

Sunday, 29 August 2021

Announcements

Well, good morning everyone! We hope you're doing really well at the moment, even with this lockdown. Please keep yourselves safe and pray for our health care professionals and also teachers who continue to work in this time. Also pray for parents who are home schooling right now.

In terms of announcements, you would have seen Rachel's vlog this week where she was doing these stretches. She's really good with that. But you may have noticed that there's not going to be a vlog this week because we're going to be holding a games night this Friday night over zoom. So please RSVP for that by Wednesday, it's going to be like an escape room where you solve puzzles with other people. I know that I'm looking forward to it, and please just know that we do not have to do any stretches (I hope)!

Challenge

Well, last week's challenge was to read through James 1 and share what stood out to you with someone. What did you get? I love what James says when he talks about counting it all joy when you face joys of many kinds because it produces steadfastness, and that allows us to be mature and complete lacking in nothing. I guess that means that God uses our trials to transform us. It's something that God is doing in us because he loves us.

Well, this week's challenge, I've got myself a teaspoon. And with our teaspoons, I'm going to challenge you to pray. You might be aware but I'm a terrible cook. But I do know this about teaspoons. The abbreviation for teaspoon is TSP. Every time this week you get your teaspoon out for sugar (I know that Diane doesn't take sugar!), pray. Pray TSP.

T stands for thanks. What is something that you can give thanks to God?

S stands for sorry. What is something that you can say sorry for in your life?

P stands for please. What is something in your life that you can ask God for?

So I'll give you an example, for me when I picked up my teaspoon to put sugar in my coffee, I said to God that I thanked him for allowing me to enjoy coffee. I said sorry because I can be arrogant at times. And I asked God to help us out of COVID lockdown.

So TSP, Teaspoon. Every time you pick up a teaspoon, remember TSP. Thanks, sorry and please. That's your challenge for the week!

Isaiah 40

This week I read Isaiah 40, and I think it's very apt to share that with you this morning. Because it talks about God's promise to his people that he will lift us up on eagle's wings. Let me read,

He gives power to the faint,

and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even youths shall faint and be weary,

and young men shall fall exhausted;

but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles;

they shall run and not be weary;

they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:29-31 (ESV)

May we be encouraged to wait for the LORD and have him renew our strength through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, your son Jesus promised that anyone who comes to him weary will find rest for their souls. Today, we come needing rest, we ask that you would lift us up on the wings like eagles and that you would renew our strength. Father, please encourage us as we read your word during the week, and help us to take hold of the promises that you make to your people. Help us to grow in our trust of you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Apostle's Creed

We're going to say the Apostle's creed together as well. Please join with me.

I believe in God the Father Almighty

Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,

Born of the Virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, dead, and buried;

The third day he rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven,

and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

From there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;

the holy universal Church;

the communion of saints;

the forgiveness of sins;

*the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Scripture

Rachel will read to us the passage for today. She's going to read to us Mark 14:1-25.

Mark 14:1 It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, 2 for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

Mark 14:3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. 4 There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? 5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. 6 But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. 9 And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Mark 14:10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Mark 14:12 And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 13 And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, 14 and

wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15 And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." 16 And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

Mark 14:17 And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." 19 They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" 20 He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. 21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

Mark 14:22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Sermon

I love celebrations. Father's day is coming up and Rachel has organised a cake for my dad. We're going to have it delivered to him next week. And I love celebrating birthdays. And you know birthdays are not birthdays, without something right? Here I've got a candle, and I'm going to light it. Because birthdays are not birthdays without cake and candles, right? Maybe we've celebrated too many birthdays we don't do cake anymore. But when we were younger, our birthdays were nothing without cake and candles! My favourite type of cake was the ice cream cake at McDonald's. You know those birthday parties that we sometimes see at McDonald's, I love the birthday cakes that they give.

Today, as we've read through the first part of Mark 14, I want to talk about celebration. You might say, but there was no birthday in this scene, there's no cake in the

story. But I want to draw your attention to the way Christianity is a celebration. In the last few months, we've been looking at the gospel of Mark, and one of the questions I've asked is, "How do we follow Jesus?" What does following Jesus look like? More importantly, though, Christianity is more about what God has done rather than what you do. Christianity is about the good news, not good advice. Good advice is like, "Make sure you look before you leap." But Good news is like, "they're getting married!"

Christianity is good news. It's what Jesus has done for us. Christianity is a celebration of what Jesus has done for us. Just like we celebrate birthdays, we celebrate Jesus.

So today, I want to talk firstly about Jesus being our passover lamb. And secondly, celebrating Jesus.

Jesus is our passover lamb

The reason why we can celebrate Jesus, brothers and sisters, is because he is our passover lamb. What does that mean? Well, let's look at the passage together. Have a look with me,

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."
Mark 14:1-2 (ESV)

and then have a look with me at verse 12,

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" Mark 14:12 (ESV)

Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem, and what we should notice is that they're about to celebrate the Passovers. For Jews, the Passover is a central part of their worship of God. It's still celebrated today, once a year. And it's done by them as a reminder to them of what God did for them. They're celebrating good news. To understand the importance of the Passover to the Jews, you have to go back to the story of Moses, the Israelites and the Egyptians. You have to go back to the story of Exodus which we looked at last year.

You might remember, that the Israelites were in Egypt for 400 years. In fact, towards the end of their time in Egypt they were slaves. It was really difficult for them. They were oppressed by Pharaoh, the king of the Egyptians. They were made to work harder, they became slaves. They cried out to God and God sees their suffering.

God speaks to Moses, an Israelite, and tells him that he plans to release his people from slavery and that Moses would be the one who would help save his people. Maybe you remember the plagues as well? Ten plagues. Turning water into blood, the frogs, the gnats, the flies, livestock dying, boils, hail, locusts, darkness. Each time a plague was sent on Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, and the Egyptians, Pharaoh would refuse to let the Israelites go. Until finally, the tenth plague. The Passover. God would send a final plague that would kill the firstborn of every single household in Egypt. The angel of the LORD would passover Egypt and kill every single firstborn. That is unless, as an act of faith, you were to slaughter a lamb, and point the blood over the doorframe. It's worth hearing what God says to Moses, have a look at the screen as I show you from Exodus 12.

Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD'S Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

"This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast." Exodus 12:7-14 (ESV)

This was God's way of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. To set them free from slavery. Well, the rest as they say is history. That night, the people of Israelites are released from Egypt, and they follow God. They're to celebrate it every year to remember what God had done for them.

Now, what does that got to do with Jesus? I'm glad you asked because back in Mark 14, Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover. Jesus is about to show them that the Passover points to him, as the Passover lamb, as our Passover lamb. Jesus tells his disciples to go into the city, meet a man carrying a jar of water, and ask that they may celebrate the passover in his house.

Have a look with me, verses 22-25

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Mark 14:22-25 (ESV)

Maybe you recognise these words. It's what you might hear when we celebrate the Lord's supper. What Jesus is saying is that the Passover that they were celebrating ultimately points to Him. Jesus is showing himself to be the ultimate passover lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. Just as lambs were killed to take the Israelites out from the slavery to Egypt. Jesus, our passover lamb, is killed to take us out of slavery. Out of our slavery from sin. Through his death on the cross, we are set free from sin.

When Rachel and I got engaged some years back, it was a joyous moment. In fact, I love telling the story, because I figure that Rachel was trying to make it really difficult for me to get engaged to her. I took her out to the Rocks, to this high tea place, and just as I'm about to propose to her she said to me that she was feeling sick. Then I say to her, maybe we should go to our favourite wharf, but then she tells me she feels like sleeping. All day, I was trying to propose to her, and all day she was trying to avoid me. Want to go for a walk? And then it starts storming. Finally, I managed to propose to her next to a Department of Housing complex in Surrey Hills. That night, it was really easy for me to start planning our wedding. Trying to lock in dates etc. It's really easy for me to take action. But I had to fight that because it was a moment of celebrating our good news with family and friends. It was really important for us just to enjoy the moment, to revel in the good news.

Sometimes, I find myself thinking that being a follower of Jesus is doing good work. Don't get me wrong, followers of Jesus indeed do good work. But Christianity isn't about good advice. It's good news. It's not about what we have done, it's

about what God has done in sending his son Jesus Christ into the world. It's important for us to enjoy the good news. To revel in it. That God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Our good work, the way we love others, is always a response to what Jesus has done for us. We need to remember that. Jesus is our passover lamb.

Celebrating Jesus

So let's talk about celebrating Jesus. Celebrating what Jesus has done for us.

It's what the disciples were doing at Passover. Celebrating what God did in saving them out of Egypt all those years ago. And it's what Jesus was doing as he instituted the Lord's supper. Celebrating what Jesus has done for us. It's what we do when we gather together on Sundays, and partake in the Lord's supper, we are celebrating it.

Today, I want to suggest one thing that we can all do. We may not be able to celebrate the Lord's supper together for a little while longer. But I thought we can all celebrate. As a challenge to you, each day this week, let's give thanks to God for Jesus Christ. Give thanks to God that he loved you so much so that he was willing to send his one and only son Jesus Christ to die for you. To be your passover lamb. It doesn't have to be very complicated prayer, it could be "Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus Christ to die for me. I celebrate him."

I could easily give you things to do, but I want us to slow down and celebrate Jesus. I believe that's what the woman with the alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard was doing. She was celebrating Jesus. The reason why she could give up such an expensive flask, to give up a year's wages for Jesus, and anoint him with the oil was because she was celebrating Jesus. Celebrating what Jesus was about to do for her by being her passover lamb.

I want to draw our attention to celebration because our joy is so important. It's like the parable which Jesus tells, where the man who finds a treasure in a field and **in his joy** sells all that he has to buy that field (Matthew 13). I wonder whether we celebrate Jesus and what he has done for us? I wonder whether we slow down and celebrate what Jesus has done for us, his good news to us? Let's give praise and thanks for what he has done through his death as our passover lamb.

Let's pray.

Church Family Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that through your Son Jesus Christ we have been set free from slavery. Our slavery from sin. Thank you that through Jesus Christ we no longer need to obey sin, but we can obey you instead. Help us to celebrate what Christ has done, to give thanks continually for what Christ has accomplished through his life, death and resurrection. And please help us to cling Jesus.

As our situation worsens here in NSW, we ask that you would remind us that even when life feels like it is out of control, you are ultimately in control. Remind us of that truth. Remind us that you are our abba Father, Our Father who is in heaven. You are loving and you are powerful. Please help us to trust you, to pray in all circumstances. We pray for our essential workers, health care professionals, nurses, doctors, we pray for teachers, we pray for parents who continue to home school their children at home. Many of them are tired, exhausted, perhaps, frustrated with the situation. Some of them perhaps are on the verge of burnout, we ask that you would like them up on eagle's wings, that they would find rest for their souls in Jesus Christ.

We also pray for ourselves, for one another in our church family. Please give us wisdom about how best to worship you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Give us the strength to love one another as ourselves. Help us grow as the community of believers as we seek to serve one another. May our love for one another be a testimony of your love for us. Help us to even show a small gesture of love so that we may be light and salt to the world. That people may see the love of Christ shining through our hearts and in our actions.

Please join me in saying the Lord's prayer.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Closing

Lorraine recommended me this television show called Songs of Praise. You probably know it, it's currently on ABC. I thought that we could try that out today. So I've included a link that you can have a look at.

<https://iview.abc.net.au/video/ZW2094A001S00>

But you can also watch it today on ABC between 2:30 and 2:58pm. But that's the end of our service today, let me give you a benediction.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

That's all folks! See you next week, bye!