, Redlands College, Wellington Point

Please pray for: LCA International Mission, as they assist, equip and empower Australian and New Zealand Lutheran pastors to fulfill God's call to reach the lost in their own communities and beyond.

DAY FOURTEEN

"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." - Matthew 13:33

'Pau' is a Chinese bun which is enjoyed by everyone in Malaysia for breakfast or tea time. The dough is made with flour, yeast, salt, sugar, vegetable oil, water and baking powder. After kneading, the dough is left to stand for one to two hours, giving time for the yeast to work through the dough and bring it to rise. Then the dough is punched down, the preferred filling is added into the pau and it is then steamed for consumption. This is how just a small portion of yeast is used and spreads throughout the whole dough, fermenting in such a short time.

Our God who loves us and is all-knowing, sent Jesus Christ, that through his death and resurrection we be brought into the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven started small, built through the ministry of the prophets and the disciples, with Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19.) The good news of Christ is that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, which brings salvation to all whom God calls. The gospel impacts the world as does the yeast in dough. The yeast is in small quantity, yet it impacts and works through the large amount of dough.

As Isaiah 55:11 says, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the things for which I sent it." So, it is with the preaching of gospel. When the gospel is shared, it works in the heart of each person, bringing them into repentance and faith in Christ's saving grace. The joy of the Holy Spirit and the gift of salvation prompts us to carry the gospel into the world through words and action. This we see in the lives of the apostles and early church believers, which resulted in the extension of the kingdom of heaven throughout the world. The yeast in the parable, which is the gospel message, secretly and irresistibly has transforming power, hence we as God's people need to go into the world to preach the gospel. God's will is that the church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will continue to work for the extension of God's kingdom. Let us arise and build. All praise and honour to God!

What do I do with the gospel message that has been entrusted to me?

- Marey Sundaraj, Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia

Please pray for: The Lutheran Study Centre, Malaysia, as they serve students who are training to be pastors in the Lutheran churches in Malaysia.

DAY FIFTEEN

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches". Luke 13:18-19

Early in 2023 I was fortunate enough to be part of a small group from the Adelaide Hills who travelled and spent time with the Lua people of Nan Province in northeastern Thailand. While we were there, I witnessed the amazing faith of these people. The Lua are refugees who fled Laos during civil wars in the 1960's. Lua people are traditionally animistic. Their lives are controlled by spirit worship and fear through the leadership of the village witch doctors.

Since 2005, many Lua have become Christian through the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. It takes a lot of courage to move away from traditional animistic beliefs and take on a new life with the Lord. Many of the newly converted run the risk of being forced out of their villages and away from their families to take on a life as a true believer of God.

I met a former witch doctor who had become a Christian. He shared how it had transformed his life and the life of his family, and the comfort that believing in God gave him. Just as the mustard tree in the parable provided shelter and refuge to all who seek it, he was able to find rest and peace in God's Word.

Many of the villages now have church buildings which have been constructed with the help of Lutheran Church of Australia members. These are now well attended, and numbers continue to grow. More and more Lua put their trust in God as they can see the positive changes this has made in their lives.

Just like the parable of the mustard seed, the faith of the Lua has grown from a small seed planted in their communities over 20 years ago. Sharing God's Word in these small villages sees that his work can lead to remarkable growth and change. God's love, grace and truth has the power to transform.

As we reflect on this parable, let us remember that God's kingdom starts small but has the potential for significant growth. Let us embrace the transformative work of God in our lives, provide shelter and love to those in need, and faithfully plant seeds of faith in the lives of others. Through these actions, we participate in the expansion of God's kingdom, allowing it to grow and flourish in the hearts of people around us.

- Rachel May, member, Lobethal Lutheran church

Please pray for: Hills Lutheran churches, as they are reminded through their connection with the Lua evangelists that the seeds of hope can be sown in the hardest places.

DAY SIXTEEN

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. - Luke 15:22-24

Couples quarrel about many things but when it is too frequent, it affects a couple's mood. When words are too weak, a touch, holding hands, an embrace or a kiss makes up for all that words fail to express.

The church named this parable the 'prodigal son'. But Fred Craddock reminds us, "This parable is about the father." And through his words, Jesus wants to tell us what the loving heart of God looks like.

The younger son asked for his inheritance before the father died. In Asia, this would be the ultimate insult. This kind of request by a son tells the world that one prefers to enjoy the father's property, rather than be in his presence.

The father lost face. The humiliation is beyond what any father can bear. How did he feel? When a man suffers an insult in public, he punches back!

Yet the father was looking for his son. That is the only reason why he spotted his son afar when the son was on his way home. He did not wait but gathered up his robes to run! His love for the son makes him care less about his dignity as a father. For a son who had insulted and wished him dead, the father threw his arms around the son to draw him close and kiss him. This physical encounter makes up for all that words fail to express.

The older son also wished the father dead. He had obeyed and laboured in the field to deserve the father's inheritance. The older one does not behave like his younger brother but he also did not want to be with his father. He wanted to have his property! It was why he got so angry with the father when he saw him throw a party for his brother who turned up alive. His younger brother squandered away his inheritance. Now, he had the cheek to enjoy even more of his elder brother's property!

The angry son insulted the father by not turning up at the party but the senior did not take offence. Instead of sending a servant to chastise his son, he talked to him face to face to persuade him to come home.

What kind of a father is God? He bears our sins, carries our insults with grace, embraces us when we are lost and treats us with a dignity we do not deserve! The father's action makes up for all that words fail to express, for in loving us, he suffers.

- Samuel Wang, Director, Field Education, Trinity Theological College, Singapore

Please pray for: Seminaries who train Lutheran pastors, missionaries, church workers, and theological educators, as they develop in students a mature understanding of the historic and biblical faith that is grounded in the reflective study of Scripture and critical engagement with the life and ministry of the church.

DAY SEVENTEEN

"Meree ata-ro, ramepai adiai-da ipuai-da atimai a'ai bia, kamia ede'ai a'ai bia totoi goroi-da. Abia, ka aiha ede'a, ramepai himia totoi ho'ui-da. Ka motoi eito iido uubi-ro, ramepai hehei ea'ai a'ai kaumo."

(Ruka 8:16, Kope made (Kope language))

"No one lights a lamp and then covers it with a bowl or hides it under a bed. A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light can be seen by all who enter the house." Luke 8:16

Some days I want to hide from the light that is the Word of God. On those days I want to take it out of a central place in my life and put it somewhere where it has less effect, under a bowl or the bed, some place that does not draw my attention so much. This is because God's Word illuminates aspects of my life that I do not want to see quite so clearly. Still, in this season of Lent we practise shining God's light into the parts of our lives that maybe we have not looked at carefully recently.

It is good for us to stop and regularly reflect on how we are living, because it is true that we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed, in what we have done and in what we have failed to do. We have not loved God with our whole hearts and we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. Each time we confess these things, the light of God's Word can show different ways in which they are true in our lives. They are old and familiar words, yet they are fresh and true each time we confess them. The good news is that the light we are shining is one of love, grace and forgiveness. As we uncover things that do not reflect who we are made to be as image-bearers of God, we are called to repentance and offered forgiveness. The light illuminates our brokenness and need for God, and at the same time the light overcomes darkness and brings forgiveness and healing. This is the beauty of the Word of God, that even while it brings into the light things that we do not like, it purifies them through Jesus, so that we can live as children of the light. Not only does God give us a fresh start but he promises to be with us, so that we can continue to shine as lights in the darkness. The light that brings new life to us can then, through us, bring new life to those around us.

So I encourage you today, to allow the light of God's Word to be in the middle of your day. Let it shine light on your dark and broken places, but do so without fear, for it comes with the offer of forgiveness and restoration. Let it shine from you to others, so that they too can be restored.

- Hanna Schulz, Linguist and Bible Translator, Papua New Guinea

Please pray for: Hanna Schulz, as she serves as a linguist and Bible translation advisor in Papua New Guinea for the Kope people.

DAY EIGHTEEN

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? Matthew 18:12

My 4-year-old son once lost one of his Ultraman toy collections. He cried uncontrollably. His mother and I comforted him that he still had other collections but he would not stop crying. He really missed his toy. Fortunately, after searching outside the house, his toy was found. Grieving the loss of a small part of the many is often considered unreasonable. In Indonesia there is an expression, 'broken, growing, lost, replaced'. If it is broken, a new one will grow and if it is lost it will be replaced by another one. Therefore, losing a small part of a large amount doesn't need to be thought too much about.

Our Bible reading today is Jesus' parable of a lost sheep. A shepherd has 100 sheep. One of them got lost. Then, what did this shepherd do? He left the 99 and looked for the lost one.

This shepherd's actions demonstrate several things. Firstly, losing even one is a serious thing. Little does not mean unworthy. Value does not depend on quantity, like the laws of mathematics or economics. Secondly, even though this sheep has strayed or rebelled so that it goes astray, the shepherd still loves it with all his heart. Deviations do not hinder the power of the shepherd's love. Thirdly, the shepherd himself goes searching. This shepherd's sacrifice is evidence of his active love to call the lost to return to fellowship with him.

"For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The shepherd is Jesus Christ. He has come to seek and save us the sinners. This is proof of God's love for us. For God, we are highly valuable, not based on our goodness and righteousness, but on his grace. "But God proved his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus' death on the cross is proof of this love of God is for us. God loves us deeply!

Only God loves us like this. Let us welcome this love of God and listen to his voice, which proclaims his forgiveness and redemption. We are also called to proclaim God's love to our brothers and sisters, so that they can receive God's love. Through us, they can hear his voice and have fellowship with him. Our repentance and fellowship with God become his great joy.

- Fotani Ziliwu, Lecturer, Sundermann Theological Seminary, Nias, Indonesia

Please pray for: Those who are studying in Sundermann Theological Seminary, Nias, as they are formed to be pastors and teachers who proclaim God's Word faithfully.

DAY NINETEEN

When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. Luke 14:7-14

Some years ago, travelling overseas with friends, we received an invitation from a family who, along with their pastor, invited us for an evening meal. Entering the humble abode, we were welcomed with warm smiles and greetings. Eventually we were asked to sit upon a mat on the floor. Plates, cups, and cutlery were placed before us. To the side of the room, was a small kitchen from which several dishes of rice, vegetables, and curries were brought. Our hosts enthusiastically encouraged us to eat, so we gratefully filled our plates and began enjoying the simple but delicious gifts. After some mouthfuls it became apparent the host family were not eating. When asked if they would join us, they reassured us this food was for us, so we kept enjoying the hospitality. After our plates were filled a second time and neared completion, we were then offered more! We then insisted we were grateful, but indeed full. Being satisfied, we naturally expected our hosts would begin eating, yet they didn't. We began to assume they must have eaten earlier or would be cooking more food, as there wasn't much left. Later, we enquired of the pastor as to why the family did not join us. "They will eat what is left over," he replied.

In Luke 14, Jesus teaches about pride and humility in public. He encourages us not to think so highly of ourselves that we take the 'places of honour', for they may be reserved for others. Instead, he encourages us to consider ourselves more humbly. Humility was counter-cultural in the Greco-Roman world of Jesus' day. Perhaps not unlike today, social status, celebrity, influence, and wealth were prized. Jesus gives us a new foundation on which to build, set apart from the 'ordering' of this world. He summarises by saying, "all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (v.11), and then outlines the new way of his kingdom of grace (v.13-14).

Though we were outsiders to this family, we were honoured as guests and humbled by their gift. We could not repay their debt of love although we knew who was behind their generosity. When it comes to sin, we are all 'poor' before God. Yet Jesus paid our unpayable debt with his life so we may be forgiven and restored in relationship with God. Instead of being humiliated, all who humble themselves by trusting in Christ, are honoured as beloved guests at his eternal feast. What a gift! To honour your King this day, may you share a kindness with the undeserving in his name.

- André Meyer, Support Pastor, Cultivate program

Please pray for: The young adults who are involved in the Cultivate program, as they discover a life of discipleship with Jesus Christ, while experiencing the freedom of his salvation.

DAY TWENTY

For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. Matthew 20:1-16

We expect value for money. The performance principle is fundamental in school, work and business. Good work deserves good pay. Peter also asked about the relationship between price and performance, "We have left everything and followed you, what will we get in return?" and Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. "The kingdom of heaven is like a master of the house". From this beginning, you understand that where God reigns, the performance principle is overcome. In the kingdom of God, the important question is, what does God do? First, God is hiring for his vineyard and into his service. As the landlord says to the labourers in the marketplace, "come and work in my vineyard", so Jesus says to his disciples, "come and follow me!" The parable also speaks of people who respond to the call. It is a parable for disciples. Secondly, God gives out. A silver penny was what a labourer of that time could live on with his family for one day. Now it becomes clear what the landowner means when he asks the angry first one, "are you frowning because I am so kind?" God gives everyone what they need, not necessarily what they have earned, and in the end he gives us eternity. He abolishes the principle of performance. He wants even the last to be able to live. He gives to all who belong to his kingdom, to all who work in his vineyard, no matter how much they work.

Someone once spoke of the 'sin of comparison'. It is the mistake of thinking we can give something to God and he will give us something back. But as God speaks in Jesus, we realise that no one can earn heaven: "it cost the blood of my dear Son, who died for you and for all who belong to my kingdom, no matter how much they perform. This is my love and goodness. I give you heaven and my blessing without you deserving it. My Son has earned this for you."

Dear readers, the fact that God does not reward performance, is love! If the performance principle applied to God, we would be in real trouble. God gives us everything we need, including his eternity. Let us serve him all our lives and live for his glory. Amen.

- Arnim Doerfer, Regional Secretary for Papua New Guinea/Pacific, Mission EineWelt, Germany

Please pray for: Mission EineWelt, the Centre for Partnership, Development and Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, as they develop and strengthen their partnerships with Lutheran and other churches in Africa, Latin America, East Asia and the Pacific through interactions, exchange of personnel, and financial support.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." Matthew 13:52

When I first read this verse, I was immediately drawn to the words "brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old". I think it is inherent in human nature that we all like the thrill of the search for treasure and the joy it brings when we actually find something we think is a "treasure". Whether that be through activities like metal detecting, searching through second hand shops, visiting garage sales every weekend or searching through piles of stamps or coins for that one elusive example not yet in your collection.

The things that we might find and the treasures that the "master of the house" might bring out are all material treasures. But this is not the treasure that Jesus is referring to.

I attended a church camp held by my congregation a few years back. The organisers had chosen a pirate theme for the weekend and I was asked to do the opening welcome address on the first night. In my best pirate voice (ahrrrr) I told the congregation that we were going to search for treasure all weekend. Not material treasure like gold or silver, but treasures that were hidden in the Bible. This is what Jesus was referring to, that is, the very special treasure that is written in the Bible and there for all to find.

In this very short parable Jesus refers to the scribes, or teachers, who have been trained for the kingdom of heaven that bring out treasure both old and new. He is telling his disciples that they too will be teachers. Teachers, of not just the Old Testament treasures but also the new truths and treasures of Jesus' teachings. They will become the teachers of Jesus' life story and how he made the ultimate sacrifice as an act of love for all mankind.

We too have the opportunity to be like the disciples by opening our hearts and minds to Jesus' Word, by being a teacher of his truth and by making it known to people who do not yet understand his kingdom.

- Andrew Cecil, volunteer, Stamps for Mission program

Please pray for: The Stamps for Mission program, as it raises funds to support LCA International Mission partners to speak of God's truths and be good teachers and strong disciples of his Word.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:7-29

When Jesus saw the condition of human beings, he had compassion on them, and began teaching them many things. He fed the hungry and healed the blind. Jesus cared for the real-life issues people faced. This is the essence of the Good News, summarised in one sentence in the book of Micah 6:8, “...he has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”.

The narrative in John chapter 4, which recounts the dialogue between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, is inspirational in demonstrating how the gospel liberates a person from these identity issues. Jesus demolished the barrier between the Jews and the Samaritans, as he extended loving care to the Samaritan woman who was despised and rejected by the Jews. In the dialogue, Jesus pinpointed the problems in her life and her identity crisis. By doing so, he liberated and transformed her from being an oppressed, marginalised person to being a follower of Christ. As she was liberated and transformed, she, in turn, became the liberator of others. The Bible records her action and its consequence: the woman left her water jar and went into the town and told the people, “Come see, a man who told me all that I ever did, can this be the Christ?” Many Samaritans from the town believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony. To preach the Good News is to help people truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, so that they will be liberated and transformed. They, in turn, can, by the power of the gospel demonstrated through loving action, liberate and transform a community trapped in an adherence to its own identity. It is only when we shape our values on the Word of God, rather than being fully concerned with ourselves and our own comfort, that we will have the ability to love others just as we love ourselves.

- Thu En Yu, Principal, Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia

Please pray for: Sabah Theological Seminary, as it serves as both a spiritual and academic training centre to provide the facilities and opportunities for Malaysians of diverse cultural backgrounds to be trained locally as pastors and church leaders, up to degree and post-graduate level.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
Matthew 13:44

When I was 14 years old, I became seriously ill and no one seemed to understand or could see and feel what I felt inside my body and my fuzzy mind. School took all my energy. I struggled to drag myself from room to room. I would stare at my pen, trying to contract my fingers enough to lift its great weight. Muscle pain was concentrated and constant. I wince at remembering being touched, hugged or slightly bumped. This was typical of the first two years of my illness.

The third year of the chronic fatigue syndrome was worse. I was confined to bed except for when, somehow, I managed to crawl to the toilet. On a good day I could watch television but on other days I lay in a darkened room, unable to bear light. I was often too exhausted to roll over. Raising my chest to take a breath became a chore. I slowed my breath to once every fifteen seconds to conserve energy. Each morning I woke up with pins and needles, sore along the side I had lain on.

Yet, during this time, I came to know God and found joy and peace in knowing my body was not who I was. That my body is temporal, but my spirit is everlasting. I learnt that in heaven I will receive a new body that will not be exhausted or in pain. I could relate to Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16, 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.' I was losing every bit of control and life, but was finding true healing in knowing the presence of God. He was grieving and sharing the pain, powerlessness, anger and the darkness with me. God knows suffering personally and relates to those who suffer. I remember the incredible joy that came with realising that. It welled up in me as a great pressure and I felt as if I would burst with joy. This mind-blowing experience led to more scripture reading and a longing and thirst for God. Gradually I started new experiences, volunteering in a Christian book shop and, with a huge amount of faith and body rebuilding, attending Easter youth camp. Gradually I got better and resumed layers of normal life activities. I now feel busy and life has so much stuff. The joy I had felt is somewhat buried.

I recently came to remember this joy and thought, how can I cultivate a life stripped back to the basics of being present with God? How can I depend on God for my everything? How can I sell all that I have and buy that field?

- Tanya Morrison-Gass, member, Trinity Lutheran church, Warrnambool

Please pray for: The Trinity Lutheran congregation, as they support the Abong Lutheran parish in Lae, Papua New Guinea to reach out to the young people with the saving love of Jesus.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14

A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stands and prays, "O God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tenth from all my income". But the tax collector stands far off, not brave enough to look up to heaven. He beats his breast, saying "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner".

There are similarities between the Pharisee and the tax collector. The two men go to the temple with the same purpose - to pray. However, the content of their prayer differentiates them. The Pharisee is proud that he is righteous before God from all his good deeds. He compares himself with others, including the tax collector. His words and how he behaves really hurt the heart of the tax collector. The tax collector bows his head and confesses himself as a sinner. He asks mercy from God. He feels unworthy before God. The short sentence from the tax collector comes from the bottom of his heart, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner".

We can see and meet people who pray like the Pharisee. There are people who name themselves as religious, counting the good deeds they do e.g., attending worship every Sunday, donating money to support the church, feeding the poor. By those things, they consider they are more righteous than others. Some people announce their good deeds via social media, expecting praise and recognition, thinking their reputation becomes better. They assume the good deeds will determine their salvation. How can I be right with God? Is it through good deeds? Do I work out salvation for myself?

From the parable, we learn that there is hope for sinners. The very short prayer of the tax collector got an extraordinary response, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Be humble before God. Believers are justified by faith and by Christ alone. During the weeks of Lent, we are invited to come to the presence of God. So come to the presence of God and say "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner". Amen.

- Eleven Sihotang, Director, Sekolah Tinggi Diakones Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, Indonesia

Please pray for: The women who are training through the Sekolah Tinggi Diakones HKBP, as they become part of the creation of a Christian community that is faithful, professional, moral and adhere to the principle of serving wholeheartedly.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

*"Who do you suppose loved him the more after that?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the larger debt."
"That's right," Jesus said. Luke 7:40-43*

This story is not just about forgiveness but about love and relationship, as against traditional religion and law. As human beings living in and surrounded by our culture, we can so often be tempted to compare our situation to that of others around us. How do our shortcomings, our failures and the challenges we may be facing stack up against others IF we go down the rabbit hole of comparisons?

In a way, might I humbly suggest this was what Jesus was doing when he 'compared' the size of the debts of these two people?

This is where we need to dig a little deeper in trying to understand the heart of God. We can assume that Jesus knew what Simon the Pharisee was up to when he accepted Simon's invitation to dine with him. But it does make me wonder what Simon's motives were, because Jesus made it really clear later that he had not been welcomed into Simon's home in the customary way, thereby showing Simon's lack of courtesy, respect and love for Jesus.

How the evening took a new slant when this uninvited "immoral" woman entered and absolutely poured out her love, emotions and gratitude for, what it appears at some previous opportunity, was Jesus' love and forgiveness for her.

Despite this poor start to the evening, (maybe from Simon's perspective!) Jesus, being Jesus, never turned anyone away. We only need to reflect upon how he responded to the thief next to him on the cross - with total love and forgiveness at no cost to the thief, yet costing Jesus his life! Thankfully though, Jesus did already know what was in Simon's heart and so by Jesus telling this story, it allowed Simon to reflect and to hopefully understand what absolute love and forgiveness truly is. With no need for us to compare our sins and shortcomings with those of others, or be judgemental, may we simply put into action what the Holy Spirit prompts us to do, as we follow Jesus' example - building relationships with others in love and forgiveness and most importantly, our personal relationship with Jesus himself.

With this gratitude in our hearts may we give him all the praise and glory. Amen.

- Ray Seidel, LCA International Mission congregational representative

Please pray for: Those who promote and are involved in God's mission through LCA International Mission, as they share what he is doing in and through our partner churches.

DAY TWENTY-SIX

The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. Matthew 13:47-50

This parable relates to an end-times sorting, served by angels, when believers will be separated from unbelievers permanently.

Just as the net was cast into the sea drawing many fish, the gospel message is cast into the world, drawing many people to it. Just as the net gathered all types of fish, regardless of their value, so the gospel invites many people who neither repent, nor desire, to follow Christ. Just as the fish could not be sorted until the net was pulled ashore, so false believers masquerading as true Christians will not be made known until the end of the age.

If spirituality is only that of mere outward form, of respectability, a certain moral standard, a degree of a "live and let live" attitude, and yet we have no compassion, no willingness to reach out and expend ourselves to meet the need of someone else, then we have never been changed. Sometimes it is because some of us really are hypocrites and have never truly surrendered to the lordship of Christ, truly repented and turned our lives over to God for Christ!

These 'bad fish', or false believers, can be likened to the rocky and thorny soil in Matthew 13:5-7. They claim to have a relationship with Jesus, saying "Lord, Lord" (Matthew 7:22), and Jesus' reply will be "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (verse 23). In other words, as we draw near to the end of the age, hypocrisy is going to be more and more difficult.

It is going to be harder to pretend to be a Christian. People will be more and more driven into an open manifestation of the evil that is within and no longer able to cloak it with some form of outward righteousness. That will be the result of angelic activity, exposing the bad in order that it might be destroyed, and allowing the good to remain for the harvest of God, just as this parable makes very clear. Our only hope is to say, "Lord, here I am. I cannot change myself. I can only admit what I am and put myself in your hands. And you, Lord, can change me."

- Jeffrey Solomon, Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia

Please pray for: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, as they teach and respond to the love of the God revealed in the Holy Scriptures as: the Father, who is the creator of all that exists; Jesus Christ, the Son, who became human to suffer and die for the sins of all human beings and to rise to life again in the ultimate victory over death and Satan; and the Holy Spirit, who creates faith through God's Word and Sacraments.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." Mark 4:26-29

My great grandfather was one of the first missionaries to Hermannsburg in Central Australia. He arrived there in 1877 and his mission was, together with his colleagues, to bring the gospel of Jesus to the Arrarnte people, with the intention of them being baptised into the Christian faith. It was ten years before the first of those baptisms happened in 1887. It is easy to imagine how discouraging it was for those missionaries to wait so long for any 'results' of their work. I guess it is not surprising to learn that the missionaries were often criticised by other people in the church for the lack of 'success' in the work they were doing.

Mission, witnessing and evangelism are often like that. The church spends years in various mission fields. Congregations undertake all sorts of programs and spend countless hours and dollars in evangelism programs. Members of the church devote themselves to learning how to witness and then putting what they have learnt into practice. Then nothing - or not much - happens. I know, because I have been there, and I have seen the 'nothing' happen. I also know what it feels like to see church members become critical or discouraged by the little, if any, 'success'. And I know what it is like to feel something of a failure as a result.

Against that backdrop, I find the above words of Jesus really encouraging and, in fact, liberating. Jesus reminds any of us who are involved in his ministry that the new converts, increases in membership or bums on seats are not our business. Our business is to scatter (not even to sow!) the seed, then to go to bed and to sleep, and wake up in the morning for breakfast! The seed and the plants and the harvest happen all by their divine selves.

I know people for whom that approach to mission is just a bit too radical. Lazy, in fact. Even unfaithful. But it's what Jesus says: 'Just go and scatter the seed. Tell other people, in whatever way and place you can, that I love them... to death', then go to bed. God's Spirit will do the rest.

It may feel as if nothing much is happening. But, believe Jesus, beneath the surface there is heaps going on.

- Bob Kempe, retired LCA NZ lecturer

Please pray for: LCA NZ pastors and lay workers, as they lecture in LCA International Mission partner church seminaries and remind the students that simply telling someone else how much God loves them, is enough.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.' Matthew 9:17

At Lent, some church traditions use symbols as essential elements pointing to Jesus, like ash, the cross, bread, fish, and wine. Wine was an integral part of celebrations, social gatherings, weddings, and was also accepted as a sign of hospitality. Jesus used the allegory of wine and wineskin to counter a legalistic (routine, accepted ways entrenched in traditions) mindset about spirituality. Accusations against the disciples of Jesus were that they did not fast as demanded, and Jesus pointed to things that are different in the kingdom of God.

Old wineskins traditionally needed proper maintenance. They were regularly soaked in oil and sometimes submerged in water to be rejuvenated and in preparation for holding wine.

Wine represents joy, prosperity and celebrations. The commonness and centrality of the use of wine in daily life in Jesus' times makes it imperative that the metaphorical dimension was understood more clearly. Some thinkers speak about wine as a 'symbol of divine grace, freely given'. Having been confronted with a conversation about accepted forms of traditions of a kind of spirituality of fasting, Jesus points to a more radical (radix-root) and liberating way of the gospel, one that does not fit into old ways of thinking like the legalistic mindset of the Pharisees, but points to newness.

We look for deeper meanings to refresh our spirituality. 'Making all things new' (Revelation 21:5) has guided and continues to inspire communities and congregations worldwide, linking newness with faith. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America launched an "Always Being Made New" campaign to deepen relationships and expand commitments to serve neighbours and communities. Some see wine as 'God's gift'. In it we see the deep love of God in providing life and joy for all people.

This Lent, we are invited to look for ways in which we seek to transform situations, to embrace the newness of the gospel of grace rather than a legalistic faith of the Pharisees. Law and Grace, never can the twain ever meet. Newness is recognising God's presence and embrace. The sharing of the wine, as in the Eucharist, is sacramental. Jesus invites us to do these "in remembrance of me". All are welcome to the table, regardless of anything!!

- Chandran Paul Martin, Regional Representative for the churches in Asia and the Pacific, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Please pray for: ELCA, as they walk with more than 80 companion churches in other countries to participate in God's reconciling mission through proclamation and service.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Matthew 25:31-46

My work has a program which provides our staff opportunities to serve the community. This has included working in a soup kitchen, wrapping Christmas presents for the poor donated through retail stores and helping not-for-profit organisations. Those in this program have really valued the opportunity to help others and enjoy doing it with fellow colleagues.

In this passage Jesus separates people into two groups – categorised in the parable as sheep (the blessed) and goats (the cursed). This is a challenging teaching by Jesus and one that does not always sit comfortably with us as the receivers. Jesus' judgements as king are very much action based and are all about how we interact with others who are less fortunate than we are – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned.

God is a relational God (e.g. 1 John 4:7-9). We read in this teaching that the first thing Jesus is asking of us, through describing his end of days judgement, is how we go about relating to and helping those less fortunate than ourselves.

Jesus is not judging us on the precision of our doctrine or our recall of specific Bible verses. He is assessing us by how we love our neighbour (Matthew 23:39) – the people in the world around us, particularly how we interact with those who are in need of our help.

What happens when we inevitably fail? God in judgement sees Jesus. In Jesus our failure to provide food for the hungry or to visit the sick and imprisoned are taken from us to the cross. Jesus makes us right with God – again and again.

It is Jesus who both instructs us to live in this way and picks us up when we fall short of his standard. It is Jesus to whom we turn in prayer to ask for help – for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 6:22-23). These fruits of the Spirit allow us to provide water for the thirsty and clothes to those who need them.

I still marvel from time to time at just how much joy people receive from serving others, despite no direct personal gain. This challenging instruction from Jesus puts our relationships with each other at the core of his assessment of us. He requires us to give of ourselves – our time, gifts and skills in serving others, particularly to those in need.

- Ben Gargett, Chair, St Paul's Lutheran, Box Hill

Please pray for: The partnership between St Pauls Lutheran and GKPS Jalan Jenderal Sudirman, North Sumatra, as they are willing to be renewed and empowered in faith and commitment to mission through one another's witness to Christ.

DAY THIRTY

And the master went into another country...Have you not read this Scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" Mark 12:1-11

God leaves. Repeatedly, Jesus irritates listeners to his parables with ideas like this. Why doesn't he stay to see what is going on? He hands over responsibility for his vineyard to others. Everything is regulated; the responsibilities have been clarified.

When God has left, temptation and transgression take hold. When God is not visible and tangible, people focus on themselves and their interests.

That is sin: people putting themselves first, at the expense of others, taking no account of what God has given.

The tenants possibly have the vineyard in good shape, but they only look at themselves. They want the greatest possible profit, forgetting that everything they have is entrusted to them from God.

Is God out-of-sight in our lives? Is our well-being more important than anything else? Does what God want, seem a minor matter? He seems far away, so sin grips.

Life is easier when we work and keep the produce for ourself. But God has entrusted us with our life and expects us to act responsibly, for him, his church and his community. It is a disturbing message, so those messengers are chased away, beaten and killed. Finally, even the son of the vineyard owner, God's Son, Jesus Christ, is grabbed and killed. Sin takes hold of people.

Even the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who caused a sensation with his cry "God is dead!", knew the tragedy of what he said. Life without God does not make the world heaven on earth. Rather, the strong wins and when the strong becomes the weak at some point, he too falls. A world without God is a tragic world because it loses the basis of values and norms.

Importantly, the story that Jesus tells does not end there. The last sentence is, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This has happened from the Lord and it is a miracle before our eyes.' Jesus, consistently choosing the path of non-violence, sees himself as a rejected stone. A stone that doesn't fit into the edifice of possession, violence, greed and enrichment. A stone on which you can build a whole new building.

Jesus says we need a completely new order of affairs to regulate relationships between God and people.

- Andreas Latz, Pastor, International Lutheran Seafarers' Mission, Singapore

Please pray for: The International Lutheran Seafarers' Mission, as they care for the seafarers and fishermen's needs and rights by offering them pastoral care and practical items.

DAY THIRTY-ONE

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Mark 13:28-31

Just before Jesus tells this parable he talks about signs – the sun darkens, the stars and moon fail. It sounds fearful! But Jesus gives you hope. He says, in those dark times you will see your Saviour.

Jesus then tells the parable of the fig tree. The fig tree tells us how to read the signs. We see leaves sprouting and we know that something is happening - a new season with new life, new growth, new fruit. This is good news. No matter what the signs in our world and your life might look like, how dark and disappointing they seem, look and see your Saviour. Look and see the face of the one who came to save you, who constantly forgives you, and always loves you. In seemingly dark, dangerous, and difficult times, look and see not the face of a foe but of a friend. It is your Saviour. It is Jesus, Immanuel – God is with us! A new season, with new life!

People of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea tell an inspirational story about one of the early baptism services in the Southern Highlands Province, of how the people witnessed a sign of new life at the baptism service on 2nd June 1963. What happened? A bird flew down with sweet potato leaves and another small branch containing a leaf and placed it on a woman being baptised that day. The name of her clan has a reference to talking – resulting sometimes in trouble, sometimes in goodness. But she was named Rekename which means ‘listen, believe and follow’. The sweet potato leaf refers to the daily food of the area, the bread of life! The branch with the leaf attached brings to mind, ‘I am the vine and you are the branches, remain in me and bear much fruit.’

That day, hundreds received baptism in Ialibu along with Rekename who listened, believed and followed. It was the dawning of a new day. The sign on that day, like in Jesus’ parable of the fig tree, brings hope of God bringing another group of people through a new door to a new life. Today the district of the church there is called Immanuel – God is with us! Isn’t it like that for all baptised children of God? You are given new life. You don’t always know what lies ahead but you know that with you is your Saviour. Jesus, Immanuel – God is with us!

- Greg Schiller, retired Pastor, formerly served in Papua New Guinea

Please pray for: LCA NZ members who have previously served overseas, as their stories of service continue to encourage others of God’s graciousness.

DAY THIRTY-TWO

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

Born into a Christian home, I have walked with Jesus from the beginning. Unlike distant treasures, Jesus has been with me and has been a close companion for as long as I can remember.

So, for me, I read in this parable that the merchant is the kingdom of heaven. If this merchant represents the kingdom, i.e. Jesus, what does the pearl mean? The answer is obvious: each of us.

But here, in contrast to the previous thought, the question looms large of whether I am really a pearl of great price. It is difficult to see myself that way. I am acutely aware of my weakness and inability to show my true self to others. As a weak believer, I am not able to be proud that my faith is worthy of salvation.

Sometimes I feel that I am not needed by anyone. But isn't this exactly why Christ was crucified for our sins? Jesus endured the physical pain and mental anguish resulting from our sin. Just before his crucifixion, in his last moments, he cried out to the pain of feeling abandoned by everyone, by his disciples and by God, which resonates with us.

But God never abandoned Jesus. Having conquered death, the wages of our sin, Jesus ascended to heaven in glory. To God, Jesus was undoubtedly a pearl of great price, and each one of us must also be a pearl of great price. There will definitely come a moment when we are compelled to feel that way. That is when I realise how valuable I am to God and how valuable Jesus is to my life today.

For me, that moment comes when I am traveling in a foreign land, and in a new encounter. It is when I fall into difficulties that I have no control over that I see the presence of God. This God who does not abandon me, but arranges for someone to show me the way. When I had nothing to eat, my visa expired and I lost my way in the midst of a global pandemic, there was nothing I could do except pray and ask. Still, there were people who comforted me and showed me a new path. I have lived my life with the help of those who are close to me. Through them, I have been reaffirmed of the greatness of God.

Now, how on earth can we as pearls respond to the merchant (God) who considers us expensive and wants to get us? I can only wait. I can only be found. I can only pray and seek. I can only live today, relying on God who says, '*That's good enough*'.

- Kyosuke Sugioka, Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church

Please pray for: The Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church, as they cherish the spirit of the reformation, worship God based on the words of the Bible, and walk a life of faith while praising God.

DAY THIRTY-THREE

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13:1-23

In Matthew 13:1-23, the Word of God gives four illustrations of what faith we could have. If God’s Word was written today, the author may use the illustration of a car running on a street with four different driving modes. Cars driven without proper skills are exposed to the risk of accidents. Cars driven without car maintenance also pose a safety risk. A dangerously driven car will inevitably result in an accident or even death. A well-driven car that meets all safety requirements, poses less risk for an accident. This illustration tells us where our faith is, in difficult times or in trial. As I read these verses, I started to question with myself “which seed am I?” It turned out that I couldn’t make a choice because it was like I was going through every situation described. As a young person, it is a struggle to live with faith like a strong rooted seed and then to fruit many times. You may feel you have struggle in the same way.

I started my career working as a travel tour operator in accordance with my degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. Then I switched and was employed as a driver for a family, and after that I worked as a kindergarten teacher. Currently I am a Coordinator for the Early Childhood Education program in my church. While working as a Coordinator, there are also other jobs that I do, such as empowering communities. So much of what I have done, and continue to do, includes hopes (feelings of happiness) and disappointments (anger, sadness, lost faith, becoming numb). I could ask ‘God, am I a seed sown on the side of the road? In the middle of a rock? Bush of thorns? Or fertile soil?’

I know there are challenges and trials which we cannot prevent. But we can know that God is surely there for us through all of them. Whatever happens, every single one of those incidents has a hope that allows us to go through it all. As believers, we have the Lord Jesus Christ as our hope to enable us to live every second of our lives.

God is our hope and his Word is our guide. God often works in a way we never thought about and his way is the most interesting one. Do you find life hard? It’s ok. During every rise and fall for us, keep believing in the Lord Jesus Christ!

- Jenet Mogimbong, Coordinator, Early Childhood Education, Protestant Church in Sabah, Malaysia

Please pray for: Those from the Protestant Church in Sabah who are working with children, as they plant seeds in their communities so that people can find spiritual growth, shelter and comfort in the love that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit gives.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. Luke 16:1–13

This parable offers a rich tapestry of lessons that prompt us to consider our use of resources, priorities, faithfulness, and the choice of whom or what we serve. It challenges us to be both resourceful and faithful, to seek eternal wealth over earthly riches, and to make a clear and unwavering choice about where we place our allegiance.

The steward is resourceful and creative in a challenging situation. Even though he had been dishonest in his handling of his master's wealth, he used the resources at his disposal to secure his future. This aspect of the story serves as a reminder of the importance of using our God-given resources wisely and creatively. It calls on us to reflect on how we can make the best use of the talents, opportunities, and the possessions we have been entrusted with. Just as the steward sought a creative solution to his problems, we too should consider how we can leverage our abilities and blessings for the betterment of ourselves and others.

The parable draws a sharp contrast between earthly wealth, which is often seen as temporary and unreliable, and eternal wealth, which is our relationship with God and our spiritual well-being. This juxtaposition encourages us to examine our priorities. In a world that often places great emphasis on material possessions and financial success, we are reminded that our spiritual well-being and our relationship with God hold far greater significance. This encourages us to reflect on where we invest our time and energy, considering the eternal value of our actions and choices.

The story suggests that we must make a clear decision about our priorities, as trying to serve two masters could lead to divided loyalties. This conflict of interest prompts us to reflect on our own lives and make conscious choices about where we direct our affections and commitments. The parable concludes with the powerful statement that no servant can serve two masters. It highlights the necessity of making a clear and unambiguous choice about whom or what we prioritise and serve. This passage encourages us to reflect on our allegiances and reminds us that a divided heart can lead to conflict and inner turmoil. It emphasises the need to choose a clear path in our lives and direct our devotion and service toward our chosen master, be it God or material wealth.

- Ampri Samosir, Program Officer for Education, National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (KN-LWF), Indonesia

Please pray for: KN-LWF, as they collaborate with their fellowship members for better services of the Indonesian Lutheran Church in Lutheran theology, human rights people, justice, education, and economic development.

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Your will be done. Matthew 26:42

Could you surrender everything you love and submit completely to God's will?

Christ's will was undoubtedly good, yet he surrendered this in order that God's will be carried out. In his sinless human nature, before he was beaten and tortured, Jesus knew how he was going to be treated. He knew that his body would bear the wrath of God against the sins of the world. When in the Garden of Gethsemane, he therefore asked his father if there was any way out (to remove the cup) but added "Not what I want but what you want" (Matthew 26:39). The cup was not taken away from Jesus, but he was given strength to take it and drink it until it was empty. It is from Christ's example that we too are transformed to live. Just like Jesus, there may be things that we want to do or do not want to do which are not or are God's will. Our own sinful will, never free of evil, is at war with God's will. It is therefore imperative that if God's will is to prevail, we must look upon God as so gracious and us so genuinely accepted by him, that we allow his graciousness to overflow from us.

Confessing our sin and inclination to selfishness, we cannot know or do God's will by our own strength. We therefore need to ardently and earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit will give us help and mercy, forgiving our shortcomings and transforming our hearts so that we can discern what God's will is for us. And then to submit to his will.

Jesus' example teaches us to pray that God's will be done because as we do so, we are asking for God's direction in our lives. For when we follow him with gladness, he will lead us in a life of joy and hope and a life without fear.

- Emile Nkurunziza, Bishop, Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, Burundi

Please pray for: Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, as they strengthen their relationship with Lutheran churches in nearby countries and in doing so, are a beacon of light for Christ.

DAY THIRTY-SIX

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Matthew 5:13

As we go to Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount', he is laying out the principles and the philosophy of what he called the 'kingdom of heaven'. Today he is talking about how you and I are citizens of his kingdom and are making a difference in this world and in history.

Let's dive into Matthew 5:13. Jesus said this about human beings who are part of what he is doing in this world. He said, 'you are the salt of the earth but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet'.

In this passage, Jesus is using the illustration of actual salt. He said, 'you are the salt of the earth'. So, in all the globe and in all of humanity, we are like salt. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall saltiness be restored? In other words, Jesus is saying 'you are to be in this world like salt is in food'. What does salt do in food? It amplifies the flavour of the food. Salt amplifies the goodness and enjoyment of the food when it is used rightly. Jesus is saying that, as the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, you go through life in this world highlighting and amplifying; drawing attention to the beauty and majesty and the wonder of the life of this world and of the God who made all these things.

We are the salt of the earth. We are supposed to be making a difference in this world and living in peace with one another (Mark 9:50). Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus wants you and all of us to be difference-makers on earth.

Dear friends in Christ, through the help of God, what way can you make a difference in your life? Pray and think about it.

Pray the Lord Jesus will show you how you are to be the salt of this earth; how you are to make a difference and amplify what you are doing, to the glory and wonder and majesty of his purpose and his person. Pray Jesus will enable you to remain salty. Don't turn away from him. Don't lose your zeal and your fervour for him. Pray that you are always an example, and you always point to Jesus.

- Jan Philip, Pastor, Lutheran Bethlehem Church, Myanmar

Please pray for: The Lutheran Bethlehem Church, as they partner with the Ipswich Lutheran Church and share a connection in Christ, even as their food, clothing, cultural traditions, and buildings are worlds apart.

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him.

Matthew 21:28-32

In this parable, the first son told his father he would go but did not. His parents must have been so embarrassed and sad, feeling cheated by this son's attitude. As a result of his actions, the son lost the reward, lost appreciation and his parents may have lost their confidence in him.

The second son said he would not go but afterwards changed his mind and went. This son had a reliable attitude. He was responsible and committed, a positive thinker and a worthy son. He was helpful to his parents, honoured them, lightened their burden and as a son he could boast of who he is: an obedient child. The parents must have been happy with this son and may have even given him extra love, care, and blessing. In this earthly life we need to choose what kind of a person we want to be. The first son represents the chief priests and elders. They said yes to God but when they heard the message they did not act. They tried to look good but did not actually do anything God asked of them. As a believer, are there times when you are over-confident in your righteousness and don't believe God wants to reveal or say something to you?

The second son represents the tax collectors and prostitutes. The tax collectors and prostitutes in earthly terms were not good professions. They had an unhealthy living style. These people said no to the kingdom of God at first, but when they heard the message, they changed their minds and believed Jesus. They repented, they trusted, they obeyed, and they did accordingly what is needed to inherit the kingdom of God. Jesus lived and died to pay for the sin of the repentant sinner.

Jesus forgave all our sin – whether it is sin we have tried to ignore and pretend didn't happen, or even sin we enjoyed. Because we know this, we can live our lives now in service to the God who has saved us from our sins. Jesus tells us we belong to him- this is the reason we obey him, because of his greatness.

- Jessy Thiraviyam, Treasurer, Rumah Chrestus, Malaysia

Please pray for: The partnership between Manawatu Lutheran Parish in New Zealand and Rumah Chrestus, as they share Jesus' love with one another through prayer, communications and shared news and resources.

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43*

“Then the weeds appeared also.” This situation puzzles the servants. They know he has sown good seed. God sowed good seed when he made man in his own image. They can’t imagine that he would also have sown the bad seed. How, then, did the bad seed get into the field? “An enemy has done this,” says the master. Sin and unbelief were sown in the field of the world when Adam disregarded a clear command of God. The suggestion and temptation to doubt God and commit sin came from Satan, and man willingly consented. And since the days of Eden, he has been busily sowing his evil seed, the “sons of the evil one.” Now what is to be done about it? The servants are ready to take measures against the enemy’s wickedness. They are more than willing to go into the field and tear up the weeds that have been sown. Plucking out the weeds seems to be the best and most efficient way of dealing with the spiritual weeds. Two of Jesus’ disciples advocated such strong measures (Luke 9:54). Is that the way to deal with the situation?

“No,” says the master, “lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.” To pluck up the weeds will do too much damage to the wheat. At times, it will be hard to distinguish between weeds and wheat and the roots are so intertwined that even with the greatest of care, much of the wheat will be uprooted. By the Word of God, the weeds can be changed into wheat. Enemies of God and the Savior can be transformed into children of God and heirs of eternal life. The only thing to do is to “let both grow together until the harvest.”

The weeds will be taken care of in due time. In the time of the harvest the master will command his reapers: “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

“So will it be at the end of the age.” The weeds will be destroyed in the judgement by the Son of Man himself. Let all unbelievers be warned. The vicious and the respectable, those within and without the church - the end of unbelief is disaster.

While Jesus speaks to all unbelievers, he comforts the believers who have forsaken unbelief and the folds of the wicked for God and goodness, for faith in Christ and the service of Christ! For when judgement shall come upon the world, “then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” Amen

- Wilando T Roa, Instructor, Lutheran Theological Seminary and Training Center, Philippines

Please pray for: The Lutheran Theological Seminary and Training Center, as they train young men in preparation for the public ministry.

DAY THIRTY-NINE

And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. Luke 14:16-24

Most of our thinking and planning in this world is restricted by limitations that make us question what is possible. Like the way we are forced to limit the number of invitations to a wedding due to the very real constraints of our budget. Or when young people are considering a career path and limit their choices according to the constraints of their perceived gifts. Most concerningly though, even our plans in the church and efforts at mission are very often tainted by the limitations we perceive – whether they be limited finances, limited personnel, limited opportunities or whatever. But what if we were free to think and plan without limits – especially in the church? What if, instead of having a mindset of scarcity, we lived with the expectation and confidence that the Lord would provide all we need, as we seek to do his will by inviting all people to his eternal banquet?

The parable of the great banquet summarises God's missionary activity throughout the ages and reveals that his is a mission that is extravagant and boundless as he calls all people to himself. God's invitation to the chosen people of Israel comes at the beginning of the parable, reminding us that he has prepared a place for the earthly descendants of Abraham. But their excuses for not attending the banquet – highlighting their rejection of the Lord Jesus – remind us that many have and continue to reject God's loving and generous invitation. Note carefully that God does not withdraw the invitation in this parable, but, the people find all sorts of half baked excuses not to come.

Despite their rejection, God's mission will not be constrained by the excuses and indifference of those who are invited. The master sends his servant out to invite anyone and everyone – the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Just as Jesus sought out the prostitutes and the publicans when the religious leaders rejected him, the master generously extends his invitation to the lowly and despised – and they come!

But there is a problem. After rounding up the rabble from around town, "still there is room", so the master sends the servant out again, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled."

That's how it is with the mission of God – there is always room for more and there is always opportunity to share the invitation on behalf of our abundantly generous God.

It is only natural for us to look at our limitations and make excuses, but the mission we are called to be part of is God's mission and he knows no limits – especially when it comes to his loving invitation for people to feast on the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. So what's stopping you? Go out to the highways and hedges and invite the masses because there is always room at the table and the Lord longs for his house to be filled!

DAY FORTY



Contact LCA International Mission to subscribe to, be involved with, visit, purchase...

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Partnerships of prayer, sharing ministry resources and exchange visits between LCA churches and schools and those in Papua New Guinea/ Southeast Asia.

Congregation Representatives

LCA churches nominate a member to be updated with LCA International Mission information, stories, and resources to share with their faith community.

eNews

Monthly LCA International Mission updates delivered via email.

Financial Donation

Various LCA International Mission projects and programs available for support via online donation, cheque, or cash.

Missionaries and Volunteers Timeline

An acknowledgement of those from the LCA who have served in mission overseas, both short and long-term.

Online Monthly Prayer Gathering

Last Tuesday of every month at 12 noon (ACST) via Zoom. Each prayer session hosted by a different LCA International Mission partner ministry/country.

Prayer Calendar

Produced monthly. Available to download and read online or print.

Soul Food Recipe Book

\$20 + postage. 23 x recipes from countries where LCA's partner churches are based. Proceeds support ministry done through hospitality.

Stamps for Mission

Selling used stamps to raise funds for programs and projects.

Volunteer

Opportunities in Australia, New Zealand and among our partner churches.

Wantok Place

Museum of Papua New Guinea artefacts, located on Archer Street in North Adelaide, South Australia. Open Wednesdays 10am – 4pm.



40 DAYS - a Lenten Devotion and Prayer guide

Editing by Denise Grieshaber

Cover designed by Anna Schubart



**LUTHERAN
CHURCH**
OF AUSTRALIA

**INTERNATIONAL
MISSION**

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