



**Sunday 31 May to Sunday 7 June**



Sunday 31 May 2020

## Time changes many things

by Pastor Reid Matthias

**'But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him' (Genesis 33:4).**

Read Genesis 33:1-11

My sister, Danielle, is an emergency room nurse in Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dani had to leave her three children with my parents to keep them safe during her long hours of taking care of sick patients in the ER. This separation was horrific for her, and the loneliness that assailed her was a heavy weight of darkness.

Six weeks into their necessary separation, my parents drove to meet Dani and decided to surprise her by bringing Dani's kids along. The excitement made the kids squirm in the back seat of the car. Unfortunately, my sister called and said that she'd be late – she had been struggling very badly.

Finally, when she arrived at the meeting place, she parked away from my parents' car, and as she approached, the kids' heads popped up from the back seat. Instantly, the ache of mother's love overtook Dani and she began to weep. To be separated from family is a very, very difficult thing.

If you were going to meet someone, who would you love to have pop up?

Would family, friends or neighbours with whom you'd disagreed come to mind?

In the text, Jacob never expected Esau to pop back up in his life. The way they had parted, Jacob deceiving Esau, taking both blessing and birthright, would have caused a rift between the brothers. Perhaps Jacob would have not wanted to see Esau.

But in the midst of reconnection, time had changed Esau for the better. Gone was the sibling rivalry and the need to impress parents (and even each other). What replaced it was a desperate desire to be reunited with his brother.

Maybe in this time of separation, isolation and loneliness, someone unexpected will pop back up into your life. Will time have changed them? You? Is this time a perfect one for reconciliation?

***Heavenly Father, thank you for the opportunities you give to us to reconcile with our brothers and sisters. Help us to reconnect and find a common point again. Amen.***

Monday 1 June 2020

## Before

by Barb Niczynski

**'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Ephesians 1:17).**

Read Ephesians 1:1-17

Major events disrupt our lives: birth, death, illness, divorce, new relationships, moving ... or a pandemic. There is always what was before, what is happening during, and what comes after. 'After' is never the same as 'before'. It cannot be, and it should never be. God wants to use 'before, during and after' events to grow us, challenge us, draw us closer to him, and invite us into his love and compassion.

What was your 'before' church life like? Looking back, do you feel you were a nurturer, a nest builder for the young in life or faith? Was it a place of safety, a feeding place? Did it encourage others to test their wings, to dare courageously in a leap of faith out of the nest? As you added twigs to the nest, did they strengthen faith, build courage, build a home? Or did they bind with rules, tight structures of behaviour, and conformity? Were you going around in meaningless circles, or were you part of a team working in unity for the good of all and the glory of God?

How was your personal spiritual life 'before'? Has this absence of structured church life given you the opportunity to consider your real relationship with God? Perhaps something was lacking? Perhaps you have realised just how strong and secure your faith was after all?

As the saying goes, 'You can't know where you are going, unless you know where you came from'. May God bless your examination of your 'before' soul today.

***Jesus, I commit and open my soul for examination to you today in honesty and trust. Reveal to me in gentleness and love. Bless me with integrity and compassion as I hear with wisdom and revelation. Holy Spirit, keep unwarranted judgement away as I examine my heart. You know it all anyway, so I acknowledge that it is usually me who is conveniently unaware. Peace be with us all. Amen.***

Tuesday 2 June 2020

## **During**

by Barb Niczynski

**'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe' (Ephesians 1:18-19).**

Read Ephesians 1:18-23

Most of us are confined to our homes in some shape or form still. We appreciate those who go to their workplace each day at risk – we thank you. Some are working from home, are home schooling, or are retired. We are all missing family contact and are blessed that these restrictions are gradually easing. But we are still deep in the 'during' phase of this pandemic.

So, what's happening with your faith in this 'during' time? Is it on hold like so much else? Have you coasted and not given it much effort? Is your faith richer as you depend more on prayer, reading, meditation, and one-on-one contact with God? How do you maintain faith without a weekly church service with the add-ons of music; friends; touch; prayer for others or yourself; the noise; a cuppa during fellowship; and the people you don't really know well but find you are strangely missing their faces? Are online services working for you? In a nutshell, are you enlarging your faith in this space of 'during'?

How are you going without holy communion? Is it a good thing that you can't commune presently? Are you deliberately finding ways to feast with Jesus, read his word, sing songs of praise, enjoy deep quiet time, rest in his presence, and converse with him in your aloneness or loneliness? May this be a time of renewal of your faith with God, and your community.

***Jesus, as I do the dishes, school work, my job, housework, deal with online connecting, or hide in the toilet for five minutes of peace from the children or my partner, bless me and take my mind to the rooftop, to contemplate the sunset with you Jesus, to imagine the breeze, smell and gentle waves at the beach with you, Holy Spirit, by my side. Show me the beauty and bounty of you, Father, in all ordinary moments of my days. Bring your words, songs that lift my spirits, forgotten hymns, favourite psalms, and mostly, your presence to my being. Amen.***

Wednesday 3 June 2020

## After

by Barb Niczynski

**'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith' (Ephesians 3:16–17).**

Read Ephesians 3:14–21

As we, hopefully soon, take tentative steps towards 'back to normal', what will that look like? I hope we won't be the same people. Have our attitudes to consumables changed? Have our priorities in life changed? How do we view our planet that has had a measure of healing in this lull of activity? Will it be weird hugging people again? Will you actually feel safe? What will you discard as you enter 'after', and what will go with you? What is worth picking up again from 'before'? Have you considered this yet?

And what about your church? Do you want it to be the same as 'before' now that you are an 'after' person? Are you excited about sharing holy communion in community again? What seeds of change would you like to nourish as a personal calling from God? Are there some congregational changes you would like to see? How do we as congregations discuss the changes wanted or needed, and the changes not wanted or needed? Will our 'after' be wonderful, or will it be a mixed bag because we are all mixed bags in various packages of emotions, needs and values?

I pray we will be inquiring people and congregations. I pray that we would individually and corporately seek God's will in these questions. I pray that we would spend time thinking before speaking, hearing God's voice in our searching, seeing the needs of others who have struggled and responding in love, and sharing our highs and lows honestly. I pray that we bring the best of ourselves back into the community and share God's unfathomable grace with each other.

***Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, we ask for your grace and mercy for each one of us. As we continue our journey in 'during' for now, tease us with opportunities for the 'after', bless us with your visions and plans, give us compassion for others, guide us to help out where we can, and sustain us with your companionship and deep love. You are the best example of community, and you draw each one of us into that community. Help us to share it with others in whatever ways we can that are permissible for now. Amen.***

Thursday 4 June

## Radiant in the face of crisis

by David Folker

**'All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory' (2 Corinthians 3:18).**

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Ever tried staring at the sun? Good luck. Within seconds you cannot help but avert your gaze, lest you do permanent damage to your eyes. I remember being somewhat stunned as a youth to learn that the moon was 'nothing but a rock' orbiting our planet, its pale radiance a reflection of light from our star. (Another mind-blowing revelation for a child. Space is awesome.)

Are you frustrated with your own self-efforts? Perhaps you are grinding yourself over a lack of faith. Or berating yourself for not being good enough. Maybe amid this crisis, you've slipped back into a bad habit that you thought you'd kicked, and your view of yourself is anything but glowing. You want to be more like Jesus, but your greatest efforts lead to nothing but failure.

Today's verse is a blessed reminder that our self-efforts count as nothing in the end. True victory over our fears, our unfaithfulness, and our sinful patterns comes from beholding the Saviour. All we have to do is fix our eyes on him.

You are like the moon. You are transformed when you keep your eyes on all that he has done. God himself was willing to die to set you free from the curse of sin. That is no small thing. God's love for you is as vast as the heavens themselves. Knowing this truth and fixing our eyes upon it, our insecurities and old self cannot help but melt away. How can we ever be the same again?

With your face fixed firmly on Jesus, you cannot help but reflect his radiance. I'm sure you'll agree that humanity needs some comfort right now. Let us not raise a facade, nor paint a false image of bravado. We are broken, dusty vessels, reflecting the majesty of an eternal God, whose love for humanity is so intimate that he knows each one of us by name. It's incredible to consider. And should we each carry the light of this truth into the world around us, it will never be the same again.

***Lord, I want to be a reflector of your grace. Transform me. Holy Spirit, grant me a fresh revelation of Jesus; of his beauty, his perfection, his radiance. Thank you that you have made me accepted in the beloved. May I forever be transformed into his likeness for all the world to see. Amen.***

Friday 5 June 2020

## God is our refuge and strength

by Norma Koehne

**'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ... though the waters roar and foam ... the Lord of hosts is with us' (Psalm 46:1,3-4).**

Read Psalm 46

Many years ago, I prayed portions of this psalm over and over again as I was on a mission boat, buffeted by strong trade winds as it travelled from Siassi to Lae across the notorious Vitiaz Strait. There were times when the boat was hit side-on by waves and it heeled over, and I wondered if it would come upright again. Most worrying was that my two young children were with me. God kept us safe, and we finally reached Lae.

It is reassuring to us all that God is protecting us as we are buffeted by the vagaries of physical life here on earth, whether it be danger from the elements, sickness, or problems with work and careers. God gives us the strength to face them by standing with us through these trials.

More reassuring is that God is protecting and strengthening us as we are buffeted in our spiritual life by doubts, depression or anxiety about the future. The Holy Spirit stands with us and supports us through word and sacrament and the love of fellow believers. We can trust God to be with us and never let us go.

I am reminded of a time when I was driving past a pine forest in Mt Gambier, and my three-year-old grandson wanted us to stop and go into the forest. I said, 'You might get lost'. He replied, 'No, I wouldn't because I would be holding your hand'. God grant us such child-like trust.

How blessed we are that we have such a strong base in our life – one that will never fail us but will keep us safe and secure all our days and into eternity.

***Thank you, God, that you are always with us to guide and support us through all the trials of this life. Amen.***

Saturday 6 June 2020

## Ask, seek ... body slam?

by Sal Huckel

**'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you' (Matthew 7:7).**

[Read Matthew 7:7-12](#)

A popular memory verse even for the youngest of children, it takes a lifetime to comprehend these words and try to understand how to pray. How to ask our Father in heaven for our heart's desires in prayer – and to understand how that dovetails with the answers that we do – and don't – see on this earth.

Discernment is key – and something that mature Christians can still struggle with.

You may have many examples from your own life of doors that have, and have not, opened as you called on the Lord frequently and fervently, or sometimes just once and simply, in prayer. It's a mystery.

Recently as a family, we have prayed so hard into a hoped-for overseas school trip. Around November last year, we prayerfully admitted defeat and resigned ourselves to the fact that it was not God's will for our family.

We had been 'body-slamming' against that door – it was a trip that no doubt honoured God, was a Christian school camp, and ticked so many boxes. It could have easily been God's will for us. Instead, I went to the UK on an emergency trip alone. We had no hope of raising the money and accepted it wasn't God's will. Then came COVID-19.

I have no idea whether if we had continued body-slamming against that door it would have eventually opened. If it had, we would be sitting here now, with a cancelled camp, probably losing thousands of dollars on the cancelled airfares and accommodation.

Other testimonies exist in our family of gently tapping on the door in prayer with amazing results. These are all part of our Matthew 7:7 story. The lesson for us, for now, is to be discerning as we thankfully were. Don't push too hard a door that doesn't want to open.

***Father God, thank you for faithfulness to our prayers and for hearing everyone. Help us to be discerning about how to pray in line with your will. Help those of us who are parents or mentors to teach the importance of discernment in prayer – and help us not to be discouraged when doors won't open. Thank you for having a plan for our lives and for sometimes giving us an insight into why doors do – and don't – open, when we call on you in Jesus' name. Amen.***



Sunday 7 June 2020

# Shelter

by Ruth Olsen

**'Those who live in the shelter of the Most High ...' (Psalm 91:1).**

Read Psalm 91:1-8

Where do you live?

The NIV uses the word 'dwell' in this verse. The Macquarie Dictionary has the associated meaning of 'live' as 'to dwell or reside', and for 'dwell' it says 'to abide as a permanent resident'. To 'dwell' has a sense of engaging more fully and deeply, with roots that go down, permanent, anchored. I have lived in many different locations, but it has taken time for my 'roots' to start going down before I could say that I 'dwell' there.

My Study Bible has a cross-reference from 'shelter' to Exodus 33:22. Moses asked the Lord to show him his glory (Exodus 33:12-23). The Lord said, 'OK ... but no-one may see me and live ... I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by ...' (Exodus 33:18,20,22). The Lord provided and gave shelter to Moses. There is trust and intimacy in that relationship. He does the same for us in and through his beloved son, Jesus!

Now in these times of current upheaval, we have opportunity to grow in trusting, and thereby knowing, the Lord as our shelter in and through Jesus. I join in Paul's prayer, 'that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith ... that [we] being rooted and established in love may ... grasp ... and know ...' (Ephesians 3:16-19).

***Lord, help my roots go down deeper in you. Amen.***