

Good News!



Luke

Louis Del

Good News

Devotions on the Gospel according to Luke

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Contents

<u>1 Good News!</u>	<u>16 Welcome to Capernaum</u>
<u>2 Friend of God</u>	<u>17 Fishers of men</u>
<u>3 Zehariah</u>	<u>18 The Leper</u>
<u>4 Mary</u>	<u>19 Man through the Roof!</u>
<u>5 Pregnant</u>	<u>20 Levi</u>
<u>6 Baby for God</u>	<u>21 Caught out on the Sabbath!</u>
<u>7 Census</u>	<u>22 Twelve Apostles</u>
<u>8 Shepherds</u>	<u>23 Blessings</u>
<u>9 Law Abiding</u>	<u>24 Live out your Love</u>
<u>10 Jesus in the Temple</u>	<u>25 Parables and Fruit Trees</u>
<u>11 John the Baptist</u>	<u>26 Foundations</u>
<u>12 Jesus' Baptism</u>	<u>27 Two Miracles</u>
<u>13 Son of God</u>	<u>28 Doubt</u>
<u>14 Temptations</u>	
<u>15 Rejected in Nazareth</u>	

29 Criticism

30 Simon and that
woman

31 Women with Jesus

32 The Sower

33 The Oil Lamp

34 Storm at Sea

35 The Obsessed

36 Two Dramas

37 Sent into the World

38 Who is thie Jesus?

39 Peter's Confession

40 To Follow Jesus

41 Glorified on the
Mountain

42 Inability

43 Respect

44 Following Jesus

45 Despatched

46 Who is my Neighbour?

47 Martha, Martha.....

48 Our Father

49 Prayer

50 Jesus and Beelzebub

51 The Troop Leader

52 Priorities

53 Three Sermons

54 Greed

55 Are you Ready?

56 Time is Running Out!

57 Where was God?

58 Mustard Seed

59 Is God Unjust?

60 Jerusalem, Jerusalem!

61 Modesty

62 The feast

63 Calculate the cost

64 The Lost Sheep

65 The Father who almost lost both his sons

66 The Sly Manager

67 The Law and the Kingdom

68 Lazarus and the Rich Man

69 Difficult Assignments

70 Ten Lepers

71 The Son Comes Again!

72 Prayer

73 Jesus and the Children

74 Desires

75 "I'm Going to Die!"

76 Jericho's Blind Man

77 The Man in the Tree

78 Ten Gold Coins

79 The Great Entry

80 Cleansing the Temple

81 Jesus's Authority

82 The Farmers and the Vinyard

83 Tax?

84 Is there Life after Death?

85 The Grey Hornbill

86 Two Coins

<u>87 The Fall of the Temple</u>	<u>Jewish Council</u>
<u>88 End Times</u>	<u>102 Jesus before Pilate</u>
<u>89 Terror of Jerusalem</u>	<u>103 Herod's Disillusionment</u>
<u>90 When the Fig Tree Buds</u>	<u>104 "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"</u>
<u>91 Be Vigilant</u>	<u>105 On the way to Calvary</u>
<u>92 Judas Stumbles</u>	<u>106 Jesus Crucified</u>
<u>93 Instruction from the Master</u>	<u>107 Two Criminals - One Promise</u>
<u>94 The Lord's Supper</u>	<u>108 Jesus Dies</u>
<u>95 Who's the Boss?</u>	<u>109 Jesus is Buried</u>
<u>96 Peter, Peter!</u>	<u>110 He has Truly Risen!</u>
<u>97 Two Swords</u>	<u>111 The Road to Emmaus</u>
<u>98 Gethsemany</u>	<u>112 Jesus is Here!</u>
<u>99 Pitch-black Darkness</u>	<u>113 The Ascention</u>
<u>100 Peter's Betrayal</u>	
<u>101 Jesus before the</u>	

Good News!

Introduction to Luke

I eagerly turn on the TV to watch the news. Right from the start, there is the most beautiful story of hope. Not a single case of Covid has been reported. The State President has put together a brand new cabinet made up of leaders from all the different churches.

Oh no, it's just a rumour! You seldom hear good news if ever. Many people refuse to buy a newspaper or watch TV news because everything makes you morbid. There is a hunger in people for something that is beautiful and good, something that can offer salvation from this stinking pool of mud in which we find ourselves. Our finances are in a terrible state. This nasty virus is demanding more lives by the day and we have all been hit hard with loved ones who have died. Our government is in a mess. Just look at the

devastation that has been sown over the past few days on all the roads in KwaZulu-Natal. State capture, corruption, gang violence - you name it!

And then Luke comes and tells a story of hope, of a God who cares and has a plan for the world's misery. This is not just another one of the many schemes that do not work - no, the Plan of which Luke writes is the only one that truly works, because he tells of Someone, a Saviour who has our people's joy and prosperity at heart. Of course, this Someone of whom he writes is God the Creator of the universe who, thousands of years before had already revealed to Adam his plan of deliverance.

Luke was a medical doctor and grew up in a Hellenistic world. Alexander the Great introduced the Greek language and culture to the world some 400 years before Luke wrote his book. In Luke's time, there were about 4 million Jews living around the Mediterranean, half a million of whom lived in Palestine. No

less than six thousand of them were Pharisees. Alexander's power, of course, had long been a thing of the past, and the whole area around the Mediterranean was in the hands of the Romans. Despite this, there was a Jewish royal house that had a small amount of power, and there was also a Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin, where the Jewish religious leaders swayed the scepter.

In the countryside it was often very difficult times because many landowners moved to the cities. There were heavy taxes, and begging and robbers were the order of the day. Uprisings due to poverty and oppression further destabilized society. Many people turned to magic, astrology and all sorts of new religions for a solution.

Although Palestine was heavily under Greek influence, there was still a very high value system among the Jewish population. Judaism had high moral standards and a belief in a personal God. Strict laws were upheld, especially as interpreted by the

Pharisees. Most Jews found their salvation in this. Honour and shame played a very important role in people's values. We must understand the Gospel of Luke within this value system.

Luke did not just sit down and start writing. Nor was he the first to venture into such a gospel. He also writes that there were many before him who dared to tell the story. So Mark's Gospel story was already published. Luke uses Mark's story as one of his sources. He did thorough research work before he started writing. He very much wanted to make sure that his information was absolutely correct and sincere, and that the order of his story was correct. Of course, the fact that the other gospels are not always in the correct order does not make them any less reliable. The emphasis is only on other aspects. And of course, Luke got a lot of inspiration from the great missionary, Paul. He sometimes accompanied Paul on his travels and assisted him as secretary with his letters. Perhaps this was one of the great

incentives to write himself. He later wrote a "sequel episode" when he published Acts.

The Gospel of Luke was much more than a story. It gave people hope in a very confused world. Today our world may be even more confused, and still Luke's book is fresh and new and an absolute refreshment in a time where we do not know hither or thither. Luke tells us about God's plan of redemption, something that may be old news to many people. But often I still come across people who are desperate for this wonderful plan of redemption. Luke's story may be 2,000 years old, but the information and message are both still fresh and relevant. In our modern world of technology and science, this book still offers as much hope as in the Hellenistic world in which Luke and his first readers lived.

Prayer:

Thank You Heavenly Father for the wonderful hope You give us in these uncertain times.

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Friend of God

Luke 1: 1-4

Doctor Luke sits at the desk, goose quill in hand. This is not the first time he has written a letter, he has done it many times on behalf of Paul. But this time it's different, this time it's his own writing.

"Dear Theophilus!" he begins his story.

Luke smiles, the man's name "Theophilus" literally means "Friend of God." He had spoken to Theophilus several times about Jesus, and now he decided to write down the complete story of Jesus for him exactly as it all happened. Although Luke is writing to Theophilus, this book is intended for any "Friend of God" who wants to read it!

Indeed, Luke did a lot of research and spoke to several eyewitnesses about exactly what all happened. He also read Mark's account and several other accounts written about

Jesus. Now a big task awaits him to process everything and write it down in the correct order. This book will therefore be much more than just a “story”, but rather an accurate combination of art, scientific reporting, and most importantly, the message of God to Theophilus and everyone who reads it.

It was a difficult task for Luke to write this story, because he was not personally involved. Unlike the other three Gospel writers, he was not an eyewitness to what happened to Jesus. It's so much easier if you've experienced these things yourself. I often write sketches of the Lowveldt, and I can tell it in fine detail because I have experienced things personally. It's been a part of my life for twenty years, so it's easy to write about.

For Luke, however, it was different, and he had to talk to numerous people who had experienced the events and try to make sense of what they were telling. In addition, a long time has passed since these things took

place, and he had to evaluate and put each person's story into perspective. More importantly, he had to make this story that unfolded before him as he talked to people his own, and experience it for himself in his mind.

After Luke records the hundreds of snippets, an even bigger task awaits him. He had to try to make sense of everything and put it in order in a story that makes chronological sense. It was a huge task!

Today it is relatively easy to tackle such a task. With the modern technology of the Internet, fast transportation, organized archives and trained scientists, research is relatively simple. However, we must remember that Luke did not have such technology available. So it was a huge task, and I assume he often had to travel long distances for weeks to be able to record some facts.

Why would one make so much effort? An author usually hopes that his research will

eventually mean that his book sells well, and that he will make some money out of it. Luke, however, never had that prospect. What, then, was his purpose? He wanted to pass on all the facts to Theophilus so that he could secure the Christian values he was taught to with the true facts.

However, there is another aspect to this story that we need to keep in mind. Although Luke does not mention it pertinently, we know from other passages that this breathtaking piece of work could never have seen the light of day if the Holy Spirit had not personally been the inspiration behind it. It was no coincidence that Luke started writing. He came into contact with Paul, and there he learned the love of writing when he had to write Paul's letters on his behalf to help the visually impaired old man. The times he spent with Paul must have given him a wonderful insight into what it was all about. It certainly also brought him into contact with some of the eyewitnesses who experienced these things firsthand. In this way, the Lord

wonderfully provided for a gifted man to record the story of Jesus.

But there it certainly did not stop, because every moment of His research and sorting and throughout the whole writing process, the Holy Spirit was present and He inspired Luke to be able to write the right things. No, He did not dictate word for word to Luke. We clearly see how Luke's own personality often emerges. But what we do need to understand very well is that the Holy Spirit used Luke to write the story.

Your name is also Theophilus, because you are a "Friend of God!" That's why this story was written for you and me personally. The Author is in fact the Holy Spirit, and that is why He speaks to you and me through this wonderful story. So let's read it with an open mind, and drink in every word that the Holy Spirit wants to say to us with this story. Because He speaks personally to each of us through this, each one's message will be different, unique and personal.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for Luke, and thank you for speaking to me personally through his writing.

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Zechariah

Luke 1: 5-25

"One day, long, long ago" That's how fairy tales begin. The story takes place somewhere in the distant past with fictional characters. Luke's story is so much different. It has a definite place in history, in the time when Herod the Great ruled Judea. The characters in the story are famous people.

We meet the priest Zechariah from the order of Abijah, one of 18,000 priests and Levites in Palestine. Each of the 24 priestly orders had to do temple service twice a year for a week.

Zechariah was a devout religious leader, faithful to the Law of God. This was in stark contrast to many of the religious leaders with whom Jesus would later come into contact. Zechariah's devotion came from his heart. He had a sincere love for God, very different

from most others when it came to self-righteousness.

Zechariah and his elderly wife Elizabeth had one very big problem: they were childless. It was a disgrace at that time. It was a hopeless situation because both were too old for children. How ironic, that the parents of the boy who would become the forerunner of the long-awaited Messiah had nothing to show, nothing that could fulfill that dream!

Luke begins his story in the Temple in Jerusalem and 24 chapters further his story ends again in the same Temple. This is very important, because for the Jews it was the dwelling place of God on earth, and there He made His presence known among the people with the coming of the Christ. However, Luke writes his story in about 85 AD, thus 15 years after the temple was already destroyed by the Romans.

However, there is another extremely important issue that Luke wants to draw our attention to: the power of prayer. Luke tells

us that the people outside the temple were praying while Zechariah was in the temple. They could not participate in the priestly acts themselves, but they could still be part of it through their prayer. For us as readers of the Gospel, this creates an expectation: where people pray together, something very dramatic can happen! No, we cannot manipulate God through prayer, but through our prayer we can realize how dependent we really are on God. Thus we experience His love in it's full intensity.

So on this special day, Zechariah is appointed to burn the incense on the altar. Outside he hears the people praying. For him it is a very ordinary working day, and with great dedication he begins to perform his task. He places an incense burner on the altar as he has done for many years. But then he suddenly gets a sensation that makes his hair stand on end. He feels that he is not alone in the sanctuary! To the right of the altar there is suddenly someone. Zechariah gets the fright of his life when he

gapes at this strange person in shock. Then the man speaks, and immediately Zechariah knows that this is not just an ordinary man, but an angel of the Lord, none other than Gabriel, one of the angelic thrones of God who may speak on behalf of God. This is something that only happens on very special occasions, and therefore Zechariah's fear.

The angel reassures him, and then he announces that Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayer has been answered. They will have a boy in their old age, but this child will fill a very special place in God's great Council Plan. He will already be filled with the Holy Spirit from the day he is born. His great task will be to prepare the way for the Messiah, the Son of God. This child has the task of focusing the people's minds on God so that they will recognize the Messiah. The Holy Spirit will give him the power to become a true prophet of God, one who will suffice to fill even Elijah's shoes.

Zechariah shakes his head in disbelief. "It's

impossible," he thought. "How will I know if this is true?" he asked the angel. God proves His omnipotence by silencing Zechariah.

The human-impossible happens, and Elisabeth, an old woman, becomes pregnant. Luke sketches here that there is absolutely nothing impossible for God. His omnipotence is without limits! While Zechariah may bite off his tongue that he doubted, Elizabeth rejoices because she knows that God's promise would come true.

Miracles did not stop at Zechariah or even at Jesus' ministry. Day-by-day, I experience God's incredible miracles in my life. Every day begins for me with a miracle when this devotion is born, because I am not able to write it on my own. His Fatherly provision in my life is breathtaking and I am totally dependent on Him. I can only praise and thank Him.

Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, for carrying me in Your

loving hands every day of my life!

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Mary

Luke 1: 26-38

Six months have passed since the angel appeared to Zechariah. The miracle happened exactly as the angel predicted, and the elderly Elizabeth became pregnant. She and the grey-haired Zechariah had long since made peace with the fact that they would die childless. But now God has done the absolutely impossible! In the blink of an eye, their lives are completely turned upside down!

However, they are not the only ones who have experienced such a radical turnaround in their lives. In Nazareth lives a young girl named Mary. At the fragile age of 14 she was already engaged, as was the custom in those years. Her engagement to the carpenter Joseph was arranged by her father. (These details are not mentioned pertinently by Luke but we can assume so.) An engagement was

as good as a marriage, although the marriage ceremony had not yet officially taken place. Everything was already finalized. However, Luke emphasizes the fact that Mary was still a virgin.

Unlike today, at that time it was of utmost importance that a girl would never have intercourse until the day of her marriage. The community was so set on a clean life that anyone who committed adultery could be stoned. They could stone her to death!

One day a very strange man suddenly appears before Mary. He greets her with: "I greet you, favoured one! The Lord is with you!"

We must also keep in mind that a young girl like Maria had absolutely no status, she was hardly considered more than one of her father's meager possessions. So when the angel calls her "favoured," it almost scares her to death. What did she, the simple, unimportant girl, do to deserve such big words? She's stunned, what can that mean?

Very soon the angel reassures the poor bewildered girl. But then he tells her the disturbing news that she would get pregnant. Mary's knees suddenly became paralyzed, that was surely not possible? The angel goes on calmly and describes in detail all sorts of things that her mind does not want to understand at all. "He will be called the Son of the Most High," she heard the angel say.

"But it's impossible!" it shouted inside her. "I am dreaming!" However, the angel calmly goes on to tell her that she must call her Son Jesus and that He will sit on the throne of His ancestor David. He will reign forever as King.

Mary's head turns! Everything is just way too much for her. "But how is it possible? I have never had intercourse with a man! "

The angel explains of the Holy Spirit who will awaken life in her and that her Son will be the Son of God. Maria's mind tells her that it must be a mistake, it's totally impossible! But then the angel tells her about her elderly aunt Elizabeth who is six months pregnant. If such

a miracle could happen to her childless aunt, then the miracle that is unfolding before her here is also possible! Absolutely anything is possible for God!

And so Mary resigns herself to it: “I am at the Lord's disposal. Let what you said happen to me.”

Many years later, when Mary was already an old woman, she shared with Luke what she had kept in her heart about that breathtaking event. What then seemed to Maria as a young girl to be an impossibility and totally unreal, she later had to find out that everything was absolutely true, down to the last comma. From the words of the angel it was very clear that Jesus, Mary's Son, was the Messiah that the whole Jewish people had been looking forward to for so long. The terrible oppression they had to endure for hundreds of years now would come to an end when this Messiah came! However, they misunderstood it, because the Messiah would not be a political leader. He would be

King forever and ever. As the Messiah, He is the Son of God, a fact that Luke repeatedly emphasizes in his story. So it is God who is the central figure in his story.

Luke tells the stories of Jesus and John's births as parallels. These are two great miracles that take place simultaneously. In doing so, he wants to convey to his readers that God has intervened in human history. Through His Spirit, God worked in the birth of John and Jesus. The power of God is creative, so we also see in the creation story where the Spirit of God hovered over the flood and controlled it in His creative power.

There are people - even learned men - who have a problem with this virgin birth. Both of these unnatural pregnancies seem to be impossible. Yet it happened! All too often today we want to place restrictions on God's omnipotence. If He could do the impossible then, He can still do it today. Yesterday I witnessed miracles in my own life, and I want to emphasize them today, because with Him

absolutely anything is possible! "Nothing is impossible for God." (Luke 1:37)

Prayer:

Lord God Almighty, I want to praise and glorify You this morning, because to Your omnipotence there is no end.

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Pregnant

Luke 1: 39-56

Being pregnant makes any woman very excited! Within hours, everyone knows about it and the Whatsapp groups are buzzing endlessly! Her poor husband has to be at her beck and call, because she wants every available magazine about babies and pregnancy, and she wants to explore everything in a baby shop. And willing (?) Hubby has to tag along all the way. And if he dares to show that he does not thoroughly enjoy it, then there is trouble with a capital letter "T"! And even before the boop starts to show properly, it is accentuated and expressed so that no one can make the mistake of not noticing it. The brave one's will be walking around at eight months with the round tummy exposed to trumpet forth that miracle to the whole world!

Oh, and then there is the cooing from all the

pregnant women, and all their experiences are shared to the point of boredom with their fellow expectants. with giggling and chuckling worse than a bunch of broody hens together!

That excitement can certainly not be helped, because every pregnancy is a miracle. There is a brand new life forming in her womb, a life that God breathed into the little unborn child.

For Mary, this excitement is even greater: not only is she pregnant, but the little life she carries in her is the Son of God, the long-promised Messiah on which her people are so eagerly waiting! She wants to trumpet it forth, shout it out to the world. But she may not, because she is not yet married. The community will crucify her!

She wants to share it with someone who also feels like her. Then she remembers Aunt Elizabeth, who also has a miracle pregnancy just like her, the angel himself said so! She will definitely understand Mary's excitement!

Mary hurriedly packed her things and left for

Uncle Zechariah and Aunt Elizabeth's house in a small town in the mountains of Judea. She is bubbling with excitement.

The elderly Elizabeth sits impatiently counting out the days. "Only three months left, then my miracle baby will be born, oh happy day!"

Then she hears a woman's voice at the door: "Shalom, Aunt Elizabeth!" At that moment, the baby kicks and moves in her womb as if he has heard the voice and is excited about the visitor. When she sees that it is her cousin Mary, there is a wonderful feeling bubbling inside Elizabeth, and suddenly it is as if the presence of the Lord is so overwhelming, that she cannot help but burst into a song of praise. Full of the Holy Spirit, she rejoices: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Mary's mouth hangs open: "How does she know what has happened to me?"

"To what do I owe this visit from my Lord's mother?" Elizabeth is excited and she chats

on and tells Mary about her baby who moved in her with pure joy just when he heard Mary's voice.

Mary got so carried away by this praise, that she herself burst into a song of praise that spontaneously came deep from her heart: "I sing of the greatness of the Lord, I rejoice in God my Saviour, because He cared for my humility," it bubbles from the lips of the young girl in a Spirit-filled song of praise. She sings of the great things the Lord has done for her and she sings of His holiness. She sings of the greatness and omnipotence of the Lord, and of His great mercy which He has shown her.

For three months Mary was visiting her aunt, and I can imagine what their conversations were about. Of course, there was a lot of wondering and guessing about the two babies that were coming, and the amazing prospect. But nothing on earth could prepare them for what would really await these two unborn boys. John became a prophet who

lived in full for God. Eventually he was beheaded by Herod, purely because of the cruel Herodias' horror whims. And Jesus? We know the path He had to walk

Just as the expectation for the coming of the Messiah at that time was very high, so today there is a great expectation among believers for the return of Jesus. All the signs we see happening daily, the signs foretold by John and the other prophets. Is there such a bubbling excitement in you too? Yes, with pregnancy there is often a lot of suffering, back pain, nausea, complications and finally the unbearable pain when she gives birth. In the same way, there is still a lot of suffering for the believers. We in KwaZulu-Natal felt this thoroughly last week when our beautiful province was completely destroyed! And the closer it gets to the end time, the worse it gets. Sometimes it feels like we want to give up. But just as with pregnancy, the clinging to a small miracle of God, a brand new life, culminates in the wonderful brand new life in glory with Jesus after all the suffering.

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus, come soon!

Prayer:

Thank you for this wonderful inspiring story, Lord. Please also cultivate in me the bubbling excitement for the return of my Lord.

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Baby for God

Luke 1: 57-80

Elizabeth's pregnancy in her old age is big news. Everyone used to look at the poor woman sympathetically when she went to fetch water: "Shame, the poor childless woman!" Now, however, it has changed to a look of astonishment: "What an incredible miracle!" These words are on everyone's lips when the elderly pregnant woman walks down the road. When the big day of the miracle baby's birth arrives, the whole town is there to see this baby. Is it going to be a boy? Of course, Elizabeth and Zechariah knew from day one that it was going to be a boy, after all, the angel himself said so!

When the baby's first cry resounds from Elizabeth's house, there is great rejoicing at Zechariah's house in the mountains of Judea. And there is celebrating until late at night. Eight days later the whole town is gathered

again, this time to come and see how Zechariah's boy is being circumcised. The people look at the poor dumb Zechariah sympathetically: "Shame! That the poor soul now had to become so dumb in his old age!" They shake their heads and click their tongues: He has been like this now for nine months already!"

The baby must be named, and the old priest who performs the circumcision simply assumes that the little baby will be named after his father. He wants to call him Zachariah. However, Elizabeth says, "No, no! John, that must be his name!"

An awkward silence descended on the crowd: "Has the old woman now become dilly just like her old husband?"

"Elizabeth, there is no one in your family with that name, is there? What is it with you? What does Zechariah say?" And then they remember that the poor old man can't talk. And if someone cannot speak, he cannot hear either! With great gestures they signal

to him: **"W-H-A-T M-U-S-T H-E B-E N-A-M-E-D?"**

Zechariah gestures annoyed that he is not deaf, and that they should bring him a writing board. Everyone stretched their necks to see what he was writing. And then they gasped for breath: "John," it was written in large letters on the sign.

The next moment old Zechariah gets his voice back, and to the great surprise (and alarm) of all he begins to speak and babble with pure excitement. Then he bursts into song of praise. He sings Spirit-filled of the omnipotence of God and he sings of the Mighty Saviour that the Lord has given to His people. He sings of how the Lord saved His people and of the covenant God made with them. Then he switches to a prophecy, and he prophesies about little John, that he will be a prophet and that he will prepare the way for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah.

Everyone is deeply impressed by the greatness of the moment. The news spreads

like wildfire, and for a long time every conversation is about one thing: that miracle baby, John. "What will become of this child one day?" everyone wonders.

Luke casually remarks, "It was clear that the Lord was with him." (Luke 1:66). And then he sums up John's childhood and youth in one single sentence: "The child grew up and became strong through the Spirit."

When he became a young man, he went to live in isolation in the desert to prepare himself for the huge task that would rest on his shoulders. At the age of thirty, he suddenly emerged as a powerful preacher and prophet. But we will tell you more about that later.

A baby is always a very big event in the life of a parent couple. The most adorable clothes and soft toys are bought, and the baby is prepared for life with great care. Finally he takes his first steps, and says his first word. He is taught with great care of all the things around him. Often a child can barely speak,

then he already understands how to work a computer!

The tragedy, however, is that most parents are so preoccupied with preparing the child academically for life, that the spiritual is never reached. Maybe it also has something to do with our lifestyle, that there is simply no time to pay attention to the spiritual as well.

My dear cousin Louis Nel from Melkrivier tells me that there was never a day in his life where he had to choose Jesus. For as long as he could remember he knew he was a child of God. Why? Because Dad Jannie, then principal of the farm school at Melkrivier, taught him all the things of the faith from an early age!

We live in a time where there is a mixture of religions in schools, and if a child does not already have a good faith base before kindergarten, he will get lost in the religious maze of New Age, Muslim, Hinduism and ancestor worship, where Christianity often has to play second fiddle. Dear parent, I

plead with you this morning not to send your child into eternal damnation, please give him the foundation of faith that can keep him standing when the onslaughts of life come.

Prayer:

Lord, please give our parents the insight and wisdom and perseverance to raise their children for Jesus.

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Census

Luke 2: 1-7

Luke's story now moves fleetingly to the other side of the world of that time, to the sumptuous city of Rome. He does not linger long there, because it is of less importance. In just two short sentences he sketches the whole situation because everyone in his time knew exactly what it was all about. However, I want to explain because we live in a totally different time.

In the lavish palace of the emperor in Rome, an upset man in an off-white robe and adorned with gold trimmings, impatiently walks up and down while half a dozen officials, also in white robes, are already walking behind him. Suddenly he stops and in the process he almost causes a chain collision of officials. "Yes, I understand that we do not usually do that, but I want to know how many subjects there are in the whole

Roman Empire!" He cannot understand why his officials cannot immediately carry out his order!

The officials are very uncomfortable with his brand new fancy, wanting to hold a census throughout the Empire. Does he ever realize what he is asking for? But Augustus is the emperor after all, and no one questions the emperor! "Get Sirenus to organize the thing! After all, he is the governor of Syria, he will make things happen!" ordered August, and with that it was settled. In his "wisdom" Sirenus decides that it would be a brilliant idea if everyone was sent to the hometown of their ancestors for this census, because then everyone who is related to each other is together. It just makes things so much easier!

Now Luke's story shifts to the year 7 BC. The place, the relatively unknown Bethlehem, also known as the city of David, in the Palestinian province of Judea. In a single sentence, Luke tells us that Joseph and his fiancée Mary of Nazareth went to Bethlehem.

Sounds simple, just quickly go over there! But it was indeed a gruelling journey across dangerous, inhospitable mountain passes that lasted a full week.

A large crowd flocks into the town. Walking in the long line of people, is Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth and his highly pregnant fiancée, Mary, on a donkey. No one even notices these two simple people.

In just a few short sentences, Luke describes the breathtaking story of the birth of Jesus, as if it were an everyday event.

However, there is much, much more to this story than meets the eye. First the main players. On the one hand, two powerful political figures, the mighty Emperor Augustus and his accomplice Sirenus, governor of Syria. At the other end of the spectrum, we see two ordinary people without any status, Joseph and Mary. Augustus' power was astronomical, and many people even saw him as a kind of god. Joseph was a simple carpenter and the

status of the young girl Mary was completely meaningless.

Augustus announces a worldwide census. It was an unusual order of astronomical magnitude. Such a census was completely unheard of because the logistical problems surrounding such an action were simply too great. To make things easier, every resident had to go to his hometown, something that meant a total disruption of society.

Despite the scale of Augustus's operation, the event has completely disappeared into oblivion, and even in the annals of history it is not even mentioned. The parallel event, the birth of the baby of two virtually unknown people in the unimportant hamlet of Bethlehem, is considered the greatest event of all time.

Why?

The answer, in short, is that it is all the work of God.

The fact is that God used Emperor Augustus to make this unusual thing happen, because otherwise Joseph would never, ever have taken Mary to Bethlehem in her condition. Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem, the City of David, so that everyone would realize that He is the long-awaited Messiah, the descendant of David.

Secondly, it was also very important that He should be born in a stable, and that His first bed should be a manger from which animals eat. In this way, He would already at birth begin the path of suffering that would eventually lead to acquittal and redemption. Hence the census and also the horde of people so that there would be no place for them anywhere else but in a dirty stable. Absolute Divine intervention!

Many people want to explain these things by saying that it was a wonderful confluence of circumstances. No! The whole event was meticulously planned by God to work out to the second and the exact, right place.

Elsewhere we see that even the stars and planets responded exactly right according to God's command.

We often stare blindly at the Child in the manger, forgetting to see the bigger picture, how Almighty God made everything happen as He planned it. To make it even clearer to us as human beings, He had these things recorded in Scripture by His prophets, hundreds of years before they took place. Before such a God we can only fall into worship.

Prayer:

Lord, this morning we stand in awe of Your omnipotence. We praise and glorify Your great Name.

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Shepherds

Luke 2: 8-20

The long-awaited birth of the Messiah has arrived! He is the One that Isaiah and Daniel prophesied about, the One of whom God Almighty promised Adam. This event simply had to be trumpeted forth! All the scribes, priests, church leaders and rulers had to be informed of this. The king and the emperor had to know about this, and all the important people had to be invited to come and celebrate this glorious event and pay homage to Him.

But God works differently than people think. The scene of Luke's story moves to the open field near Bethlehem. A group of ordinary, simple shepherds sit quietly around their fire and talk about the events of the day, a predator that has been spotted near one's flock of sheep, a sheep that has strayed..... The next moment a strange man is standing

next to them. A strange gleam envelops the group of men and they got a big fright. They stare at this being with wide eyes, because they cannot describe him other than as a "being". Then he reassures them, "Do not be afraid!" The men tremble with shock and fear as he tells them about the Saviour who was born, Christ the Lord, and that they would find Him in Bethlehem where He was wrapped in cloths in a manger.

The mouths of the poor shepherds hang open. They cannot believe what they see and hear. But that was just the beginning, the greatest is yet to come! Suddenly it is as if the whole sky is torn open all around them, and a great multitude of angels stand around them. Heavenly music fills the valleys and hills and the mighty choir of angels sings the most beautiful song ever heard in human memory: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

The shepherds are amazed and listen to the greatest and most moving choral

performance of all time. It fills their ears and body and whole being while a Divine radiance shines around them. And then, suddenly, all is over, and the bewildered shepherds are left alone with their thoughts. An urgency to see this Saviour of whom the angel spoke burns in them and without delay they ascend like one man to the sleeping Bethlehem.

At the stable, they find Joseph and Mary and the Child wrapped in cloths in the manger, just as the angel described it. Full of amazement, they later leave to go back to their sheep, singing all the way. What they experienced that night they told far and wide to everyone they encountered, and the people were full of amazement at the breathtaking events.

Mary, the faithful woman who made herself available to the Lord, despite the danger that her reputation might suffer, kept all these things in her heart. Thirty-three years later she had to watch while her Baby, then

already a young Man in the prime of His life, was being tortured, mocked and spat on. How He was nailed to a cross to innocently die a cruel and painful death.

This story makes you think very deeply. Why shepherds? Why not simple, illiterate shepherds, and not a select group of scribes and kings and church leaders? That mighty choir gave their very best performance only to a small handful of men in dirty veldt clothes who were stinking of sweat and smoke!

We must remember that God does not look at numbers, or how learned or exalted or grounded people are. To Him, the dead-simple, dead-ordinary man is just as important as the highly educated theologian. The message of the simple shepherds amazed many people and created in them an anticipation of what was to come. Just think: if it was a group of scribes and church leaders, then they would have first set up a commission of inquiry and debated the whole

event to the point of boredom. The chances that the right message would reach the people would eventually be very slim. Just look at what these learned men did to Jesus later! They persecuted, insulted, doubted, and eventually sentenced Him to death.

Later Jesus Himself also used simple people to spread the Gospel. His disciples were simple fishermen. He used a Samaritan woman with a very bad reputation to stir up an entire town, and a madman who walked naked in the cemetery prepared an entire region for the Gospel when Jesus sent him.

Today it does not matter who or what you are
- He wants to use you too!

Prayer:

Lord, please use me only as I am - I place myself at Your disposal.

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Law Abiding

Luke 2: 21-40

Am I really still responsible for taking my kids to church and Sunday school? Many believers set aside that responsibility. The result is children who are "difficult". In schools, children often become totally out of control, and teachers' hands are tied. Even at home, things often get too much for the parents. And then they wonder what went wrong.

In our children's spiritual education, there are two aspects, firstly that I teach my children the truths of faith at home. They must learn to love the Word from an early age. Secondly, I need to take my children to church to further their education. It is my duty and responsibility to my children!

Joseph and Mary faithfully fulfilled their duties, even though they knew that this Child

was very special and that He should be treated differently from any other child. Eight days after Jesus' birth, he was circumcised according to Jewish tradition and was officially named Jesus. Three months later, there is a second duty that must be fulfilled, that the mother must be traditionally cleansed, because she is unclean for three months after birth. Along with that happens the so-called "redeeming of a firstborn". Luke actually quotes the Old Testament precept freely, and he rather points out the fact that Jesus is not so much redeemed, but rather made available to God - as it were returned to God, just as Hannah in the Old Testament returned Samuel to the Lord. Luke mentions here that they sacrificed two doves during this ceremony. Usually the sacrifice is a lamb, but for poor people pigeons are also in order, so we know from this that they were just poor people and came from a humble social milieu.

Luke describes a third scene, where Jesus is brought to the temple in Jerusalem "to fulfill

for him the customary provision of the law". The temple in Jerusalem was the center of the entire Jewish religious home. This was the pivot around which the law and cult revolved, and here we find Jesus as a baby, and later as a young boy. Thirty years later, the temple still plays a major role in Jesus' ministry. Jesus did not take a stand against the law, but His coming brought about something far greater than just the law. Later in the story we see how Jesus came to give new meaning to the law. Where at first it was strict regulations that had to be observed at all costs, it became guidelines for a Godly life. Today we can say, for example, that I do not take my child to Sunday school because the church expects it of me, but precisely because the church offers me that opportunity to let my child learn more about the Lord.

When Jesus is taken to the temple, Luke tells us, the old man Simeon takes Him in his arms. Immediately Simeon recognizes Jesus as the Saviour to whom he has longed for.

Full of the Holy Spirit, he testifies of Jesus and what lies ahead for Him. The pious old Anna, who dedicated her life to God, also came to witness about this Child. From Simeon's words we see that people will be faced with a choice, and that not everyone will agree on Him. There are bitter tears for Mary. If only Mary knew how great the pain would still be.....

Yes, you and I are not spared pain and tears in our faith life today either. Adversity is something we live with. But just as Mary saw with her own eyes that Jesus had risen from the grave and death after all the pain and suffering, and could experience the wonderful joy, so too we can know for sure today that in spite of persecution and suffering, we can look forward to a resurrection and a life with Jesus. Simeon and Anna were not disappointed, they saw the Savior! You and I do not need to be disappointed either, for God's wonderful promises are recorded for us in His holy Word, which is firm and true. These promises also mean that we will see

Jesus, and also that we will be with Him forever.

The events in the Temple and in Jerusalem must have been a soul-enriching experience for Joseph and Mary. However, they did not stay there, but went back to their own town, Nazareth in Galilee. There, we read, Jesus grew into a strong boy, full of wisdom and carried by God's grace. Yes, the Lord also wants you and me not to separate ourselves from the world, but to continue with our daily task. In this same world we must raise our children, but the basis of faith we give them at home and through the church must be strong enough to help them withstand the onslaughts of life.

Prayer:

Lord, teach us to educate our children to live to the glory of You.

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Jesus in the Temple

Luke 2: 41-52

I barely fell asleep, when Dad woke me up with a "Get up! Rise!" Quickly I jump out of the bed - trembling with excitement. "We're going to the Game Reserve!" Waterval Boven's icy Highveld air tingles on my skin as I am bundled into the green Zephyr Zodiac. A few hours later Mom woke me up: "Look, there's Leeukop!" I rub the mist off the window. It's still pitch dark but clearly etched against the sky that is starting to colour, the silhouette of Leeukop stands. I jump up and down with excitement, the Game Reserve is close by now! At Numbi gate, the queue of cars waiting to enter is miles long. I jump out and run down the row of cars. The delicious scent of the Bushveld fills my lungs. Grandma takes a cake tin full of sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs and sausage from the trunk. Right there in the queue where we stand and wait to enter, we breakfast. The

steaming coffee from the flask leaves a deliciously warm glow in my stomach.

After an exciting day of lions, elephants and all kinds of wonderful animals, we arrive at Lower Sabi in the late afternoon. We are greeted by a camp with rows and rows of pale green tents. In the middle, the giant campfire, packed with Leadwoodl stumps, is already starting to crackle. Everyone in the camp came to sit around the cozy fire and chat. Experiences of the day are exchanged, and over time red-hot coals are scraped out to fry a sausage. And when the lion roars, everyone silently listens.....

That was 65 years ago, but the images are engraved deep in my memory. Unforgettable times!

Two thousand years earlier, the excitement in the village of Nazareth was just as great: It was time for the annual Passover, and for weeks Mary had been making preparations. The donkey's saddlebags are packed with road food and bedding. Then, one morning

early-morning they take to the road. Mother rides a donkey and the young boy Jesus runs excitedly with his friends ahead on the long road to Jerusalem. The further they progress, the larger the group becomes. Nephews and nieces who last saw each other a year come together, until it becomes a huge feast of singing together and playing jokes and games.

For the twelve-year-old Jesus, however, there is a different kind of excitement because next year He will be thirteen, then he will be a "son of the law." It is one step closer to His great purpose here on earth.

After walking for almost a week, they arrive in Jerusalem and camp among the olive trees on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. When the other children play and start doing mischief, Jesus hangs around with the great teachers, drinking in every word they say. Of course, the adults do not worry what the children do, because everybody is hanging out together. And so Joseph and Mary left for

Nazareth a week later when the feast was finally over, blissfully under the impression that Jesus was among the bundle of nieces and nephews.

But Jesus is elsewhere - between the veterans with their grey beards. Now He is no longer the one who clings to the lips of the old men, but they cling to His lips, because they have never heard such wisdom from the mouth of a young boy! Suddenly the situation changes, because the teachers now become the disciples and Jesus the Great Teacher who surpasses all. The rest of the story we have heard over and over, about how Mary later began to realize that Jesus was no longer with the group, and that they began to search, and finally could only find Him three days later where He was still busy talking to the scribes about "the things of my Father." When Mary addresses Him about this "irresponsible" thing, the very first words that Luke records of Jesus are: "Why have you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? "

Now we clearly see Jesus' wisdom and devotion, but also that He submits to the will of God. Twenty years later, that night before the Friday of Terror, this submission to God is tested to the utmost as He prays in agony that the Father would please put aside the abomination that awaits Him. But in the same breath He fully surrendered Himself to the will of the Father, for that was the only way by which He could work atonement for man lost in sin.

Luke does not tell much more about Jesus' youth, except that He was submissive to His parents, and that He was in great favour with all around Him. Although He was obedient to His parents, God was priority number one in His life.

The question we need to ask ourselves this morning is where do our priorities lie? Is it our job or our circle of friends? No one - not even our own family - may take priority over the Lord. Around Him we must plan all the other things.

Prayer:

Lord, I must confess this morning that there are so many other things in my life that take precedence. Please teach me to put You first.

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John the Baptist

Luke 3: 1-20

Eighteen years have passed since the young twelve-year-old Jesus had the teachers and scribes so worked up in the temple. Both Jesus and John grew up to be mature men. John set himself apart in the wilderness in preparation for the huge task that awaited him, the task of preparing the way for Jesus, the Messiah. At that time he began to flourish as a true prophet, just as was predicted even before he was born.

In the first verses, Luke lists a number of names, Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lisaniyas, Annas, Caiaphas and a few others - all important people who would play a significant role in the story. Tiberius was at that time emperor of the Roman Empire, the most powerful man on earth. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled over

Galilee and Perea. Palestine was divided into four. Luke also mentions the other rulers in this empire, Philip, Tragonitis and Lisanias. To round off the picture, there were Annas and Caiaphas, the spiritual leaders. Caiaphas was the High Priest and Annas his predecessor. However, Annas still had a very big influence.

These were not just a bunch of interesting things. Luke wants to emphasize what global significance the main character of the story will play. The events in this insignificant little country spread around the world, affecting people of all walks of life. We are prepared for the fact that God's plan of salvation is for the whole world, and not just for the handful of Jews.

Luke wants to further emphasize that Jesus is not just a fictional character in a story, but Someone who can be linked to time and circumstances. The gullible who still think that Jesus was only in the spirit of the disciples must take careful note of this!

Luke quotes Isaiah 40 to show how John's actions were foretold many years before, and that his actions were given prophetic authority. As a special messenger of God, the task rests squarely on his shoulders to prepare the way for Jesus' actions, and he does so with full devotion. He spares nothing and no one, and he does not care what people think of him. Step-by-step, he fills the pitfalls along the way so that God's plan of redemption can run smoothly.

Of course, Isaiah wrote this passage while the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, and everything was very dark for the people. It seemed as if God's plan with the people had come to a dead end. Isaiah had the task of giving hope to the Israelites: God's great plan of redemption would still come, even though the picture today seems so bleak. It reminds us that even in today's dark times of Covid, looting, corruption and despair, there is still the true hope in God, and today much more so than in the time when Isaiah wrote the story.

John was a true "fire and brimstone" preacher, telling everyone the truth. The Jews lived under the false impression that as long as they were descendants of Abraham, they possessed salvation. John comes and rips the carpet out from under them. Abraham is no guarantee of their salvation! The right relationship with God was what was necessary, and this was only possible if there was repentance. When you live in the right relationship with God, it should also affect your relationship with other people - says John. This means that you will be compassionate and see the need in others and actually do something about it. It also means that you have to be honest, even if you are in a high position of power.

John's preaching was so honest and sincere that people began to wonder if he might not be the Christ. However, he vehemently denied it and made it clear that he was just the wayfarer. Eventually, John's preaching got him into trouble. He took the mighty Herod Antipas head on and addressed him

because he had made a disgrace by marrying Herodias, his brother's wife. It was an act clearly forbidden in Leviticus 18:16. John had to pay for stepping on Herod's toes, and he was thrown into prison. Later, John was beheaded at a wild party of Herod. His bloodied head was displayed on a tray to all of Herod's guests, much to the amusement of Herodias!

The story of John must be an example to every preacher of the zeal with which the Word of God must be preached, and that absolutely nothing dares to stand in your way, not even death!

Prayer:

Lord, please make me fearless to spread Your Word to all.

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Jesus' Baptism

Luke 3: 20-21

In two short sentences, Luke describes an event that took people's breath away - the day when God descended from heaven and His voice was clearly audible during Jesus' baptism.

Luke does not give much information about this great event. He does not even say where it happened or that John observed the baptismal service. From other passages in Luke we can deduce that it took place in the Jordan region and that it was John who did the baptism. Of course, this is also thoroughly described in the other gospels. However, with this description of the event, Luke wanted to make it very clear that it was not John who baptized Jesus, but God Himself! The omission of the place of baptism also emphasizes the fact that it happened from HEAVEN. Luke says that heavens

opened.

What exactly happened that day? As we reconstruct all the information, we see John preaching (as usual!), and he encourages the listeners to repent. They must turn away from their sins. As a sign that God has forgiven their sins, he baptizes them. The water then symbolically cleansed the old sins, and they stand before God as new people. It sounds like there were a lot of people who were baptized that day.

Jesus was there too. When His time came, Jesus prayed. He was therefore in conversation with God, as we see on several occasions, every time there was an important event in Jesus' life. For Him, the Holy One, it was essential to pray, how much more so for you and me who are so tremendously dependent on God! Prayer is our spiritual breathing, and the way we can communicate with God. Our absolute dependence on Him makes it necessary to discuss every decision and event in our lives with Him. This daily

passage, for example, happens in prayerful dependence on Him, because without it it can never take place. The purpose is not to expand on the different types of prayer this morning, but simply to say how hugely important prayer is to the believer, and how dependent we are on it.

The baptism was over, and while Jesus was still standing, He prayed. The next moment the heavens open, and while He is still standing and praying, the bystanders see something that looks like a dove descending on Him from heaven - the Holy Spirit in visible form. From heaven comes at the same time the voice of God saying, "You are My beloved Son. I rejoice in you. " God was therefore Personally involved in the baptism of Jesus, and with this He gives Jesus Divine authority. With this authority He will act for the next few years of His ministry. With the image of heaven opening up, God, as it were, enters the history of the people.

The Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus so

visibly is not only a sign of the presence of the Spirit, but it is for us the heavenly approval that Jesus may act on behalf of God, as well as the sign that Jesus' ministry has officially begun. This is also a confirmation of the words of the angel Gabriel in Luke 1: 32-35.

What does Jesus' baptism say to us today? Is this just another event in history that we need to take note of? Very definitely not! The fact that Jesus was baptized with a lot of other people confirms the fact that He identifies with ordinary people like you and me. He is not a God far away in heaven, but is with us. He confirmed this in Matt. 28, where He said that He would be with us until the end of the world. This brings us to the fact that we can enter into conversation with Him anytime and anywhere. We have seen above how important prayer was to Him, and then we can only realize how important it is to us. Prayer is not necessarily the formal worship of God, but also the informal talk with Him that is omnipresent. The more you

do this, the closer you move to God.

We must also see the other side of the issue very clearly, and that is the Divine authority that Jesus received. Not only is He with us, but in Him we have the highest authority ever given. So we do not have to go to God with all kinds of detours, as so often happens in our earthly red tape, but our prayer is a conversation directly with the highest authority. What a wonderful privilege!

Prayer:

Lord, we can only marvel at these events, and praise and thank You for what You have accomplished for us!

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Son of God

Luke 3: 23-4: 4

A genealogical register can be a boring thing that you would prefer to skip. Yet the symbolism and order of names are often important. Luke has a different approach to his genealogy than Matthew. He begins with Adam, where Matthew begins with Abraham. Matthew wanted to show that Jesus was a true Jew, a descendant of the earth father Abraham. Luke on the other hand wanted to show that Jesus comes from an honorable family with a very long lineage, right up to the beginning of history. This would mean that He not only has ties with the Jewish people, but with all nations worldwide.

The second interesting thing we notice is that Luke says at the beginning: "He was considered the son of Joseph." So Jesus was not really the Son of an earthly father, but the Son of God, as he rightly concludes his list.

In this subtle way, Luke brings together the beginning and the end by then implying that Jesus is truly the true Son of God.

We further see that Luke is playing with numbers. There are a total of 77 names that are divided into distinct groups of 7 each. Not only did the number 7 have a very deep spiritual meaning in biblical times, but we must also remember that this book was written before the printed book was a reality. Writings were memorized to convey it that way. A list of 77 names is impossible to remember, but bundles of 7 names are not that difficult. These bundles of seven names often also have a familiar name at the beginning, such as David, Abraham and Enoch.

The most important message of Luke's genealogy is to say that Jesus has been inseparable from mankind through the ages. He has a human genealogy. At the same time, He is the Son of God. He therefore has an equally strong relationship with God as

well as man.

The genealogy is in a sense the introduction to the next pericope, because as the Son of God, His true Sonhood is now being tested where He faces the devil. Luke wants to tell us what it really means to be the Son of God, and at the same time expose the falsehood of the devil about it. These dramatic events depict for us how Jesus' obedience to God and His very special relationship with the Father are tested in extreme circumstances. If He failed this test, then His whole commission was doomed.

We must remember that Jesus had just received the equipment to carry Him through times of crisis. He was empowered with the Holy Spirit at His baptism. It clothes Him with authority, and so He is fully ready for what awaits Him in the wilderness.

It is interesting that we often read that prophets spent a time of seclusion in the wilderness in preparation for a great task. The latest example of this is John the Baptist.

Now Jesus himself is also led by the Holy Spirit to spend 40 days in the wilderness and fast during that time. It must have been a terrible test! He was ravenous with hunger when the devil came with his first cunning temptation and exploited Jesus' desperate situation!

Jesus' experience makes us involuntarily think back to the Israelites who travelled through the barren desert on their way to the Promised Land. They suffered bitterly, mainly because of their own stubbornness, and eventually hankered for the plentiful meat pots of Egypt. They soon forgot the fact that God provided for them with manna and quail, they soon forgot. They wanted to take care of themselves and get by without God's provision. Now the devil wants to create the same kind of attitude in Jesus. The devil thought that Jesus could very easily create bread for Himself out of a stone, after all, he was fully empowered to do so and later we also see that He creates bread for 5,000 people out of virtually nothing! It's like driving

a car alongside an exhausted marathon athlete and then offering him a ride. That would disqualify him!

Jesus answers with a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, which means that the Lord will provide in His own way and with His own special gifts.

Maybe you are in the "desert" today, and the devil beckons you with a wonderful outcome. Know today that God will provide in His special way at the right time. Do not concede!

Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, that I know today that I can trust You, and that You will provide in Your time.

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Temptations

Luke 4: 5-13

We're somewhere in the bush - I do not even know exactly where. It's in the early '70s, and I'm called up by the military for a 3-week camp. The sun is baking hot on the command post I am sitting in. This vehicle has no windows - only a hatch in the roof where an officer stands to communicate with the men at the cannons. I have a heavy rubber headband around my ears, and every moment of the day or night I have to be awake, because at any moment there may be a message on my radio that I have to convey to the officer. Sometimes there are half a dozen men from different command posts talking on the radio at the same time, and often it is a hysterical chatter that you have to make sense of. My ears are bitterly sore and the sweat is streaming off me. I'm thirsty, but I dare not get up to fetch water - that critical message might just come in that

minute.

Being a signalman in the army was one of the "softer" jobs - the gunners had a hard time. But how nice it would be to be an officer who could do his own thing all day long outside! In my head, the offer of one of the senior officers mills around that I should consider becoming an officer - they need me! However, that would mean I would have to stay in the military much longer. The mere thought of the glorious life as an officer, and the power I would have, makes me almost fall for it, and give up my freedom. Power comes at a very high price!

When the devil came to Jesus to tempt Him, it was at a very critical stage in His life. The gruelling desert life, hunger, thirst, dust, the scorching heat - it was definitely not easy or just an adventure! Moreover, Jesus must have wrestled with the thoughts of the bitter battle that lay ahead of Him. He knew for sure that his own fellow villagers would throw him off a cliff and that many people, including

his own brothers, would reject him. Then there was the intimate group of twelve who were waiting for Him, men who would fight among themselves for His favour, but would deny Him even in critical times. And one of them would betray Him! He already knew of the mockery, humiliation, torture that awaited Him. And especially that terrible day of His execution - He certainly did not even want to think about it!

Then the cunning devil comes up with a very attractive proposal that would make all those distasteful things completely redundant. He could gain power over the peoples of the world without having to go through all that effort. He would be spared all the humiliation, opposition and torture. All He had to do was bow the knee to the devil!

The devil is still using exactly the same tactics, and we are often seduced by an easy way out to bypass all the problems that await you. I remember as a young boy it was whispered that if you give your soul to the

devil, then you can gain incredible, supernatural powers. At that time the thought bothered me quite a bit, but luckily I was too scared to talk about the devil! Today, Satanism is a huge attraction for many young people, and the atrocities that take place there, all purely for power, are becoming nauseating. Usually it starts with "innocent" occult games such as fortune telling, the outjo board and later the calling up of spirits. And before you know it, you hear the voice of the devil offering you great things on a tray. "You must worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone," Jesus quotes to the devil from Deut. 6:14.

The third temptation that comes in Jesus' way is of a somewhat different nature. He is brought to a very high place, and when He looks down He can see the people walking far down in the temple square. "Jump down," the devil urges Him, "You are the Son of God, aren't you?" Jesus had the whole multitude of angels at His disposal to carry Him on His hands. If He had done what the

devil suggested, it would have been a spectacular show, and the crowd below would have worshipped Him as a Divine being. However, this would be for totally the wrong reason, and it was not at all what God planned. Jesus had to choose between the spectacular and the will of God, which would be a very difficult path. The devil even takes a quote from the Bible to convince Jesus.

Just as Jesus made the choice not to make demands on God, so we must be very careful not to pretend that God is only there to provide for our (often selfish) needs. Selfish prayer is a daily item in many believers' lives, and I am often guilty of it myself. We call them spiritual "shopping lists" or "wish lists." Rest in the will of God and apply your prayers to the glory of Him and to intercede for other people.

Prayer:

Lord, please forgive me where I am so often selfish - even in my prayer life. Teach me to pray according to Your will.

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Rejected in Nazareth

Luke 4: 14-30

It's a big day in the town of Nazareth. A boy from their own community, who has gained much fame elsewhere, comes to preach in their own synagogue on the Sabbath morning. Since the Babylonian captivity, the Jews began to build synagogues in every town where they could gather to pray together, read the Law, and be taught. This morning the synagogue is packed, because everyone wants to hear what the big fuss is about. Maybe He will do some of the miracles they heard about here too! There has long been dissatisfaction because He neglects them here in Nazareth and performs and preaches His great miracles elsewhere.

The synagogue official removes the large scroll from the shelf and rolls it open to the prophet Isaiah. The voluminous manuscript is given to Jesus and He begins to read.

"Coincidentally" the passage in Isaiah 61 where the man opened for Jesus is one of the many prophecies that specifically related to Jesus. No, absolutely nothing is coincidence! God planned it so that the man had to open it here because that was what Jesus' sermon had to be about that morning.

After reading the passage to the crowd, He closes the heavy scroll and hands it back to the official. A deadly silence reigns in the room, a spirit of great anticipation to hear their fellow villagers preach. They cling to His lips as He begins, "Today this Scripture that you have just heard has been fulfilled." His words are like honey to them. What a beautiful thought is it not what He is saying. Is he not also a prophet like his nephew John? Everyone prepares themselves for a lovely inspiring sermon where they only hear beautiful things about liberation and restoration and all that is beautiful. "And to think that this wonderful preacher has been right in our midst all along!" they whisper to each other.

But then the bomb explodes: "No preacher is accepted in the place where he grew up," Jesus tells them. The crowd begins to move around uncomfortably. He should not come and get personal now. Jesus cites examples from the history of how the prophets were often despised by their own people, causing a murmur of discontent. Yet it's funny, after all, that when John told them bad things and exposed all their sins, they willingly let themselves be punished by him. But when Jesus does this lightly, they become angry, because He is one of them and not an outsider. They became so angry that they chased him out of town, and then they crowded together and pressed Him against an abyss. Today is the day they will throw this young fellow who thinks He can preach to them, over the cliff! However, they did not take God into account, and without realizing it, Jesus walked casually between them and shook the dust of Nazareth from His feet for good.

Maybe I'm going to say a thing or two this

morning where I'm going to step on toes, and it's going to hurt: The preacher in your own congregation is boring! He repeats too much, preaches too monotonously and he preaches far too much about love! Or he preaches persistently about sin. Everyone wants to go and listen when Uncle Angus preaches because there are a million people and it's exciting! Many believers run from congregation to congregation to congregation because they are satisfied nowhere. Usually, then, they are the guys who make life miserable for their fellow congregation members in every congregation they come to! And they make the poor preacher feel inferior!

If you are perhaps one of them, stop it! Rather listen for a moment what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you personally through that “boring” pastor! The big problem is that you often only want to hear the things that are acceptable to you. If it deviates from that, then you become uncomfortable, and often you do not even listen further and just make

a murderer's den of your heart about how pathetic the preacher is.

Maybe this morning you're a preacher who already has a queasy feeling in your stomach over Sunday's sermon, because you already know in advance of the criticism that will follow. Take comfort in the fact that even the very popular Uncle Angus Buchan also suffers from heavy criticism. Jesus was almost thrown off a cliff over a sermon. You are definitely not alone! The great secret is that you are guided by the Holy Spirit with every sermon you prepare (actually it is not a secret at all!) So when you preach, it is not you but the Holy Spirit who speaks through you.

This brings me to another very important point, that if you are someone who is constantly criticizing, then it is in fact not the preacher you are criticizing, but actually the Holy Spirit, because you are saying that the Holy Spirit should tell you something else you would rather want to hear. Think about it!

Prayer:

Lord, please forgive me for all the times I have criticized Your Holy Spirit.

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Welcome to Capernaum!

Luke 4: 31-44

Only yesterday we read about how the people of Nazareth chased Jesus out of town because they could not accept His claim that He was the Son of God. Now we see the exact opposite in Capernaum, where even the demons recognize and acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God.

But now I'm running ahead with the story. After Jesus' close escape in Nazareth, he left for a town in Galilee called Capernaum, and as he did in Nazareth, he also went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and taught the people. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone hung on to His lips. And then the thriller happened. Suddenly a man started screaming somewhere from the back. Everyone looked around annoyed, but the man did not pay attention to them.

"What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?" he roars. The man is clearly under the power of demons and it is a demon that speaks through him. "I know who You are." Now he mocks Jesus and all the attention is focused on him. "You are the Holy One of God!"

Then Jesus takes control of this impossible situation. With a single command He drives the evil spirit out of the man and frees him while everyone gasps for breath. They have never experienced anything like this before! Suddenly the quiet, stately synagogue sounds like a beehive as people buzz about this miracle and the authority with which Jesus worked with this demon. "What kind of man has authority over the Evil One?" Like a wildfire, the news spreads throughout the area. If there was a newspaper at the time, then this was definitely front page news!

Years ago I had the unenviable privilege of attending a Hindu festival with a missionary in Tongaat. As we walk through the hordes, I

shudder when I see these people doing the most horrible things with their bodies, clearly under the power of evil. We stop at one young man who was engaged in a ritual. He is cold - a gentle drizzle has fallen, and where he stands with his bare torso, he trembles with cold. Then he lights his oil lamp and starts mumbling. Before our astonished eyes he undergoes a total change. He no longer feels the cold and his eyes become those of a wild animal spitting fire! Someone hooks large fishing hooks through the skin on his back. He does not blink an eye! They pierce thick knitting needles through his cheeks and tongue and lips. He feels nothing! Not a drop of blood.

Cold shivers run through my spine and I pray very hard: "Lord, please protect me!"

They hook a heavily laden wagon, adorned with idols onto the man's fishing hooks, and then he walks out with his gruesome load up the built to the beat of provocative Oriental music.

I felt nauseous, I just could not take it anymore! We went home while I felt bitterly sorry for these poor people who had been so deceived by the devil!

Suddenly Capernaum becomes the epicentre of Jesus' miracles. Peter's mother-in-law lay in bed with a severe fever. A single word from Jesus healed her instantly, and then she got up, and the first thing she did was serve the people with a meal. For you and me, this is a sign of how you should experience God's grace. You thank Him by doing things for other people.

And suddenly the floodgates opened and from far and wide came everyone with their sick and possessed, so that Jesus had to work until late at night to heal everyone. Time and again the demons, in fear and trembling, acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. Many questions have been asked about why Jesus silenced them when they addressed Him as the Son of God. Firstly, He wanted the recognition to come from His followers

rather than coming from the devil's followers. But secondly, His time of glorification had not yet arrived.

After all this we see Jesus fleeing for a little silence and solitude. However, this is short-lived, because very soon the crowd find Him again. The time has come for Him to move to other towns and cities so that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God may resound throughout the world.

What does this Gospel involve? That God is the true Ruler over everything and everyone! Jesus has just proved that He even has full power over the Evil One, and that the dreaded, mighty demons not only flee from Him in fear and trembling, but that they even give Him full recognition for who He really is!

What does this story tell us today? During Jesus' time as Man, He deliberately limited His power. After His ascension, however, He reveals His full omnipotence, and that we can rely on it today. He finally defeated the Evil One so that the devil had only limited power.

He cannot rob believers of their salvation! But more than that, Jesus also gave us some of that power. If we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, then He gives us immeasurable power. Angus Buchan proved it by arranging a rally for a million people - a logistical nightmare! But for someone who has the Holy Spirit as a Partner, it is a "trifle". It is however not only the "great" men who experience the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. Ordinary people experience this every day and I can personally testify to that!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the wonderful Power You have given us. Teach us to use it wisely.

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Fishers of Men

Luke 5: 1-11

The tension reaches breaking point in Rome. The cruel Emperor Nero was on the throne and he had many Christians killed in the most cruel way. Some became lion food, others exercise bags for the Gladiators. In the streets, the disgusting smell of burnt human flesh and charred corpses hung everywhere on poles where they had been burning as living street lights the night before - smeared with tar. A stranger came to ask for directions from a small group of people who were standing and talking softly. As they talked, he drew unnoticed the outline of a fish with his cane in the dust. Suddenly one of the group grabbed him and hugged him: "You are one of us too! You are a man of the Way! Welcome!"

You did not know who to trust, because if the wrong person were to find out that you are a

Christian, you would be accused. It's as good as your death certificate! Christians recognized each other by making the sign of the fish. But where did it come from?

Well, it actually has a double meaning. The Greek word for "fish" is "Ixthus". The Christians used the word as an acronym, where the letters spelled out: Iesous Xristos Theou Uiou Soter - Jesus Christ God's Son, Saviour. But there is more! It had its origin one fine day, when Jesus was preaching to the Sea of Galilee to a crowd of people. The word spread like wildfire that He was there, and soon there was a huge crowd that literally trampled on each other to hear this Jesus preach. They pushed and shoved and bumped, and the poor Preacher was pushed to the water's edge, for everyone wanted to be near.

And then a solution to the problem came from an unexpected source: Two fishing boats with discouraged fishermen came ashore. There was not a single fish in the

boats, and poor old Peter's face hangs. For Jesus, these boats were the solution, and he persuaded Peter to let Him get in so that He could speak to the people from the boat.

After saying "Amen", Jesus says to Peter and his companions James and John - Zebedee's two sons: "Let us go fishing!" Peter looks at this Preacher sceptically. Does He know absolutely nothing about fishing? They were out on the boats since dark in the morning, and there was not a stinking sardine in the whole sea to catch! Where are they going to come from all of a sudden? Very reluctantly he finally agrees, and just to show this ignorant Man that there are no fish in the sea right now, he threw his net out. But then Peter's eyes wideedn when he very sceptically pulled in the net, butcould hardly move it, so heavy was it of fish. When he and his mates finally emptied the nets into the two boats, they were afraid that the boats might sink with the heavy load!

That day was a major turning point in Peter's

life. Suddenly he realized that this "Prophet" was not just an ordinary person, and he fell on his knees before Jesus and apologized for being so unbelieving.

Jesus smiled at him: "Do not be afraid! You will become a fisher of men from now on."

Peter certainly did not know what Jesus meant. It would take another three years, three very difficult but exciting years, before he would understand the true meaning of Jesus' words. I think Peter must have thought about Jesus' words on that day of Pentecost when three thousand people were converted. He, Peter, the simple, stubborn, unbelieving fisherman spoke to the crowd. Oh, how the "fish" did not flow in that day! A fisherman of people! Jesus told him he would be one! But on his own strength he would never, ever be able to do it! Peter was just the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit who caused the miracle to happen on the day of Pentecost.

The miracle of the fish never stopped. Despite all the persecution that Peter

experienced, and all the cruel persecution that the Christians had to go through under Nero, there were still people who were willing to cast their nets as fishermen in the service of Jesus. The same breathtaking power of the Holy Spirit that Peter experienced on the day of Pentecost is still available today to anyone willing to take up the net. And the same Ixthus symbol that encouraged the persecuted Christians in Nero's time still tells us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is still our Saviour today as He was centuries ago and will remain forever.

Perhaps you too today, as Peter of old, are sceptical of taking up the net. Maybe you're afraid you will not make it. Be assured that Jesus is still there by your side as He promised. And be assured that the Holy Spirit is still there, as with Peter, to give you the courage, strength and wisdom. He only asks for your willingness.

Prayer:

Lord, like Peter, I am often afraid to be a

human fisherman. Please give me the courage to take You at Your Word and cast out the net.

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The Leper

Luke 5: 12-16

Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John left everything as it was after the great fishing episode and became Jesus' followers. For the next three years, Jesus would have a group of disciples walking with Him everywhere day by day. Their group would be constantly surrounded by crowds of thousands of people who regarded Him as "public property" because He could preach so beautifully and heal the sick. I would go crazy if people pushed me like that! The movie stars experience quite a bit of what He had to go through, with every Tom, Dick & Harry displacing their private lives, and the many journalists and photographers trying to get a stolen photo every moment. No wonder these people sometimes lose it and assault the photographers!

Luke tells the story of a leper who met Jesus.

The leprosy we are talking about here is not necessarily leprosy or Hansen's disease as we know it today, but any serious skin condition has been called leprosy. To any Jew, this is a terrible thing because it makes you "unclean!" You are avoided at all costs! Lepers had to live in a colony outside the city and may not even have had contact with their families. This meant that they could no longer work or take care of their families. A leper was avoided like the plague. If it happened that he had to go to a public place, you would have to shout, "Leper, leper!" to warn the other people to stay out of his way.

I can imagine the picture of this poor, desperate man who risked his life amongst the crowd who gathered around Jesus. He broke all social rules to be there. It could have meant being stoned a bunch of exiled Jews! Yet he dared everything and fell on his knees before Jesus and begged for healing.

At the same time, Jesus breaks the social rule by not taking a few steps back as the

crowd around Him probably did suddenly when they saw the leper among them. On the contrary, Jesus even touches the man! He descended to that outcast's miserable social level.

You could clearly hear everyone taking a deep breath: "What is He doing? You do not touch a leper!" Then the people gasp for breath because suddenly, to their amazement, the sores that covered the man's body are gone! Traceless!

Jesus instructed the man not to tell anyone what had happened. It did not help much, for how could he but proclaim it out to the world!

Jesus further instructed the man to undergo the Mosaic precepts for cleansing so that he could be included in the community again. This would mean that he could work again, see his family, restore his honour, practise his religion freely and regain his respect in society. Can you imagine what it must have been like to be totally cut off from everything that is important and precious to you? And

then, suddenly, when everything seems totally lost, comes this miracle that instantly completely restores everything!

The news of this miracle spread like wildfire, and the crowds grew larger and larger. Measured by human standards, Jesus' ministry went well. But it was an exhausting job to have to watch the queues and queues of sick day by day from early morning until late at night. Endless queues of people with heartbreaking diseases and ailments and defects and even demon possession took up all of Jesus' precious time. He longed for that luxury of just being alone a bit. Luke therefore tells that Jesus made time through His busy schedule to isolate Himself so that He could pray.

If it was necessary for the Son of God - He Himself God - to pray alone - how much more is it not necessary for me and you who are so enormously dependent on Him to do so. One has to discipline oneself to take time to talk and be with God somewhere alone

when things are going well, or when the work is hard. I once heard someone say, "I'm too busy NOT to pray!" It is precisely when the pressure is at it's worst that we need the refreshing power of God to keep going. But then it is not just a quick emergency call to ask: "Lord, please help!" but open your heart to the Holy Spirit and let His wonderful power wash over your mind. Sing in your heart a song of praise to Him, the Ruler of all rulers. Calm down and surrender to God. It only takes a few minutes to lift your spirits and make you focus on God. The wonder of this is not only that it constantly reminds you of your dependence on God, but also that you can start your work completely refreshed again with new zeal while singing a song of rejoicing in your heart. And everyone who sees you will wonder what happened to you!

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, please teach me to spend time with You regularly, even when it is busy.

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Man through the Roof!

Luke 5: 17-26

The news of the success of Jesus' ministry, His healings, His inspiring sermons spread like wildfire. It was inevitable that this news would also reach the ears of the church leaders, and they were jealous of this unknown Teacher. For many years they had to study, hearing the laws over and over from their teachers. They had to study the Scriptures down to the finest detail, and then after years of hard work, they could only become part of the elite Pharisees. The name Pharisee means "Isolated." The movement had its origins during the exile. It was a natural step that these learned men could work themselves up to become the church leaders.

The bunch of church leaders must have discussed this new unknown "Prophet" who suddenly made so many headlines. He was

not at any Bible school! Where would He suddenly get His knowledge from? Through the corridors of the temple a murmur surely arose: "This Man can become a very great threat to our noble movement if He is not stopped soon! We will have to find out for ourselves what He is saying, before He leads the people astray."

And so it happens one fine day while the crowds around Jesus begin to gather where He was busy in a house. From everywhere the Pharisees and teachers came and took the front seats to see what was happening here. The people oppress each other just to get close to this wonderful Preacher.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Capernaum, a completely different drama is playing out. "That Jesus is in town," a man tells his friends, "and please help me get to Him today. This is my only chance!" He was paralyzed, and life became unbearable for him. The poor man is totally dependent on the favours of others.

"Come on, we'll make sure you get there." His friends are worried about him. On a stretcher, they carry him down the dusty streets in the direction where they see the crowds of people streaming. They are still far from the house, when they can already see that it will be a hopeless situation, because the people around the house are packed like a swarm of bees. "Do not worry," they comforted him when he wanted to burst into tears over the impossible situation, "We will make a plan!"

They put him down and caucus: "Look, if we can only get him on the roof, then we can get him in from above."

Everyone agrees that this is a brilliant ideal. "I'm going to get ropes quickly, and then we'll drop his stretcher through the roof!"

Jesus is rudely interrupted in the middle of His sermon by a commotion on the roof. Everyone looks up in dismay when someone starts breaking open the roof tiles. "What's going on up there?", one old grumpy

Pharisee wants to know, annoyed. And then everyone stops breathing as they watch someone lower a stretcher attached to four ropes through the opening. People stretch their necks in amazement to see. Then they recognize the man on the stretcher as the poor paralyzed man from the lower village.

When Jesus looks up, he sees four frightened faces peeking through the hole, and he admires their faith and ingenuity. He looked compassionately at the man on the stretcher. "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

The poor Pharisees almost fall off their chairs over this "blasphemous" statement. They knew there must be a weak spot in his outfit. "No one dares to claim the right to forgiveness of sins! Only God can forgive sins!" they reason them amongst themselves.

But Jesus saw from the beginning right through this hypocritical multitude. Of course, He knew that they saw Him as a threat to their own reputation. He also knew that this would only be the first of many confrontations

with them, and that it would eventually lead to His execution!

With only a few words Jesus healed the man before everyone's eyes, and he stands up as if there has never been anything wrong with him. While singing and cheering he dances out of there, carrying his stretcher while the crowds shake their heads in disbelief. But not everyone is impressed. The Pharisees came second only in the first round

The healing of the paralyzed is a wonderful story where we see not only the faith and desire of the man to come to Jesus, but also the faith of his friends. They not only left it at faith, but turned it into action by going out of their way to get him to Jesus. It is a story of neighbourly love without borders. This is an example for each of us! The paralyzed man was rewarded with something far greater than he asked for! Not only did he receive healing, but forgiveness. Jesus restores the whole person and thus brings him into harmony with God. Have you already

received God's forgiveness?

Prayer:

Lord, I praise and glorify Your wonderful Name, for You are great and good and almighty. Thank you for giving me forgiveness without me even deserving it.

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Levi**Luke 5: 27-39**

When the Roman government advertised the post of tax collector, Levi saw the gap and immediately filed his tender. This could be a paying business! This would mean that he would have to collect taxes from the Jews and then keep a certain percentage of it for himself. Most Jews did not really know what the tax entailed. Levi heard that the other tax collectors were making good money. They cheated on someone here and there and collected a little more than they had to, and then stuffed the rest in their pockets. Very soon Levi learned how to blackmail and cheat people around every hook and corner.

What Levi did not take into account however, was that everyone suddenly started avoiding him. That stigma of tax collector cheater began to cling to him, and soon all his friends disappeared. There was only one solution: he

had to join the rest of the tax collectors. He was received with open arms! The misfortune, however, was that this lot was quite the foam of society. They drank and partied - not people with whom any good Jew would mix.

So it was a great shock to Jesus' followers when they walked past Levi's toll booth one fine day and Jesus told that hated tax collector to follow Him!

I can imagine the picture: Peter was immediately annoyed: "Master, how dare you! His reputation stinks!" Jesus smiles... ..

Levi cannot believe his ears - no one outside his miserable circle of friends wants him as a friend, and here comes this holy Prophet and He calls him, poor Levi! Just there did he decide that this would be the perfect opportunity to introduce Jesus to his friends. If He is willing to accept Levi, then his rotten pals will also be acceptable to Jesus. He quickly spread the word, and that night they were already having a great time with all the

bells and whistles.

Peter and the rest are bitterly uncomfortable with this situation, but they have to admit that they are almost enjoying it! However, they cannot understand how Jesus can fit in so comfortably with the bunch of sinners. Their Master is definitely different!

The next day there was hell to pay: A delegation of Pharisees stopped Peter and his friends and chastised them over that infamous party the previous night. "How could you! What inspired you to mix with that foam? You have indeed stood with sinners and publicans, eating and drinking!" Jesus heard what was going on, and then He came to save the situation: "It is sick people who need the doctor, not the healthy!" He explains to them.

And Levi? He was willing to leave everything just to follow Jesus. And I am convinced that not only did Levi repent, but surely so did many of his notorious friends!

In this story we see that it is not necessarily the people who have lived an exemplary life all their lives who become disciples of Jesus, but also the guys who have a very rotten past. At a prayer service, one of the speakers was an old gaolbird some time ago. The guy could not even speak properly, but the message he brought was that the Lord had saved him, and that he had begun to work among prisoners. I felt a bit uncomfortable, but I just realized once again that Jesus does not look at the person.

This awkward situation that Levi created led to an inevitable confrontation. However, Jesus used the situation to show that He was willing to forgive anyone. If it is possible even for tax collectors and sinners to restore their relationship with God, then it is possible for anyone. What's more, human taboos are becoming unimportant! We must learn to look beyond our traditions, and accept others for what they are - creatures of God just like you and me!

While talking about traditions, the Pharisees also chastised Jesus because He, like John the Baptist, did not teach His disciples to fast and to follow all the other Jewish traditions. With Jesus' answer he gives a new perspective on the old Jewish customs. He does not reject the traditions, but He says that there is a time and a place for everything. So simply following a tradition because it is a tradition has absolutely no value. But at its right time and place and with the right purpose in mind, it is helpful.

Maybe you are facing a dilemma this morning because you do not know if you are ever good enough to be of any use to the Lord. Will the Lord ever be able to use you? Maybe your sin is too great or your past is too dark. From this story this morning the Lord gives you the assurance that He looks past all these things and sees someone created in His image. He definitely wants to use you! All He asks is your willingness.

Or maybe your dilemma this morning is that

you are struggling to accept a certain person, possibly because of his dark past or his culture. Jesus asks of you as believer to accept that person as he is, and to give him a chance in life, as he was willing to give even Levi a chance.

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me to accept people as they are.

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Caught Out on the Sabbath

Luke 6: 1-11

It was a quiet Sabbath morning: as Jesus walked with his disciples through the field, they came upon a green field of swaying wheat. The men drool, because it is hard work to be with Jesus, and the work only pays a starvation wage! On top of that, the crowds that gather around them do not really give them time to think about food. Now the fat wheat ears look all too attractive. "May we?" one asks Jesus, and he nods in agreement. Deut 23:25 is very clear about this, that if you walk through someone's wheat field, then you may only pick a few ears, it is not theft.

But they are closely watched by someone who was just looking for a single mistake: "Ahah! Got you!" A group of Pharisees rush at Jesus and his men. Immediately the poor confused men are confronted with the fact

that they worked on the Sabbath!

"What work?" They shrug.

"You have reaped! And that on the Sabbath!"

Pharisees conducted a very deep study of the Scripture. Unfortunately, they concentrated so hard on knowledge of the law that they never grasped the true spirit of Scripture. For them it was all about keeping the law down to it's finest details, and that absolutely nothing would cause them to violate a single piece of the law. They tried to impose this philosophy on society. Everything sounds very noble! Over the years, however, the Pharisees began to realize that keeping laws was not so easy. One reason is that there are so many loopholes. For example, if the law says you are not allowed to kill, would it be against the law to strangle someone? And so they began to formulate laws around the laws so that someone might not accidentally break a law! Probably the hardest law was the one about the Sabbath, because there are so many loopholes. When,

then, is work actually work? Everyone knew that harvesting was work, and it was totally taboo. Easy! One old Pharisee probably said to his colleagues one day: "Yesterday morning I saw my old wife standing on the Sabbath, plucking her eyebrows in front of the mirror, and then I thought to myself: but it's the same as harvesting! Now I ask you, should we not make a law that women are not allowed to pluck their eyebrows on the Sabbath?"

"Look," said one of the other ringleaders, "if she had not looked in the mirror in the first place, she would not have even noticed her eyebrows!" One of the laws of the Pharisees therefore reads that a woman may not look in a mirror on the Sabbath, because it can lead to work. Another law states that you may not pull out a chair from under a table, because it makes furrows in the dust, which is exactly the same as ploughing and of course, work. And so we can continue. There were eventually 39 laws woven around the Sabbath law alone. And the Pharisees saw

themselves as the keepers of the law.

So when the disciples were caught "working" on a Sabbath, there was great trouble! Jesus tries to explain to them that one should not be so steadfast, and that even David "transgressed" the law when there was need. There has to be a balance in your life, and on top of that, they are actually dealing with the Creator of the Sabbath here. But they would not understand it at all, because they only had one thing on their minds!

Not long after this incident, Jesus sat in the synagogue one Sabbath, preaching. Of course, there were some Pharisees who did not necessarily come to listen to Jesus' sermon, but were only trying to catch Him out. And then it happened too! A man with a defective right hand was sitting amongst the people, and the Pharisees said to one another, "Ahah! Here comes trouble!" However, Jesus read their minds, and called the man closer. "May one do good on a Sabbath?" He looked the Pharisees in the

eye. And then he healed the man, thus giving him a new chance in life to be able to work and support his family. We read that the lawmen were furious because they were outwitted!

Did Jesus consider the Law unimportant and summarily reject the Sabbath? No, that is definitely not the case! However, Jesus wants to show the Pharisees what the law is really about. Later, He beautifully summed it up as love for God and love for your fellow-man. After Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross, another dimension was added: gratitude. Because Jesus paid our debts and gave us salvation, we are thankful and therefore we live out this love that Jesus spoke of. For us it is no longer, like the Pharisees, about keeping the law for the sake of the law, or to earn our salvation, but simply because we love God, and therefore try to do His will.

Prayer:

Lord, please give me true love in my heart -

love born of gratitude for Your great act of redemption!

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Twelve Apostles

Luke 6: 12-19

Prayer is a very important part of any believer's life, especially if he is serious about his faith. In practice, we see in Jesus' life on earth how He also lived out this statement. If it was important to Him, how much more not for you and me! Time and again we see that Jesus spent long periods of time in prayer, especially before great events. We are so prone to making big decisions beforehand with a shooting prayer. Let's take a look at what Jesus did.

Jesus' followers grew and huge crowds followed Him every day. It all started when Jesus got those three fishermen at their boats, and asked them to come along with the promise that they would become fishers of men. From that day on, the result only grew.

Now the time has come for some special men to be appointed to receive intensive training. They had to take the lead, especially after Jesus' task was completed. So there would be a huge task on their shoulders later. For Jesus, it was second nature to first go and pray about the great decision of the right choice of men. Luke tells us that He spent the whole night in prayer. He chose the loneliness of a mountain and wrestled with God over that important decision.

Overnight prayer services are often sacred moments, and anyone who has ever attended such an event can only witness the glorious spiritual refreshment it brings. To pray in such a serious way, you not only glorify the Lord, but you are nourished with spiritual power that has no end. Not every major decision in your life has to be preceded by an all-night session, but especially when big decisions are imminent, you need to make time to spend with the Lord and ask Him for wisdom. Do not let your busy schedule get in the way of seeking the face

of the Lord. I once heard someone say that he is far too busy NOT to pray. If this is the case then maybe you need to spend a lot more time praying when things get impossible. It may take up some of your "precious" time, but the result is astronomical!

At daybreak, Jesus came down from the mountain and there he found his many followers. He chooses twelve of them to become "Apostles". The Greek word Apostolous means "delegates with a command".

Today we also have "ordinary" believers and believers with a specific command. This does not mean that one is more important than the other, or that one should do a greater work in the Kingdom than the other. In the case of the apostles, they were the men who would be responsible for taking the lead, teaching people what Jesus taught them, and organizing the church. The "ordinary" believers were the people who were later

responsible for spreading the Word and spreading the gospel throughout the world. It is also my and your task today to live out our gratitude in this way, not only with what we say to others, but throughout our lives, so that there will be a hunger for the gospel among all with whom we come into contact.

On the plain, a large crowd was waiting for Jesus. Not only were there Jews, but Luke also mentions that there were people from the coastal area of Tiro and Sidon, a non-Jewish region. Jesus' first task was to focus His ministry on Israel because they were, of course, the people of God. Therefore, the selection of the twelve men was also strongly symbolic of the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel. However, God's grace is also for everyone out there, even the gentiles. People came from far and wide with their sick for healing. Jesus did not disappoint them but now a new dimension has dawned in His ministry, namely to teach people. Actually, it was mainly aimed at the twelve men, but everyone who was present could also listen

to these wonderful sermons of Jesus.

The so-called “Sermon on the Mount,” which we will read about tomorrow, followed and the people hung onto Jesus' lips. Even today, 2000 years later, this sermon is still fresh and new, and each of us can read it over and over again, because every time you read it you see something new in it. I therefore invite you to make, with me, Jesus' sermon our own, and not only by reading it, but to make it our way of life.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that I can know that You have chosen me to be a believer in Your Kingdom. Teach me to live my Christianity in every field.

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Blessings

Luke 6: 20-26

Jesus sits down against the mountain slope. Below Him a huge crowd gathers. He motions for them to sit down, and then a deadly silence falls as Jesus begins to deliver His famous Sermon on the Mount. Everyone is in great anticipation because His words grab your heart, so different from the scribes' lofty sermons!

Jesus begins to speak to the poor. Most of the people here at His feet fall into this class, even the twelve men He has chosen as apostles. They are fishermen and they have voluntarily left all their meagre earthly possessions just to follow Jesus. They certainly only really began to realize their full dependence on God the day they became disciples. Suddenly there was no more income from their fishing industry and they had to look to other people for food.

Poverty and hardship are often necessary in your life to realize your total dependence on God! The opposite is often also true, that wealth can be dangerous, in the sense that you can forget about your dependence on God. A rich person has to work much harder on his spiritual life than a poor person because it is so much easier to be confident and egocentric.

We must understand this statement of Jesus about the Kingdom of God in the broadest sense. The salvation of God also takes away poverty. This means that He must fully rule over all aspects and circumstances in your life. He must be in control of your possessions as well as your spirit.

The following statement affects so many of us. We become aware that when we are hungry or sad, we are still never, ever forgotten by God. In the world of Jesus, the social structures were dominated by those with many possessions. No one got anything for free, and often people went hungry.

Today it is still so. Hungry people are still very pertinent with us. I myself have known hunger in my life, but at that time I experienced the love of Jesus so intensely. And when sorrow threatens to engulf you, you must know that He is there for you every moment. I have seen so many times at a funeral, that the deceased person's partner can still smile and not be torn apart by sadness, simply because she is experiencing God's wonderful closeness and comfort.

Jesus then speaks to those who have been rejected by society. So often such a person is scolded and even shunned as something bad. A very good example of this we see a little later in Jesus' ministry, where He sits and talks to a Samaritan woman. She had a reputation and had to wait until everyone had left the well before she could fetch water, for fear of the askance, mocking looks and reproaches. Yes, she did live in sin and it may have been her own fault, but then she met Jesus. He turns everything upside down. After leaving Him, she set the world on fire

when she could not stop telling all the people who avoided her so much about the miracle of Jesus. This rejected woman was the reason why many people finally met Jesus!

Jesus can still turn your circumstances around totally today if you just want to allow Him to do it!

In this parallel, however, it is more about someone being rejected because of his connection with Jesus. Miracles can also happen there that day when you realize that it is not about you as a person, but about God. Jesus says a very true thing here: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy"! If you greet insults or a cold shoulder with genuine bubbling joy, your opponents will not know what struck them. That joy, however, should not be plastered, but come deep from your heart.

Paul lived it out so practically so wonderfully. When his back was broken and he and Silas chained up in prison licking their wounds, they did what they could do best - singing

praises to God! The results were absolutely astounding. And later, when he was imprisoned for years in the filthy, smelly Roman prison, he was still a bundle of bubbling joy.

Jesus is the One who makes all the difference. Someone who does not have Jesus will never be able to experience true joy in the best of circumstances. For the believer, the most wonderful joy is available. However, it also requires something from you - you have to make it your own! Realize today that Jesus gives you the potential to experience that bubbling joy. I challenge you: go live it practically! The difference in your life will be absolutely amazing!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, thank you for the wonderful joy of life that you have given me. Please help me not to forget it for one moment!

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Live Out Your Love

Luke 6: 27-38

What Does Biblical Love mean? In short, it is sincere caring, from the heart as well as practical. Is it limited to your family, relatives, friends, fellow believers? The demands that Jesus makes in this morning's passage of Scripture place us under a very clear choice: you must live love or you will be swallowed up by the world! Jesus begins with the harsh words, "Love your enemies!" It literally means that you should not just be neutral or aloof towards your enemies, but that it should be an active living out of love. If we read the rest of this sermon, then we see that it requires self-denial from us to be able to truly live out this love!

Our society today is radically different from that in Luke's story. Yet there are certain similarities that make both societies very difficult for the believer. Jesus' society was

one of giving and taking. The rich and prominent gave, but only if they were very sure that they would get it back. It was not just about earthly things, but also about things like loyalty and support. Jesus comes with this sermon and He turns the whole thought of "I will be good to you as long as you are good to me" completely upside down. This is not love! You do not let your behaviour be determined by what people do to you or say about you, but your behaviour should only be determined by what God wants you to do!

We may very well quickly want to say that this sermon of Jesus is a bit unfair! How can He now expect me to actively love someone when the person is nasty towards me? Perhaps we need to look at this assignment in perspective.

Let your mind wander a little to the time before Jesus saved you. What did your life look like then? Did you really try to live according to God's will at that time? I do not

think so! Did you really love Him then? I strongly doubt it! If I think back to my own life - yes, I did make half-hearted efforts to please Him. I went to church and read the Bible, only occasionally, and I tried to pray, but it was not very successful. Besides, everything was to try and soothe my conscience. When I think back to the sins in my life, my hair stands on end. That I could truly think that the Lord does not see me! If I had only sinned ten times a day in those first 25 years of my life that I was held accountable for what I do (actually, it was a lot more!) Then I would have had 90,000 offences behind my name! It would go down very badly in court!

In spite of all this, the Lord decided to give me a whole new beginning with a clean slate. Even though I was His enemy, and even though I did everything that was bad, He still forgave my sins and gave me a brand new life. Even though I hurt Him so bitterly, He gave me the greatest gift of all, eternal life with Jesus. Even though my life was dirty

and rotten, He still gave me the Holy Spirit in my life.

Then suddenly everything changes, and I live a clean, pure, holy life? Not in your life! Show me the believer who leads a sinless life - he is dead! No matter how hard I try to live according to God's will, I do not even get it right, and every day I fall back into the many pitfalls of sin. Despite the fact that I disappoint the Lord so deeply every day, He still continues to overload me with love and goodness. He just forgives and forgives and forgives every time.

Now read again what Jesus says while keeping the above in mind. Then it starts to make sense and it no longer sounds so unfair! If the Lord closes his eyes so many times over my own hostility towards Him, and then still overloads me with love, then I dare not help but to love other people as well. Then it just makes sense that despite someone bullying me, being mean and nasty towards me, I will still actively give the person

love. It must be a love that not only shows a smile on my part, but that actively gives to that person just as the Lord gives me.

The last section is about judgment. Who gives me the right to judge someone else? We're so quick to condemn people, and then make a big fuss about it if it's a nice juicy piece of gossip. Lately there have been some big names in the news and each of us has already expressed all our judgment about these people. But the question is, are you and I such angels? Who amongst us is without sin? Who amongst us dares to point the finger at someone else? Is their sin then so much greater than the sin we commit? Sin is to NOT do the will of God. Whether it is big or small, it still remains sin. I do not speak well of the sins of those who rob our country or rioters for one moment, but I dare not judge because I myself have heaps of sins in my life! Judgment belongs only to God!

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me, where I fail so terribly to live

out my love, and where I enjoy condemning others. Help me to truly love others practically, even my enemies!

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Parables and Fruit Trees

Luke 6: 39-45

As you may have noticed, I love to bring home truths through stories, especially stories about the Bush. It's something that is very near to me. Well, I have to admit that I have a very good Teacher - the best there has ever been: Jesus! Just look at how He brought the most wonderful truths home to people with stories and parables. You just do not forget them! Every time you come to such a situation, you immediately think of what Jesus said.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is no exception, and today we look at our four brief parables that He used to bring home very deep truths. In the first parable, Jesus wants to make it clear to you that you must know what your shortcomings are, and that you must live according to them. He uses the image of two blind people trying to lead each other.

Eventually they both end up in a ditch! In practice, I have experienced many times that people ask me questions that I simply cannot answer. My natural reaction is to give my own opinion, even if I'm not even sure if it's correct. In a Sunday school situation it may be even worse, if a child asks you a trick question, then the temptation is great to just thumb-suck an answer! How will the child know? I mean, after all, you have your honour and you have to look intelligent! What would it look like if the children realized that their teacher was too "stupid" to answer a simple old question? The same goes for when someone asks you a trick question about a matter of faith - perhaps something that has bothered him for years.

We must remember that no one is perfect, and often you just have to swallow your pride and say, "Sorry I do not know what the answer is, but I will try to find out!" Personally, it has often meant that I have to confront other people with trick questions. I have often had to refer people to someone

else to try to answer their question. People do not lose their respect for you if you do not know everything! They realise that you are just as human as they are, and that they can therefore communicate with you more easily. So swallow your pride!

In the second parable, Jesus wants me to know my own limitations and to see my own faults and sins. It is therefore important that you do not judge other people, especially while you are still sitting with a bag full of sins in your life. Only the person who is totally without any sin has the right to judge others! And I assure you, that guy has not been born yet! The only Man who has ever been without sin is Jesus! It's so convenient to criticize other people and point the finger, especially when the person has a high social profile. In the process, there are often people who get terribly hurt and often also innocent people who become involved.

In our third parable this morning, Jesus reminds us that a good person does not do

bad things. As an example he uses a fruit tree. Of course it's something everyone knows. I remember from my childhood days, the time of year when the figs were ripe. As you walk past the fig tree, your mouth automatically begins to water for those delicious, juicy, sweet figs that melt away in your mouth, filling your whole being with the aromatic scent of tree-fresh figs. Oh boy! When I was a child I had the wonderful privilege of having an almost inexhaustible source of fruit on our farm, cling peaches, free-stone peaches and white peaches; apples, pears, plums and apricots; figs, grapes and prickly pears. Not to mention all the wild fruits, because against the rocky edge, medlar has grown and stem fruits and many others. There was a choice and selection of the most delicious juicy fruits, each with it's own unique taste. In the rocky edge, however, there was also a tree with gall-bitter white fruits that was delicious in it's own way. And there were also trees that bore fruit that stank. The pigs quite enjoyed them!

Indeed, it is so that you are known by the fruit you bear. Like a good tree that is regularly pruned, fertilized, cared for and watered at the right time, bears the juiciest fruit. So it is also necessary that in the life of faith we are regularly cared for, pruned and fed, and regularly drink from the fountain of life. Then we bear fruit of faith that is acceptable to God but also an advertisement of the life of a believer, and gives others the hunger for that life.

The tree on our farm that bore the smelly fruit incidentally grew right next to the pigsty. No wonder it's fruit smelled so awful! If you mix with bad friends, they will definitely have a bad impact on your life. Then you can be sure that your fruit of faith may stink too! Rather, get your roots in the rich, nourishing soil of the orchard of God - the church. Believers encourage one another to bear desirable, juicy fruits of faith.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to bear good fruit, and thus

glorify Your holy Name. Please help me!

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Foundations

Luke 6: 46-49

A young couple bought a house with a view of the wide ocean in Ballito in the seventies. If you know Ballito, you will know that houses with that kind of view are built high on the slopes of a pristine sand dune.

And then one day the big rains came. The couple went to bed that evening with the soothing sound of falling rain in their ears. While she is still lying relaxed and reading, she gets the strange sensation of a big river rumbling, but she does not pay much attention to it and she immerses herself in her captivating book.

Suddenly there is an unearthly rumbling and a sickening cracking sound, and she feels with a shock how her bed starts to move. She jumps up in alarm, just in time to see how their house is breaking apart under their

feet. Anxiously they ran out of the house in their pajamas in the pouring rain. With mouths hanging open they have to watch as a stream of water from a broken stormwater pipe cuts a huge tunnel under the house. Half the foundations hang in mid-air, and the house is literally slowly breaking through in half!

Today, many years later, that very same sand dune is still the most popular part of Ballito and the most expensive palaces adorn the slope. However, architects today realize the danger of such a sand dune and the houses there are designed with hypales (piles) that are sunk deep into solid rock to prevent stormwater from washing out the sand under the foundations and causing the palace to collapse.

Jesus used a parable about two types of building-construction, one of which was laid on the rocky bottom and the other on sandy ground. At first glance you do not see a difference between the two houses, but when

the floodwaters come, the house without proper foundations, collapses while the other remains standing. During the floods that hit Ballito in 2007, there were homes that simply crumbled under the onslaught of the waves. However, one building stunned everyone - the lifeguard's building, which was built right on the beach, escaped unscathed. The reason? An engineer who insisted that the foundation be cast on solid rock with great difficulty!

What is it all about?

Jesus asks the hearers at His feet: "What is the point of you addressing Me with 'Lord, Lord!' but not doing as I say?" Jesus is the Rock on which we must build the building of our lives, because without that Foundation there will be very big problems at some point. As with a house, everything will look fine as long as it goes well, but when the onslaughts of life come, only the person who has Jesus as Foundation will stand.

The question is: How do I build on that Jesus

foundation?

Jesus gives the answer clearly and distinctly:
"Do as I say!"

But where do I start? There are so many things?

Start at the beginning! In Revelation 3:20 Jesus invites you with the words, "I stand at the door and knock!" He therefore asks you to open your heart to Him and invite Him inside. You do not have to go looking for Him - He is already right there with you, and He is just waiting to be allowed into your life. This is the first and most important step.

You may be saying, "Oh, but Jesus is already a part of my life!"

"Follow Me," Jesus told Peter in Matthew 4:19. "Follow Me", He also says to you and me today. Following Jesus is definitely not easy! Peter and his mates found out the hard way. But the reward is one you cannot describe.

Following Jesus does not necessarily mean leaving your job and home and everything, as Peter and his family did, and going on a missionary work in Timbuktu. No, but it does mean that you have to make certain sacrifices and live fully for Him. This means that you must have the right priorities in your life, where Jesus' cause must take precedence over any worldly things. This means that you will be an ambassador for Jesus in your work situation and wherever you go. It is very difficult, but fortunately the Lord knew that we could not do it on our own, and therefore He gave us the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, wisdom, inspiration and courage to stand up for Jesus.

Jesus also emphasized the great importance of Love on several occasions. To truly build your house of life on the foundation of Jesus, the cement of love is extremely necessary, because without it everything falls apart. You can make the best concrete mix for a foundation, but without cement everything falls apart. In 1 Cor. 13 Paul sings the

meaning of love. You and I should read this section regularly to refresh our memory, and then put it into practice. Love, as Paul describes it, is truly the cement of the foundation on which our house of life is to be built.

Let's build the foundation of Jesus in all seriousness today!

Prayer:

Lord, today I plead guilty again because my building work is not up to standard. Please help me get started on the right foundation.

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Two Miracles

Luke 7: 1-17

The news of Jesus' healing power spread far and wide, until it finally reached the barracks of the Romans. After Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount, he returned to Capernaum, where they met a group of Jewish family heads one morning. The men came to Jesus to plead for a Roman officer's slave who was terminally ill. The officer was in command of one hundred soldiers. However, he realized that he was actually an outsider in the Jewish community because he was a Roman and that Jews felt very uncomfortable when gentiles came too close to them, because their purity was affected. He did not want to mess things up and go there himself, so he used intermediaries to resolve the situation.

It was a pleasure for the family heads to negotiate with Jesus on behalf of the officer, because he had a lot of influence, and he did

not hesitate to exercise it to contribute something to the community. He even had a synagogue built for the Jews, something you would certainly not expect from a Roman officer!

Despite the Roman's high position and his kindness, he had one very big problem, the great distance between him and the God of Israel. He was not a Jew, and therefore he did not have access to that God of whom he had heard so much. Jesus was the only Way to bridge that gap.

Without fail, Jesus made the effort not only to have the officer fetched, but to go to the man's house himself.

On the way there, the officer sends someone to stop Jesus, because this influential man felt totally unworthy in Jesus' company. How dare he, who has no right to the God of the Jews, bring that God's holy "Prophet" to his house?

Jesus was amazed that this man kept

believing so stubbornly! He makes it clear that even Romans and other gentiles are also part of the Kingdom of God. Without further ceremony, the slave is healed.

Shortly after this episode, Jesus leaves for a village called Nain. His disciples were with Him as usual, followed by a large crowd of followers. Near the town they came upon a funeral. It was a very sad story, and the poor woman whose son lay lifeless on the stretcher was inconsolable. For her, the whole world around her had collapsed: her husband - her caregiver - she had already lost to death. This had already left her as a very vulnerable widow. And now she also had to bury her only son. The people from the town were all there, and lamenting surely filled the air around the village. Her situation was absolutely hopeless!

Jesus' first reaction was that He immediately saw the woman's great need and felt very sorry for her. However, it did not just stay with a mere emotion of pity, but He actually did

something about the situation. He stopped at the stretcher and touched it. He risked his own purity by touching this "unclean" body, something that was taboo according to Jewish views. It once again just showed how much Jesus really cared. He was willing to ignore all social taboos for the sake of a woman's grief. And then the miracle happened when Jesus commanded her son to rise. He immediately sat up straight and started speaking. Not only did the widow get her beloved son back, but she was also being saved socially and economically by this miracle.

This miracle caused great uproar throughout all Israel. People saw it as an act of God, and Jesus was recognized as the Messiah.

In the first pericope, emphasis is placed on the faith of the Roman officer, and that his faith prompted Jesus to perform the miracle. In the second pericope, however, there is no question of faith at all. Here we simply see Jesus' great compassion and mercy. Faith

was not a condition for the miracle.

Where we often want to see our own good life or a great faith as a condition for God's grace over us, it is a revelation to us to see that our well-being is not dependent on our faith or good deeds, but that it is purely God's mercy and grace that carries us through life. He already knows what our needs are long before we ask Him for anything!

But is it ever still necessary to pray?

Indeed! Through prayer we want to confirm how dependent we really are on Him, and that we cannot exist for one moment if it is not for His grace.

Prayer:

Lord, this morning I just want to reaffirm that I am totally dependent on You.

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Doubt

Luke 7: 18-23

Have you ever doubted your faith? Has the thought ever flashed through your head that this whole “Religion story” might just be something in our heads? One day I read a report of a new fad in England to have you baptized. People who have decided that they do not want anything to do with the Christian faith, but have been baptized by their parents, want to distance themselves from it in this way. People leave the church because they no longer want to believe. I was shivering when I read this! How, then, can anyone simply give up his faith?

Still, I must confess that the thoughts of doubt hit me, and then I wanted to kick myself for lending my mind to the devil for a moment! Every day I experience God's grace and miracles intensely! How can I ever stop believing?

But I take comfort in the fact that I am not alone in this struggle. Even the greatest of the prophets have ridden in the same boat. One such example is John the Baptist: suddenly doubt began to overwhelm him about Jesus. Not long before this episode, John was the one who baptized Jesus. On that occasion, he even told Jesus that he was unworthy to baptize Jesus. With his own eyes he saw how the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus that day. With his own two ears he heard the voice of God from heaven. In John 1:29 we read that John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Yet John begins to doubt so much that he sends messengers to Jesus to ask Him if He really is the Messiah.

Luke writes that at that very time Jesus was healing a lot of sick people. Of course, John must have experienced or at least heard of these miracles of Jesus. Jesus' answer to John was that he only had to look at everything that happened - the blind who could suddenly see again, the lame who

could walk and even the dead who came back to life. Wasn't that already enough for John to get any doubt out of his mind? "Blessed is the man who does not begin to doubt Me," Jesus told John's followers, sending them back to John.

If you ever start to have doubtful thoughts, just think of the many miracles that happen around us day-by-day. Open your eyes to this, and see them touch. The paramedic, Hans Hartmann's story suddenly comes to mind. Surely you still remember the Mighty Men conference where Uncle Angus Buchan had the heart attack? On that particular occasion, Hans was given the task of assisting the sick at the conference. With the preparation, numerous setbacks hit him, but he still remains confident. And then he tells of miracle upon miracle that finally enabled him to look after 200,000 men. He is also the person who was summoned when Angus collapsed under the stage. In his report, he describes Uncle Angus' symptoms, and that it was definitely a heart attack. And then, after

a crowd of people prayed for him, the report came later from the hospital that there was nothing wrong with Uncle Angus - absolutely nothing to indicate that he had ever had a heart attack! Isn't this a miracle? And it's just one of many that take place daily!

Jesus' answer to John's disciples warns us to accept Him for who He is. Not only did He heal the sick, but He also preached the Gospel to the poor (v.22). We like to look for the spectacular miracles of Jesus, but for the sake of convenience forget the wonder of ordinary people - sinners - for whom the skins suddenly fell from their eyes, and they could see Jesus for the first time. That miracle probably happened to yourself, the day Jesus pulled you out of the mud pool of lostness and gave you eternal life. The same miracle plays itself out day-by-day where people meet Jesus. Miracles unfold before one's eyes when you see how people change when Jesus becomes part of their lives.

I myself can only testify over and over again

about the wonder that takes place every day in my life, when I, a simple person, produce a daily piece. Yes, the Lord gave me the talent to be able to write, but without the wonderful inspiration I experience every day from the Holy Spirit, these pieces could never, ever happen. No writer can go on and on every day, week after week, year after year! I often hear great writers tell how they can sometimes not write a word for months. Only a miracle from the Holy God can cause me to never be without inspiration!

So when a doubtful thought threatens to plague me, I think of all the miracles I experience. We worship an almighty God for whom absolutely nothing is impossible!

Prayer:

Lord, You are great and good and almighty!
There is no end to Your miracles!

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Criticism

Luke 7: 24-35

After John the Baptist's disciples left to tell him the good news that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, Jesus gave a testimony about John. Indeed, he was a very special man, but what really mattered was the special relationship that existed between him and Jesus. What role did each of them play in God's plan of redemption? John is portrayed as the greatest prophet of all time. Yet he is only the prophetic forerunner of Jesus. Although John was such a special person, we cannot really dwell on him, because Jesus' preaching, the Kingdom of God offers so much more than John offers. John was the one who had to preach penance. With that he had to start preparing the people for Jesus and for the great grace that God was pouring out on the earth. What Jesus preaches is so important that He declares that the least in the Kingdom of God are even

greater than John the great prophet.

Not everyone responded the same to John's and Jesus' preaching. Ordinary people responded to John's call, even the hated tax collectors heeded John's preaching. They repented of their sins and were baptized by the prophet, as a sign that God had washed away and forgiven their sins. But there were also those who looked down on this "sectarian" and distanced themselves from him. It was especially the spiritual leaders, the scribes and Pharisees who could not accept John's simple preaching. By rejecting John's baptism, they also rejected God's plan of redemption. They were therefore not prepared for the One who is much greater than John.

In the last part of this pericope we see Jesus talking about the people who do not want to understand their preaching. Their sermons differed radically from each other, yet both acted as God's agents. Jesus uses the image of children playing to emphasize what He

means. John provided sad music, but the people did not want to cry. Jesus played merry music, but the people did not want to dance. Often today you hear a typical John-sermon that says: "Repent! Break away from your sins!" Many people block their ears to those sermons! They do not want to hear it. Then you hear another sermon with a completely different style, where the pastor preaches about God's grace and love. Many people also do not want to listen to this, because it's too simple! Someone will find fault with every sermon!

To the preachers who are reading this devotion this morning, I just want to say that you are in good company, because even the greatest prophet of all time (Jesus' description of John) and Jesus Himself had to endure heavy criticism. To give just one example: when John abstained from all evil and lived a chaste life strictly according to the law, people mocked him and even accused him of possessing demons. When Jesus did the exact opposite, mixing Himself with

sinners and wicked people and celebrating with them, He was also mocked and called a "glutton and a drunkard." The criticism that Angus Buchan had to endure is totally inhuman. I have read documents that make your hair stand on end, where his preaching would even border on the work of the devil!

Let's stop criticizing. Of course I do not always agree with everything that all preachers say. It happens from time to time that a preacher says something out of the conviction of his heart, but which is not entirely in line with Scripture. We must remember that even ministers and pastors are just people, and that they can also make mistakes. However, when we listen to a sermon, we must pray that the Holy Spirit will not only speak through the preacher, but that He will open our hearts to hear the message that He, the Holy Spirit, wants to give us through the preacher. We must listen with an open mind and not with preconceived ideas. While you should be aware of any form of error, we should not be critical. Someone

once noticed that the pastor was repeating things too much, and she could not grasp them. Then I just wonder about the same song we sing and repeat so often because it is beautiful and we love to sing it. If Scriptural truths are worth repeating, you can do so to the point of boredom! We never dare get tired of it! Speaking of boring repetition - how many times have you read Psalm 23 in your life? I'm just asking

Let us forget about the preacher behind the sermon, and see the God speaking through the preacher!

Prayer:

Lord, I myself so love to criticize. Forgive me, and help me to see You rather than the pastor on the pulpit.

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Simon and That Woman

Luke 7: 36-50

Our story this morning is a moving one that brings tears to your eyes. Here Jesus demonstrates God's great and inexplicable forgiveness.

A Pharisee named Simon invites Jesus to dinner. It was the custom to eat at a low table. Around the table were pillows on which the guests lay on their sides and leaned on one elbow. Because your feet were so close to the next guest's face, it was just good manners for a host to get a slave to wash the guests' dusty feet before dinner. Remember, the people wore sandals and lay barefoot around the table. Clearly, this Simon did not consider his guests important enough to let their feet be washed!

Just when everyone had laid down and were comfortable, that woman entered the room

and she went to take a position at Jesus' feet. Annoyed, everyone looks at the woman - what is she doing here? This was a matter for the men, and women were simply taboo! Especially this woman, because her reputation preceded her! No decent man wanted to be in this woman's company!

But it would get even worse because the woman starts crying and her sorrowful tears fall on Jesus' feet. Then she does the unthinkable and loosens her hair in public. Such indecency was totally inexcusable. She is a shameless woman! As she wipes Jesus' feet with her loose hair, grumbling can be heard around the table. The tension in the atmosphere reaches breaking point when she brings out a bottle of precious fragrance oil and spreads it over Jesus' feet.

Out of "decency" a man cannot always say what you want, but you can at least think what you want! That's what Simon reconed. But he did not keep in mind that Jesus knew exactly what was going on in his crooked

mind. In his mind he rejects Jesus as a prophet, because if he was really a prophet, he would have known about this woman's reputation. He certainly would not allow her to touch Him. "So, no!" Simon thought.

But Luke tells us that Jesus saw right through Simon. As a true Prophet, Jesus also saw through the woman and he knew that, precisely because she was a woman with a bad reputation, a sinner, she needed God's forgiveness so much more. The difference between this woman and Simon was that he relied on his own righteousness. As a Pharisee, he thought that because he kept the law down to the smallest detail, his case with God was right. On his own steam he would one day march into heaven! The woman, on the other hand, realized that she was lost, and that Jesus was the only way out for her to seek God's forgiveness. She realized her total dependence on Him.

Simon was not a bad guy at first glance. He led a very exemplary life and made all the

right noises. We can assume that he was definitely a prominent member of the community, because only a wealthy person could entertain a lot of people for dinner. It also makes him generous. I am convinced that he was a pillar of support for the church.

However, our believers need to be very careful that we do not become like Simon. We can so easily build up so much confidence in life that we begin to forget the true meaning of life. If you are doing well financially and you are in church every Sunday, then you are okay. On top of that, if you still serve on every commission and do your part for the church, then you feel like you were made. You regularly give your thanksgiving offerings, pray, read the Bible and even participate in the activities of a Bible study group. Do not get me wrong, I'm not saying these things are wrong. On the contrary, it is very good, and the Lord wants us to do these things. The problem, however, is that such prosperity can cause you to then easily forget your total dependence on God.

Someone who lives prosperously must work twice as hard on his relationship with the Lord.

We must never forget the very basic things of faith for a moment. Why did we receive debt forgiveness? We were lost in our sins, and God, through His great mercy, gave us forgiveness through the atoning merits of Jesus, not because we were good or did good, but out of grace! When we have received this forgiveness of guilt, we live a life of gratitude by trying to do good, but in the constant realization of how much we still depend on God for every thing in our lives. It is He who gives us prosperity, and it is He who gives us the opportunities to serve Him in the church and all other areas. So when you sit behind the organ or take your place as a leader-elder or even stand on the pulpit with a congregation in front of you - be grateful for that opportunity given to you, and realize that you are still dependent on Him.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that I can stand in Your service - please keep me on my knees and depending on You.

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Women with Jesus

Luke 8: 1-3

It was certainly not an easy task for Jesus to preach the gospel. Day-by-day, from early morning to late evening, He was surrounded and oppressed by a crowd that often numbered in the thousands. In addition, each sought His personal attention. However, Jesus was not the only one who felt this pressure. The twelve He chose must have had a hard time keeping the crowd in check and making sure everything went smoothly. They had to stop Jesus from being completely trampled on!

I don't think we realize every day what this team has been going through. It was exhausting work that often went on until deep into the night. There was simply no time for cooking and general care. Here a few women who had already experienced Jesus' wonderful healing saw the need and decided

to come and help.

It was not uncommon for women to provide a rabbi with money and food, but here it went a step further. These women left everything to move around the country with Jesus and his company. It was absolutely unheard of and in fact it was considered a disgrace in their society. No wonder many people felt uncomfortable about Jesus because He caused people to do things you were not normally supposed to do. The social structures and traditional customs were shaken to their foundations when Jesus began preaching that day!

The names Luke mentions here we hear again later in the story, and at the end of Luke's story we see how they, along with the apostles, witness Jesus' resurrection. We do not know how many women were involved, but Luke mentions a few. There was Mary from the fishing village of Magdala. She was nicknamed Magdalena. Johanna was married to Gusa, the manager of Herod

Antipas' household. So he was a high official! So we see that there were women from all walks of life. Without the support of these women, the whole operation would have collapsed, because the men would have simply burned out!

We are so inclined to look down on the lesser tasks in kingdom work as unimportant. Often it is precisely those "minor tasks" that keep the gears oiled and the wheels rolling. I remember as a child, how I often stood with contempt and looked at a guy who was standing next to the train track at Waterval Boven with a small long-stemmed hammer. With every train that passes he knocks against the wheels with his hammer, day-in, day-out, to the point of boredom! That's all he did all day! We mockingly referred to him as the "Tappiologist". Everyone looked down on this poor guy. Still, he had an extremely responsible job, because he listened carefully to the sound that every hammer blow makes, and if one might have sounded different from the rest, the train was

summarily stopped, because then it meant that there was something wrong with the wheel. It could have caused a tragic derailment that could even have cost people's lives. Similarly, everyone looked down on the stokers on the steam trains, a humble blood-sweat job. But without their grueling task of throwing shovels full of coal into the locomotive's glowing, hungry throat all day, the train would not have been able to move at all.

Johanna was a prominent woman in society, but she jeopardized her reputation for caring for Jesus and His twelve men. Cooking, washing clothes, bringing water, preparing a place to sleep, comforting children I assume that she often had to sleep in the veldt on the hard ground with the rest. These women were the backbone of the entire ministry. We see them here as the "support team". Later in the story we see that they were the only ones who stayed calm when everything was falling apart. When the twelve chosen apostles despaired and even began

to say that they did not even know Jesus at all, it was these women who stood by Jesus to the very end. Even when He hung on the cross, they were there to try to support Him in His last moments. And it was they who cared for His body and buried Him. That Sunday morning it was once again they who were first at the tomb to come and make the final arrangements. It was also they who bubbled the good news to the other disciples about Jesus' resurrection.

Do you also have one of those “minor” tasks in the Kingdom? Do you feel inferior because you could not stand on the pulpit instead? Rest assured that the entire kingdom machine will come to a standstill without these tiny, insignificant gears. Be proud of your task, and do it with joy and devotion!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the task you have given me to do. Help me to do it to the fullest.

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The Sower

Luke 8: 4-15

Jesus' sermons must have been absolutely breathtaking. Luke tells us that "a great crowd" came from all the different towns in the area to listen to Jesus. It almost sounds like the old communion services Grandpa told me about. In Machadodorp, the people gathered every three months and held church for a week at a time. It was great happening. The farmers arrived there with ox-wagons and pitched tents on the church grounds and held services till late.

Jesus' sermons were not as lofty as those of the great scholars. He spoke simply and straight out in a language that the common people understood. He used images of things they had to deal with every day to bring home truths for them. Despite this, there were still many people who heard it and did not understand it. Even today, there are

many people who misunderstand Jesus' parables or may not want to understand at all because the parables are too simple.

One example is the simple story of the sower that Jesus told here. Later, His disciples asked him about the meaning of the parable. Jesus was patient with them and explained it to them in detail.

Maybe we should take another look at exactly what this parable means to us in today's modern terms. In my mind's eye I see the picture that Jesus paints, the farmer sowing, a sack of seed on his hip and every few steps he takes a handful of his precious seed. His steps are measured so that he may not throw less seed in some places than others. The problem, however, is that the land does not look like a Free State maize land, but it is a typical smallholder's land dotted with large rocks that he could not remove. And here and there the stubborn weeds claimed their patch. The farmer sows widely, and of course all his seed does not

fall neatly into the furrows.

Sunday after Sunday the Sower's seed is scattered in our hearts as we listen to the Word of God as it is preached from the pulpit. We get dozens of daily passages and messages on Email and Whatsapp every day. Some of them speak very loudly to us! It's still from that same seed. When I keep quiet time, the seed is sown again. When a huge congress is held for men, the seed is sown generously again. The question is: does that seed ever grow?

No, this morning the question is not about what other people are doing with that seed. Let's make it a personal thing, and let's take a look at what I did with it myself!

Jesus tells of seeds that fell on the road and were summarily picked up by birds and did not even get a chance to germinate. None of us today can say that we have not heard the Word. Indeed, I have also heard the Word for many years! From my own life I can testify that for 24 years I was like a rocky road

where the seeds were just picked up. Today I can only thank the Lord for opening my eyes at that time!

The second receiver that Jesus describes is like a stone bench where there is a thin layer of soil. The Word takes root and grows fast, but then suddenly all the ground is depleted because there is no depth. Is there depth in my own life? I have often heard people complain that they get nowhere in the faith. Many give up hope. It takes hard work, perseverance and discipline to truly gain depth in your faith.

The third recipient is the one where the weeds grow lushly and choke the seeds. There is nothing that can destroy your faith as quickly as worldly things. Wild parties, gambling houses, bad company - you simply cannot serve two lords! After an evening in the pub with the men where nasty jokes, too much alcohol and dirty or blasphemous language prevailed, you feel dirty and you definitely do not want to talk to the Lord! Are

there weeds in my life that are clouding my relationship with the Lord?

The fourth portion of seed fell on fertile ground. I believe that the vast majority of us this morning can testify that we are that fertile ground, and that our seedlings are growing lushly. If this is the case, then the harvest must show it! If I see myself as the fertile ground, then the result must show in the fruit I bear. When unbelievers look at my life, does it make them hungry to have that life too? Was I already the cause that someone came to faith? Does my life look like that of someone who truly loves Jesus? Is the fruit of love that Paul writes about in 1 Cor 13 part of my life? If these things are not present, then I must go and reflect deeply, for perhaps I am not the fertile ground I always thought I was

Prayer:

Lord, I'm guilty this morning, because the fruit I should bear, I do not bear. I want to be fertile ground for You!

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The oil lamp

Luke 8: 16-18

Someone recently described how huge the creation is and how terribly insignificant and small I really am in this vast universe. He imagines the sun being the size of a table tennis ball. Then the earth will be barely a third of a millimeter in size and 3.7 meters away from the sun. If we were to place this table tennis ball sun on Loftus on Saturday among the lower crowd of spectators, 20m beyond the northern goal posts, the farthest planet in our solar system, Pluto, would be 4m beyond the southern dead line, right at the lower seats. And these are just our own “little” star, the sun and it’s satellites! According to this scale model, the closest star to us, Alfa Centauri, will be on the beach in Jeffreys Bay, 1000km further. Then we have barely started, because we only reached the outer edge of the Milky Way, the galaxy of which we are a part and which

consists of millions of stars. What's more: the galaxy is just one of millions of such galaxies, some of them much, much larger than the Milky Way!

How small is my little lamp compared to the overwhelming glow of billions upon billions of suns hanging in the universe, yet my light is important and the Lord wants me to shine for Him!

Jesus tells another parable, one of a lamp. The lamp He was referring to was a small round clay bowl full of oil, with a spout in which the whick lay burning, very primitive but still practical. Every household had some of these lamps, and everyone knew exactly what to do with them. That is why Jesus used everyday familiar things to bring a great truth home to the listeners.

In short, it means that the Word of God must be like a light that overcomes darkness. By setting the lamp of the Word high, the light is spread to every nook and cranny. In practice, this means that those who understand what

the Kingdom means should make it known to those who do not. There is absolutely nothing mysterious about that Word, and everyone should know about it.

Getting back to the stars: our nearest star, Alfa Centauri, is a full 40 million million kilometers away from us, but it's light shines so brightly that we cannot overlook it. It is the brightest of the two indicator stars along the Southern Cross. This is not the brightest star in the sky. There are many others that are even brighter and much, much further away.

The sad thing is that most believers put their old lamps under a bucket to suffocate so that no one can see that they are Christian believers. Their lives show nothing of the love of Jesus, and they will not speak a proverb that will ever reveal their secret that they are believers. Look, you do not have to walk around all day and blurt out that you are one of the "exclusive" children of the Lord, but by your example you must be an oil lamp for Him.

How do you radiate the light of Jesus? There are many ways, and each of us has acquired other talents through which we can let this light shine. Some lamps are a million candle spotlights while others are fine fairy candles. But it does not matter! The important thing is that both drive away the dark! Some may light their lamps by standing on a pulpit and confidently proclaiming the Word. Others feel comfortable talking to someone about the Gospel one-on-one. Personally, I live my testimony most comfortably when I can sit and write, whether for a large group of people or a single person. For some believers it means to let their lamp shine, to simply radiate the love of Jesus in their general actions through kindness or a smile. A cheerful face is very contagious, and it can quickly invigorate a morbid company. The important thing, however, is to give Jesus the credit for your cheerful face.

Deeds preach much louder than words. The pastor preaches in the church for believers. He gives them training to face the world. He

fills their lamps with oil so that they can shine brightly outside during the week. Your task throughout the week is then not necessarily to repeat the sermon to everyone you meet, but to live out practically what you experienced in the worship service. By the way, if you keep filling an oil lamp without it burning properly, the oil will eventually smother the wick, and then the lamp is completely useless. So, if you do not use your lamp, it's flame will die. On the other hand, a lamp cannot burn without oil either! It is therefore absolutely essential that you are refilled regularly. Do not neglect church meetings - it is essential for your spiritual survival and fulfillment.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can also be a lamp to you. Please help me to shine brightly for You!

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Storm at Sea

Luke 8: 19-25

How great is the omnipotence of God? To get just such a small glimpse of creation mystery and greatness of God, we can once again raise our eyes to the stars. In the well known Orion constellation there are some stars that stand out very brightly. The one that makes up the giant's right shoulder immediately catches your attention. His name is Betelgeuse. This is a very special star, one of the so-called "Super Giants". It is 60,000 times as bright as the sun, and has a diameter of 5.6 AU. An AU (astronomical unit) is the distance from the sun to the earth. So, if this star were in the place of the sun, then it's outer edge would have stretched almost 3 times as far as the earth from the sun. Betelgeuse is thus so big that this single star could swallow half of our entire solar system with all it's planets! And yet it is only one of many billions of other big stars, and only a

speck in the universe - God's creation! Let us now ask again: how great is the omnipotence of God?

If we keep this image in the back of our minds, and you read the story that Luke writes about the events in the boat, then everything makes sense, and you start to see something of Jesus' power. The problem, however, is that our own problems often seem so great to us, that we cannot see the Lord's omnipotence at all!

Around the Sea of Galilee there are several mountains and gorges. Often strong winds form in these gorges, almost like through a funnel, and then cause very sudden and severe storms on the lake. Jesus and the twelve were in a fishing boat on their way to the other side of the lake, when one of these unpredictable storms hit them. Jesus lay asleep. No wonder, for surely He must have been exhausted after just another marathon day of preaching, healing the sick, casting out demons, and being trampled upon by

thousands of people who all wanted His personal attention.

The men were terrified because their little boat felt like a buoy in the great ocean, and they had already seen them sink into the depths. They shake Jesus awake. He had lain still and slept peacefully through all the excitement. "We are sinking! We are perishing! " they shout anxiously. A single word from Him calms the fierce winds and waves so that suddenly there is a deadly silence and calm.

Jesus rebuked the men for their unbelief. Lately they have seen every day the miracles He does. They see the most breathtaking things happening. However, when it begins to affect their own hides, they begin to doubt exactly as to what Jesus is capable of. They clearly still had a very long way to go before they were ready to take over the leadership of the church.

"Who is He?" they ask in disbelief. They have not even begun to comprehend who this

Jesus is who makes all the miracles happen.

The question is, do you and I fully understand exactly who Jesus really is? I think that, like the twelve men of that time, that we do not really realize every day who we are dealing with. In the first place, I think that our little minds are simply too small to understand Him, because His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are far greater than we can process. A man once told me that he could not believe in God, because how is it ever possible for someone to be in many different places at the same time? Yes, he's right! Our mind cannot comprehend such things because it does not fit into our frame of reference.

Yet the evidence is overwhelming. Think of the star we're talking about above, Betelgeuse. We cannot understand how terribly big that star really is. Yet it is a reality, proven by astronomers. It seems absolutely impossible for someone who is terminally ill to suddenly be perfectly healthy. Medically

this is not possible! Yet it happens, and then the doctors often just have to shake their heads in disbelief!

All these things just need to bring us once again to the realization of the absolute greatness and omnipotence of the Lord. It is not necessary that we experience and see the miracles - all the evidence is already there. But these things must encourage us to worship Him who rules over all and for Whom nothing is impossible. Do we ever realize who God really is? We do not even bring nearly enough praise to Him, and we speak of Him as if He were just another part of our faith. Let us today be deeply moved by the realization of Whom we worship, and give Him the praise and honour that He deserves.

Prayer:

Lord, this morning I fall down before You in worship, for I am but a speck of dust before Your great omnipotence.

The Obsessed

Luke 8: 26-39

Jesus and the twelve got into the fishing boat in Capernaum, on the north bank of the Sea of Galilee. They sail right south, past Tiberias and Hippus where the terrible storm hit them. At the southern tip of the lake lies their destination, the region of Gadara. They barely set foot on shore, or the next big "storm" hits them - this time in the form of an obsessed man who rushes at them, naked.

Jesus and his disciples find themselves here "abroad," in the land of the Gerasenes. The area is part of the so-called Decapolis, or "Ten Cities," a non-Jewish area. So the Jewish laws did not apply at all here, and the people even farmed with pigs, something that would fill every good Jew with disgust!

The man who rushes at them has long since ceased to live in a house because society

has completely rejected him. Between the graves he found his lair. His uncontrolled actions have already caused the locals to try to catch him and handcuff him with chains to keep him in check, but he simply broke the chains!

In stark contrast to this wild maniac, we see Jesus acting calmly towards him and simply asking him his name. For the disciples, it is a traumatic experience. In addition, they must hear that the man addresses Jesus as "Son of God, Most High". They themselves still swallow hard at this thought, and now a possessed heathen comes and blurts it out! What they do not realize however, is that it was the demonic demons in the man who spoke to Jesus using the man's body. Of course, the devil and all his demonic followers know Jesus very well. They know exactly who He is! However, they will never serve Him, because the devil wants to sit on the throne himself!

By the way, can we also ask the question,

whether it would be possible for someone to know Jesus, but that he would not necessarily be saved? Indeed yes! Before you entrust your life to Jesus and believe in Him as your personal Saviour, you do not have salvation! Even if you know everything about Him!

The man, or the demon who took possession of him, replies that his name is "Legio", which means "Many". The Latin word "legion" refers to a division or legion of between 3,000 and 6,000 soldiers in the Roman army. The man's life is thus dominated by a large number of demons.

The demons want nothing to do with Jesus. They just want to be left alone and Jesus' presence is a big threat to them. However, when they are driven into a corner, they beg to be banished to the pigs instead. The herd of pigs suddenly starts running when the demons invade them and the people of the area have to watch in horror as their entire herd plunges over an abyss and drowns in

the sea.

And the possessed? He was immediately healed, freed from the bonds of Satan! He asks Jesus if he can join their group and follow Him, but Jesus refuses. He must return to his own people!

It is ironic that the people are begging Jesus to leave their country! They are more worried about their financial loss than about the possessed who are healed before their eyes and get a brand new life!

The question is, why did Jesus obey the request of the demons, but if the healed man begs to go with Him, does Jesus refuse his request? There are many issues in the Bible that we can only guess about because we do not know God's full counsel plan. Why He did not send the demons directly into damnation is another mystery. What we can say is that it was a partial victory over the devil, but that the final battle will still be delivered, and then it will be a very great slaughter for the devil and his demons.

As for the man - he had a very big task ahead of him. He had to go and tell the people from his neighborhood about Jesus. And what a task it was! He had to convince the people who had previously fled from him in fear, now that Jesus was the Saviour. A few years later, when the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem was at its worst, the believers fled. Many of them found refuge in this very region and they were received there with open arms. Why? I believe that the crazy man who once lived naked in the cemetery did such good missionary work that everyone there was ripe for the Gospel when the great stream of Christians arrived there.

God's counsel plan is infinitely greater than our minds!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that we were able to behold Your omnipotence again this morning!

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Two Dramas

Luke 8: 40-56

On their return from Gadara, Jesus and the men are already greeted by a large crowd. Then two intertwined dramas play out, creating an exciting scene for the readers of this book.

It all starts when Jairus comes running and falls at Jesus' feet. Jairus was a respected church leader and councilor of the synagogue. He was also one of only a few spiritual leaders who were kind to Jesus. The man was highly distressed because his daughter was dying. With a trembling voice he begs Jesus to come with him.

Excited, the crowd made room for Jesus to follow Jairus, when the story was suddenly interrupted. Jesus stopped and turned around. "Who touched me?" He wanted to know.

We almost want to say to Jesus: "Lord, there is no time now to want to know who touched You, the girl is dying!"

Peter himself became impatient with Jesus who could not get going. After all, there was a huge crowd of people who oppressed them all the time. Everyone bumped and pushed! What would be wrong with his Master?

Behind Jesus was a woman in great distress. She suffered from a persistent menstrual flow, something that is already a very uncomfortable situation in today's terms. What made it worse for her, however, was the fact that she was permanently unclean according to Jewish customs. She could therefore not come into direct contact with anyone. For twelve years she lived in this unbearable situation and she just could not take it anymore! Jesus was her last and only hope!

According to Jewish laws of Lev 15: 19-30, she did not dare touch Jesus because it would have made him unclean for seven

days. So she only touches the farthest point of the hem of His clothes.

Peter urged Jesus to continue on to Jairus' house, but Jesus stood firm! He first wanted to know who it was that touched His clothes.

The tension builds up as time was running out for the dying little girl. But for Jesus, the drama that unfolded here was more important. When the woman realized that Jesus knew it was her, she came before Him trembling with fear and acknowledged her deed. She tells of her terrible dilemma, but the most wonderful was that she felt how her body was healed the moment she touched Jesus!

Jesus lovingly addressed her as "daughter." Suddenly, the twelve years in which she was rejected and cast out by the whole of society were over. She realized that for the first time in years, she was part of society again and even her own family.

Jesus refuses to let His redemptive work be

limited by any social or political boundaries!

But then the story returns to Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter. From home came the news that it was too late - she had already died!

We want to ask Jesus: "Lord, how can you? The woman could have just waited a bit?" Humanly speaking, any further action of Jesus was meaningless. But Jesus comforted Jairus: "Do not be upset. Just believe, and she will be saved." Shocking words!

"But she is dead, Lord!" we want to say to Jesus, "Do not make the man's suffering worse!"

However, for those who have just seen how the woman's terrible disease was healed, Jesus' words give new hope! Her faith was miraculously rewarded! Could Jairus' faith be rewarded in this way?

At Jairus' house, Jesus encountered a scene

of people weeping and mourning over a child who has died. They did not expect anything further from Jesus because all hope was gone. It is understandable that they reacted in this way. But when Jesus told them that the child was just sleeping, they laughed at Him! After all, they saw for themselves that she was dead, and that was final! Jesus' simple response was to simply take the girl's hand and command her to get up. Her parents could not believe their eyes when she responded immediately. It just emphasizes once again the fact that Jesus has all power, even over death!

Indeed, we know today that death for a believer is no longer final. Not only did Jesus show that He is ruler over death with this child's healing, but a few years later He finally overcame death, when He, after paying the full price of salvation on the cross, on that Sunday morning rose up out of the grave. You and I also share in this if we only believe in Him. Jesus' words to Jairus: "Just believe and she will be saved." later

becomes so much more significant when Paul says in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Or when Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3:16: "Everyone who believes in Him ... will have eternal life".

The question is: do you believe?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that you also saved me, and that death no longer has a hold on me!

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Sent into the World

Luke 9: 1-6

We meet in a basement room in a building on the edge of Welkom's large circle. I'm excited but at the same time very nervous. All who sit in the circle are believers who take their faith seriously. We have received intensive training over the past few weeks, and now the day has come to put into practice what we have learned. It was in the eighties, and Welkom was just a pretty wild mining town with notorious miners from all over the world coming to seek their fortune there. It was especially this great circle that attracted the men. And now our task is to carry the Gospel to this rough crowd.

Then the moment of truth dawns, and in groups of three we take to the streets. As I walk up the stairs from the basement, the vulgar laughter of a few drunken men rises from the street. I want to turn around, but

then comes the wonderful knowledge that the Holy Spirit is in me and will give me the necessary strength for this task that seems to want to engulf you. Behind me I hear the prayers of the few left behind - prayers that have to carry us through the uncertain night. When we first confront people with the Gospel, my fear is suddenly gone, and I can speak boldly about Jesus, my Saviour.

Twenty years later, I was once again in a state of fear and trembling when I had to write my first devotional and send it into the world. And once again I had to realize very quickly that the Lord provides wonderfully and gives me the necessary strength and wisdom, if only I am willing to put myself at His service. I never looked back.

The twelve apostles at that time were only followers at Jesus' feet, engaged in intensive training. Every day they watched in amazement as Jesus performed the most breathtaking miracles before their astonished eyes. A single word or touch was often

enough to instantly cure someone of an ailment. Even the blind could see again and the paralyzed could walk.

Then came the day when they had to get a first taste of what it really means to be an apostle, a sent one. Jesus explained to them that during this “exercise run” they themselves would have the opportunity to heal the sick and cast out demons. I can imagine how the men there trembled with anxiety! "How are we ever going to get it right?" The worst was that the Master would not even be around to go help if they got stuck! They would be sent into the wide world, far from Jesus. And there they had to get by on their own!

Jesus gave the twelve anxious men complete instructions. They were not allowed to take anything with them, not even extra clothes, travel bags or even food for the road. They had to be totally dependent on the people's hospitality. In this way, the men had to learn the hard way what it would really mean to be

totally dependent on God for everything in life.

Years later, the men would only really realize why Jesus made them suffer such hardships, because this preparation prepared them for a life that would be anything but moonshine and roses! Jesus also warned them that they would not be welcome everywhere. Not everyone stood with open arms waiting for the Gospel and there would certainly be people who would be hostile to them in spite of all their good intentions. When that happened, they literally had to shake the dust off their feet as an accusation against those people, that they had heard the Gospel but rejected the good news.

In today's terms we can say that you should not sit and ponder if your message of hope to someone is greeted with a scolding. It has happened to me many times that when I send someone a devotional for the first time, that the person rebukes me because I have the audacity to try to make a Christian of him.

Our natural response is to feel bad and rejected about such statements. Just remember that it really has nothing to do with you, because you are only the Lord's messenger, and it is not you as a person that he rebukes, but actually he is going against God. In other words, it is out and out a matter between him and the Lord and you are only the mediator. It's the same as swearing at a secretary when you're mad at her boss, something that happens quite often!

Luke tells us that the twelve men entered the wide world and that they not only preached the Gospel but also healed the sick themselves. I think no one was more surprised by their new abilities than themselves. All the Lord asks of you and me is our willingness to be in His service, He will provide all the necessary equipment for the task. I can testify to this from my own life, because He provides wonderfully every day in the task I perform for Him.

Prayer:

Lord, I can never thank You enough for everything You provide for. Thank you for being so faithful.

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Who is This Jesus?

Luke 9: 7-17

Herod Antipas, one of the four sons of Herod the Great, was a man whom all feared. Jewish prophets cringed at the mere hearing of his name, for to them he was a terror. John the Baptist was one of the victims of this cruel man. His bloodied head was shown to the guests in a dish at one of Herod's wild parties, after Herod had him beheaded to satisfy his wife, Herodias' whims.

But Herod also had another side that he did not want to show to the world because a very insecure man hid behind this cruel mask. When he heard of the miracles Jesus performed, he was startled. "Did John rise from the dead?" He was firmly convinced that Jesus was John's ghost! Herod tried his best to see Jesus, but he was not rewarded. Eventually he did see Jesus, but it was in tragic circumstances, just before Jesus was

to be executed. There Herod had the ideal opportunity to talk to Jesus. He even got the chance to determine Jesus' fate, and give Him a fair chance. But he let everything slip through his fingers!

"So, who is this Man?" Herod wanted to know.

Luke masterfully answers this very question in the next four episodes with four descriptive titles for Jesus. In Luke 9: 10-17 he describes Jesus as the Provider. In verses 18-22 He is the Anointed of God. In verses 23-27 He is the Suffering Son of man and in verses 28-36 the Son of God.

Jesus ended His ministry in Galilee and we meet Him on the way to the town of Bethsaida, on the north-eastern shore of Lake Galilee. This was the domain of Herod Antipas' brother Philip. The twelve were certainly dead tired but very excited after their first experience as evangelists and they barely gave each other a chance to tell their Master everything about their experiences.

Jesus longed for a little rest and silence alone with the men, and they walked to a remote place, away from all the people. However, they were not destined to have peace and quiet, because when the people realized where they were, there was again within a short time a huge crowd that gathered around them. Instead of Jesus saying to them, "Go home, and leave us in peace and quiet!" He rather welcomes them and talks to them about the Kingdom of God.

However, the twelve men later started to worry because time was running out and the sun was already setting and this crowd needed to be taken care of! The nearest town was miles away and here sat a crowd that would fully fill up Loftus' pavilions. Where would this bunch suddenly get food and sleeping space at short notice? They started doing sums and came to the conclusion that there were easily 5,000 men seated. It hasn't even included the crowd of women and kids yet!

However, Jesus was very calm about the situation: "Give them something to eat."

It was a totally impossible task for the twelve! They looked at each other in disbelief. There was no way they could get food for this crowd. They held stocktaking, and only five loaves and two miserable fish were all it produced!

How terribly limited are our human thoughts and abilities! Jesus asks some of the twelve men to do the absolute impossible, and desperately they try to put something together while realizing all too well that it was purely in vain. In stark contrast, Jesus was the One who calmly and sedately took the sandwiches and asked for the blessing, as if it were just another ordinary meal. The miracle happens when the men hand out the bread and fish to the people, and it simply did not run out. So abundantly did Jesus provide for the needs of the people that there were finally twelve baskets full of bread left over after the huge crowd had eaten their fill!

To Herod's question about who this Jesus really is, Jesus is presented here as the Provider. Although Jesus was the One who performed the miracle, it was the disciples who were given the task of preparing and distributing the food. In this way Jesus shows them in what way He would provide abundantly for them when they later had to stand in the great mission field themselves. However, Jesus' provision did not stop at twelve either. Through the ages we have seen how many times in miraculous ways there was provided for those who were in the service of the Master. Today, the stories are still legion, and miracles happen daily. In my own life, I can only testify over and over again about God's wonderful provision at times when everything seemed totally impossible to me.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that we can look up to You every day as the One who also provides for us.

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Peter's Confession

Luke 9: 18-22

Who is Jesus? Luke lets this question echo through the mountains and hills and valleys of the desert. At first it was John the Baptist who, hesitantly, asked the question before being beheaded by Herod. Then Herod himself came up with this tantalizing question. Now Jesus throws the question before His disciples' feet: "Who am I?"

As we have seen on a few occasions, Jesus was sitting to one side praying alone - something that once again emphasizes the great importance of prayer to us. If Jesus found it necessary to be in prayer, how much more important is it not for you and me to pray? This is our spiritual breathing. Without breath we cannot live, and without prayer we die spiritually.

When Jesus' disciples gather around Him,

He catches them completely off guard with His question. But He puts it in a very clever way, to get them thinking hard. He first asks with a detour, what do people think about Him - what do other people say about Jesus? The answer Jesus gets is exactly the same answer that Herod got, that He is some prophet or even the reincarnation of someone like Elijah. But then it becomes uncomfortable when He turns the question around and asks them directly what they themselves are saying. There must have been an awkward silence before Peter dared to say, "The Anointed One of God."

But could this intimate group of followers then not clearly see that Jesus was the Messiah? After all they had seen Jesus do every day - all His miracles and the things He said must surely have opened their eyes to the true Jesus! How is it ever possible that they could not notice it? Was Peter then the only one who had this insight?

I think even Peter made this confession only

in a moment of clarity, because later we see how he repeatedly falls into doubt again and again.

But before you make a judgment too soon, get into those men's sandals first. If you were to live in that time and suddenly this wonderful Prophet start performing and doing the most breathtaking miracles - does that automatically make Him the Messiah that everyone expects? The problem is that He did not look Divine at all - He was a very ordinary person! He also became hungry, hurt, tired and needed to pray. And then he did things that raised eyebrows, things that condemned the church leaders! Surely he could not be the One? Moreover, what about the prophets' prophecies that the Messiah would save the people? Just look at how they were oppressed by the Romans and it certainly did not seem as if this Prophet had any intention of performing a redemptive act. He even wanted to tell them that they had to love these very Romans who caused them so much sin! No ways! Yes, He was a very

impressive Prophet, but the Messiah? Not quite!

Thank goodness! Today we know very differently! Today we can say with certainty that we know that Jesus is truly the Messiah, the Saviour, and that His redemptive work is something totally different from what the Jews expected. However, the question is: How do you and I experience Jesus? Yes, of course we all know and believe that He is the Saviour. Faith in Jesus, however, means something much more than that! It means having a living relationship with Him. Are you in a living relationship with Jesus?

After Peter's confession, Jesus explicitly forbade His disciples to tell the people that He was actually the Anointed of God or the Messiah. He explains that it is first necessary for Him to endure suffering and eventually be killed! Only then can it be trumpeted to the whole world. It does not quite make sense to us! Wouldn't it be nice if there were already a huge crowd of people who accepted Him as

the Messiah? Just think how much it could mean for the spreading of the Gospel!

The answer is a resounding "No!" God's plan with Jesus was not to gather a lot of believers. His plan was to offer the whole world the chance of salvation. This could only happen if Someone took the debt of sin of the world upon Himself so that all the debt would be paid. This would mean that people could then go to God with confidence knowing that their sins were forgiven. Jesus was the only One who could perform such a task, because He was the only Man ever who was truly without any sin, so that it could not be said that He was only being punished for His own sin. No, He would bear the punishment of other people alone. The mere fact that so many people saw the things He did, and yet rejected Him in the end, only made His suffering so much worse.

Thank goodness! There was another side to the matter - that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and reigns today as King. Let us

honour and worship Him for it.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we bring to You all the glory and thanks for Your redemption work!

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To Follow Jesus

Luke 9: 23-27

23 And he said unto them all, "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Someone once said that being a Christian is definitely not for sissies!

This is definitely a fact - it's what I found out a few years ago! Our congregation teamed up with a small, poor Indian congregation in Shakas Kraal to go on a mission outreach in Mozambique. And just there and then I decided to go along.

What at first seemed to me like a big "adventure", I had to find out very quickly that it was not moonshine and roses at all. Many hours of driving on roads that were almost impassable were just the beginning. The circumstances were extremely primitive. We

had to sleep on the ground and the mosquitoes and flies carried us away! Scorching heat, sand in everything, dust and long hours of hard work.

This was just a foretaste of what missionaries often go through to spread the gospel. One such missionary told me about their work in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, where they had to work in appalling conditions for several years before the first convert was there. They were totally cut off from the outside world and they had to master an unknown language to be able to communicate with what you can only describe as a barbaric people.

My wife's cousin is a missionary in the farthest corners of Zambia, and he has contracted malaria several times. Dangerous work!

Jesus told His followers that if they truly wanted to follow Him, it would require some very difficult conditions from them: Self-denial, Cross-bearing, and Following. But

what does this mean in practice?

Self-denial means that you have to give up the things that normally give you a feeling of self-worth. The most important person in any person's life is yourself. You have an innate urge for survival, which means that you will defend yourself to the bitter end and fight for survival. This urge is usually taken much further than just survival. You become self-centered, and the whole world later starts to revolve around you only. This whole thought reaches a climax when you no longer care who gets in the way, as long as you can only achieve your own goals and elevate yourself above every other mortal. And it's not just the "big" names of Hitler and Nero that we mention here. In everyday life there are many such people that we come in contact with every day.

Actually all people strive to a greater or lesser degree to this height where you are elevated as a person. On the opposite scale, there is the incredible example of a certain

kind of spider, where the female gives up her own body to be eaten alive by her young so that they can have life and strength to face the world. That sounds awful! But that is exactly what self-denial means. In the Angolan bush war, there was the story of a young man who fell on a hand grenade and in the process blew himself to shreds to prevent his accomplices from dying in the explosion. This is true self-denial.

Self-denial means that you begin to stop thinking of yourself alone, and that other people's needs are at the top of your agenda. This means that you will have to make certain sacrifices in life, because your own comfort and worldly pleasures often have to be given up for the sake of other people's needs. Cross-bearing and following are both natural outgrowths of self-denial.

Does this mean that if you really want to live out your Christianity, that you will inevitably put on a long face and show the world how you are struggling? No, definitely not!

Something that particularly struck me about the group of people who were with me on the mission outreach was the humour and joy and cheerfulness that radiated from each of the people, even in the midst of great hardship! Missionaries who have passed through deep waters are radiant with joy and love.

Jesus concludes by reassuring the listeners with the promise that those who are willing to follow Him in this way will certainly not taste death until they have truly seen the Kingdom of God. Is that perhaps why these people are so flourishing? Definitely! There on the mission field in Mozambique I saw the Kingdom coming among the poorest of the poor who walked miles to hear the message of Jesus!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the many people who are willing to sacrifice everything for Your Kingdom.

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Glorified on the Mountain

Luke 9: 28-36

Once again we find Jesus where He is praying - it happens every time something big is going to happen or when Jesus has to make big decisions.

The scene takes place a week after Jesus made the announcement that He would be persecuted and die. He takes the inner circle of His disciples, Peter, John and James, up the mountain with Him where He wanted to go and pray. The three men must have been exhausted because they had barely sat down waiting for Jesus to finish praying, when they fell fast asleep! A while later they wake up. The men look at each other questioningly - they hear voices speaking. They do not understand it because they were alone here on the mountain with Jesus! Then they see something that catches them totally off guard. Jesus' whole appearance changed

completely and his clothes were brilliantly shiny. And with Him were two very strange men who could only be described as heavenly beings. Their appearance also shone.

Gradually, Peter and his friends realized that the two heavenly men were none other than Moses and Elijah. The three stand and listen to the conversation between Jesus and the two prophets that was about Jesus' "exodus, which he would bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem" (v. 31). What exactly that meant, they still did not understand at all. In fact, the three disciples did not even have the faintest idea what this whole scene was about that unfolded before them. Overwhelmed, they all stood there and gaped.

As usual, it was Peter again who spoke before he thought. He wanted to suggest that three huts should be built for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He just wanted to keep them there forever! It was heaven on earth!

The next moment a cloud covered them from

nowhere and the voice of God resounded from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to Him!" The next moment Elijah and Moses were gone, like mist before the sun and everything was normal again.

The three are instructed not to say a word about what they experienced. Who would they ever believe anyway? Only much later did the three have the courage to talk about that day on the mountain.

How should we understand this event?

Moses and Elijah actually represented the law and the prophets. Here they fulfill the role of Old Testament witnesses of who Jesus really is. The fact that they appeared in such a heavenly splendour puts the stamp on their heavenly status, and makes the three understand that they experienced a supernatural and very important moment. The holiness of the moment radiated around them. The fact that Jesus' appearance and clothes shone confirms His Divinity. They had to realize that He was certainly not only an

ordinary person, but at the same time God.

Jesus' conversation with the two elders of the day was about a very important and weighty matter: His "exodus from Jerusalem", a great task that lay ahead for Jesus. We must see the word "exodus" here within the framework of Divine victory. It therefore refers not only to Jesus' suffering and death, but also to His resurrection, ascension and elevation to the highest Authority.

The story reaches a climax where God speaks from the cloud and just as at Jesus' baptism reaffirms that Jesus is in fact the Son of God. Jesus' Sonhood is repeatedly made known to people in a supernatural way. They need to take proper note of this. Even more: they had to listen to Him, obey Him, do what He tells them, carry out His commands!

After the gleaming appearance, Jesus was suddenly alone with the three disciples again. Moses and Elijah's quick visit was over and they returned to their heavenly home. Jesus further had to carry out His task alone. How

awfully lonely it would not be later, when even the three inner circle men would finally leave Him!

Where does this story leave us today? Like the three disciples we also sometimes want to "build huts" and place Jesus on a mountain so that we can worship Him from a distance. As long as He looks down on us in glory from up there, and we can know that He is always there, we are happy. However, like Peter and his friends, we need to be drawn back to reality and realize that Jesus is part of our daily lives. Not only is He God up there, but He is also God here with us. A personal relationship with Him means that we do not worship Him from a distance, but that we make Him part of everything we do. We must acknowledge Him in absolutely everything in life. Of course we must stand in awe as we behold His glory. For sure we must realize every moment of the day that we are dealing here with Almighty God and not just a "Friend". At the same time, however, I must realize thoroughly that He is

here with me every moment of the day and that I can go to Him with all my worries, sorrows, joys and gladness.

Prayer:

Lord, keep me under the realization of Your great glory, but thank You that You are always there for me.

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Inability

Luke 9: 37-43

In the seventies, Prof Malan-Nel launched the Youth-to-Youth action. Do you still remember it? It was in the fall of 1974 when I attended an intensive evangelism course with a group of young people on a farm near Greytown. The task of the presenters was to train the young people to spread the gospel to fellow youths. Of course, I was one of the ringleaders as always, and the course went smoothly. Despite the hard work, it was lots of fun!

As the course progressed, I began to realize that I was far from ready to share the gospel with anyone else. Oh, I was very good at playing the role of the “difficult unbeliever” in role-playing. However, I was terribly afraid to talk to anyone in practice in a real situation. What if he asks me a trick question? What if The reason for my uncertainty and fear

was that I still did not understand the Gospel myself, and had never been in a true relationship with Jesus. For me personally, the course ended in a wash-out.

However, not everything was in vain. The direct result of the course was that after one of the sessions I suddenly realized what was wrong in my life. There I gave my heart to the Lord!

The twelve men whom Jesus had chosen to receive this intensive training had been with Him for some time now, and they had even been sent out into the field for practice runs. Together they had by that time already had all the most breathtaking experiences, and experienced miracles and also did miracles themselves. There was the day when they experienced the terrible storm, and Jesus calmed it down with a single word. Just the next day, there was the experience with the crazy guy in Gadara's cemetery. How miraculously that man did not suddenly recover! And the time when they saw before

their eyes how the food became more and more, when they had to distribute bread and fish to thousands of people!

Despite all this, they just could not find direction! It was still so very difficult to see everything in perspective. Peter proclaimed on their behalf that he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, after which the questions of doubt struck them again. A desperate man's son was demon-possessed and he was constantly having convulsions. He brought the boy to them. The disciples tried so hard and sincerely to pray for the child to be healthy, but in spite of that, the man had to turn away in despair. His son's condition had not changed!

Time was running out for the disciples! Would they ever be ready to stand on their own two feet? There was a huge task ahead of them, but it looked like they would definitely not manage!

Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem was at hand, that journey to the cross and still the apostles

did not understand what it was all about. The man with the sick son brought his child to Jesus because the work of the twelve was fruitless. Jesus was discouraged about His disciples' absolute inability, and especially their unbelief. "Unbelievers and degenerate generation!" Hard words of Jesus to the twelve. "How long must I still be with you, and bear with you?" I think the poor men should have wished the earth would swallow them. They grieved the Master deeply. And that only after they had come down from the mountain where they saw Jesus in His full heavenly glory!

Jesus healed the child and once again the twelve had to behold His Divine power, embarrassed by their own inability. All bystanders were amazed at the greatness of God. But the question is: how much more evidence did they need before they would finally believe? The same people who were so amazed at Him would soon cry out in rage: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! "

We are very quick to condemn the men today for their inability, but we must remember that at that time they were not yet equipped with the Holy Spirit. Today we have the wonderful privilege of having the full power of the Holy Spirit at our disposal. He gives us all the necessary equipment to carry the Word. If we are still too scared to do so, then we are in fact offending God, and we want to imply that His power is not enough for us. Or perhaps worse, that He will refuse to assist us when we preach His Word. With that we want to dismiss His promises as worthless!

Let us take Jesus today on His promises in the Word, and with the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit we declare to the world that Jesus is the only Saviour and Way to salvation, with the absolute knowledge that He, Jesus, is by our side to carry us through it.

Prayer:

Lord, strengthen our weak knees and help us to stand up for Jesus.

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Respect

Luke 9: 44-50

Reverend enters the pulpit on Sunday morning. Out of the blue, he announces: "Dear brothers and sisters, soon I will not be with you any more". There was a loud buzz and murmur in the congregation. Now everyone is wondering what this pastor actually meant? Is he then terminally ill? Maybe a deadly cancer? Or is he just leaving? Everyone is too scared to ask him about it, and he himself does not elaborate further on the subject.

I think Jesus' disciples may have just felt that too! Jesus did not spell out for them exactly what would happen, but with this announcement that He would be delivered, the men were quite upset! However, they were too scared to ask Him about it. There were so many contradictions! Now just look at how popular their Master was amongst the

people! Everyone gathered around Him and no one could get enough of His preaching. Why then would He be rejected now? Why would the same people who glorified Him so want to condemn Him? Just look at how many miracles He has done for the people! It was now the umpteenth time that Jesus made such remarks! They did not understand it! One thing, however, was slowly penetrating through to them, and that is that their Master would die, but it was too awful to think about it, so they preferred not to even talk about it!

In spite of these gloomy thoughts that so haunted them so, and in spite of the weightiness of the moment, the men began to quarrel amongst themselves as to which one of them was actually the most important. Judas carried the purse, he was the Minister of Finance, and perhaps that is why he was one step higher than the rest. However, John reckoned that he might be a level higher, because he and Jesus had a very special relationship. Peter's leadership qualities

made everyone else jealous, but then he often messed up so much that everyone was angry with him. And then there was the incident when James and John's mother came to ask Jesus that her two sons should receive honorary positions in the Kingdom. Imagine that! There was not much arguing out loud, but the men mumbled amongst themselves and walked around with dark thoughts!

Very clearly the men did not have the faintest idea what it was all about. Did they then not get the message? Did they then not see at all what their Master had done? Could they simply not realize that it was not about status but that everything revolved around service? Their Master had just told them that He would be persecuted, and all they could think of was their own prestige!

Then Jesus bent down and pulled a child closer to bring home a very important lesson in life. We must remember that children at that time did not have the privileges they

have today. A child was just a piece of property with which the parents could basically do what they wanted. He could in no way compete with adults. He had absolutely no status in life. Unlike today, children at that time knew their place in society, and humility was one of the outstanding qualities of any child. In a subtle and loving way, Jesus explains to His disciples how their actions toward one another should be. The child is a symbol of someone who is the least, and shows it with his whole life. Humility was what He wanted the disciples to live out!

Humility is a very rare trait today. Even among believers, there is a hierarchy that must be maintained, and everyone fights to be as high as possible on this pyramid. It's often ridiculous how the big wigs often go crazy to get all the attention! Even in the very highest circles of politics, everyone raves for attention. There is no question of humility! But in our own lives it often goes that way too! Even in the church there is a daily

dispute about who is actually sitting in the highest chair.

Through these children Jesus also explains to the disciples what His own relationship with the Father is, and that by honouring Jesus, honour is shown to the Father at the same time. How should we honour Jesus? Honest and sincere, like the child of old, and with all the humility and respect that child had for his superior. Believers are so often totally disrespectful to Jesus, pretending that He is their "Play Mate". We must remember what our status is in the Kingdom. He is so much, very far above us and we must give Him that necessary respect and honour. For example, a child would never have dared to command his superior to do something. Thus we never dare to "command" God to do certain things, as we do so often, but go to Him in humble dependence.

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me where I am so often disrespectful to You and also to my fellow-

man.

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Following Jesus

Luke 9: 51-62

The time had come for Jesus' last journey, and He told His disciples to leave for Jerusalem, a journey that would surely take them a long time. At this point they were still busy in the vicinity of the lake of Galilee, and Jerusalem lay right south, about 150km walking distance. In today's terms, it's barely an hour or two's drive, but we must remember that they would embark on the journey on foot, and that it would only go very slowly, because everywhere along the way there were hordes of people who urgently needed Jesus' attention. In addition, there would be many confrontations on this stretch of road with church leaders who wanted to get rid of Jesus. But Jesus also used this opportunity to teach the twelve men for the last time. There was still so much they had to learn, and time was running out.

It is interesting that Luke says that the time has come for Jesus to be taken up into heaven. He does not refer at all to the crucifixion and suffering that was at hand. For Luke, the ascension was the great climax, but the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection are, of course, summed up in this remark.

Their first destination was a village in Samaria. Someone was sent ahead to arrange the accommodation for the traveling party, but then comes the first setback when the Samaritans refuse to receive Jesus in their town. The curtain is, as it were, opened for us slightly so that we can peek at what would follow. Actually, the people did not really have anything against Jesus personally, but the fact that they were on their way to Jerusalem made the Samaritans' blood boil. You see, they and the Jews were not exactly best friends. It started with an argument many years before, when the temple had to be rebuilt after the exile. The Samaritans wanted to come and help with the building work, but the Jews refused their

help because they were not Jews. This led to great bitterness, which hundreds of years later still boiled over every time a Samaritan and a Jew met.

The disciples were so angry at this insult that they simply wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy this lot. They were humiliated and they sought revenge! Very clearly all the things Jesus said about love very definitely did not sink in. Moreover, the disciples did not yet understand what Jesus' calling was. He had to be humbled and He had to suffer and be rejected! As disciples, they failed miserably because they still did not understand at all how the will of God was to be worked out in and through Jesus.

I think that the group felt very upset after this argument, and that Jesus had to reprimand them for it. One tried to break the tense atmosphere by telling Jesus that he would follow Him everywhere, no matter where Jesus went. However, Jesus' answer stopped him in his tracks, because Jesus explained to

him that it was a road full of potholes. Then began a whole conversation about what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. Some of the men had all sorts of excuses about things that had to be done first before they could finally become followers.

From the conversation it becomes very clear that a lot of sacrifices have to be made if you are serious about following Jesus. You also need to know exactly what lies ahead for you before making such a decision. Simply accepting Jesus' teachings with your mind is not enough. You must choose with your whole life that which Jesus stands for.

We can possibly compare it to a train on it's way to heaven. On the train there are a lot of passengers who are served from head to toe as they all ride on their way to heaven. But there are also the waiters, cooks, cleaning staff, driver, stoker and conductor who have to work hard to keep the passengers happy and get the train to it's destination. Of course, the staff is also on their way to heaven. The

fact is, however, that that train will never reach heaven if the staff is not there. Maybe I should ask myself if I'm one of those comfortable passengers, and if I'm one of those who makes a lot of sacrifices to keep the heavenly train running?

If you decide that you would give up your convenience to become one of the heavenly train staff as well, then there are also two ways to do it: you get the waiter who just works to get it done. And then you get the one who makes his job a joy for himself and the passengers. He is always friendly, tells jokes, and makes his work his life. I can also choose to live my Christianity in such a way that it is contagious, and that everyone can see that, despite the sacrifices, it is a feast to be a follower of Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord, please give me love and joy that radiates from me so that people will want to become Your followers.

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Despatched

Luke 10: 1-24

About two weeks ago we saw Jesus send out the twelve apostles to preach the Gospel on their own. I think it must have been exciting for these men on the one hand, because they are trusted to go and preach the good news! In today's pericope, however, we see a different picture. Jesus decides to send a large group of the people who come to listen to Him every day, in the same way to go and experience in the field what it means to carry out Jesus' commission. The mere fact that Luke writes quite a long piece about it, tells me that it was a very important event. We now come to the realization that it was not only the chosen twelve men who had the privilege of spreading the Word, but everyone who was willing, including the ordinary followers of Jesus.

None of us can say today that it is only the

reverent, pastor or missionary who is an evangelist. Every believer has this task and command of Jesus.

Someone once told me that as a young girl she had to take care of a lady who had a very large back operation. The woman was lying flat on her back, unable to even move her head. She literally had to be fed. When the girl first entered the room, the woman's very first words to her were: "Do you know Jesus? Are you saved?" It shook the girl to her foundations, radically changing her whole life. Today, years later, she herself is a zealous witness for Jesus. Even someone who is totally helpless can still carry the Gospel in a powerful way.

When Jesus sends out the group of 72, He emphasizes that it would certainly not be easy and that they would be sent in like lambs among the wolves. There would certainly also be people who would reject them. They had to get ready to be treated like Jesus. Jesus was certainly not always

treated so well!

Jesus also gave them a specific code of conduct that they had to follow during their mission. For example, they did not have to make small talk or tally along the road because the message was very urgent! And they had to carry and radiate the peace of God with them. They were not allowed to carry money or a bag of luggage with them so that they could realize that they were fully dependent on God during their mission. Furthermore, Jesus explained clearly to them what to do if they were received hospitably. However, he realized all too well that they would have a good chance of being chased away, so he also told them what to do in such a situation.

Every person who sticks out his neck to spread the Gospel can be assured of opposition. I know - I've experienced it myself a few times already. Then you feel hurt, rejected! However, you need to see it in perspective. It is not you who is rejected but

it is Jesus who is rejected and then the person takes it out on you! He cannot get to Jesus! When that happens, you literally have to shake off the dust from your feet and rejoice in the fact that you were considered worthy to suffer for Jesus! We can all learn one thing from Jehovah's Witnesses, that they are willing to endure many blows to carry forth their message! You can scarcely chase them away, but soon they'r back again with another booklet or pamphlet! It often asks of me and you to be tough-skinned regarding the Gospel! Let the insults roll off like water from a duck's back and do not take it personally.

After these emissaries came back, they were very excited because suddenly they realized it was working! Even demons obeyed them if they only mentioned Jesus' Name!

Jesus' comment was that He saw the devil fall like lightning from heaven! However, the fact of the devil's fall is less important. However, something that is very important is

that Jesus' followers have now gained access to heaven. He wanted to correct the perspective that it was the heavenly certainty that was the most important consequence of carrying out Jesus' commands and not the sensational earthly events.

Luke tells how Jesus rejoiced over the events that ordinary, simple people began to understand what it was all about. In the same way, Jesus and the whole angelic being with Him will rejoice when we ordinary people begin to realize that it is our responsibility and task to spread the Gospel. This is not the job of ministers and pastors and all the learned men. Their big task is to give us training. However, the task of spreading the Word lies squarely on our shoulders, for we are the sent ones.

Prayer:

Lord, please make me willing to proclaim Your Word day and night.

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Who is my Neighbour?

Luke 10: 25-37

We are now reading for the first time of an open conflict between Jesus and the church leaders, when a teacher of the law stood up during one of Jesus' sermons to ask Him a question. The law-man knew the answer, at least so he thought! However, he wanted to tempt Jesus to say the wrong thing: "What must I do to obtain eternal life?" If Jesus had answered the man directly, it would have simply led to further questions with the aim of finally trying to prove Jesus to be a false prophet. However, Jesus answers the man with a counter-question, and it amazes you to see what insight the lawyer really had. He certainly understood very well what the law was about, but he was not satisfied with the outcome of this round. Then a second question, his trump card: "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus did not try to give a definition of who your neighbour is, because he knew that this would only lead to further confrontation. Then He told a story with which the listener could identify himself in such a way that he could give the answer himself. This story is probably, besides the Christmas play, the most staged story ever by Sunday school children. We all know the story by heart. But let's just reflect on the meaning of the story.

For the people who listened to Jesus, it was an everyday scene, that people were attacked by robbers. So they could identify with the man who was lying there helpless. He was overjoyed when he saw a priest approaching. His office was, after all, to render service to his fellow man. Now, could the poor man ever ask for better? But the priest did not want to get involved and he took a detour. Just as the man's courage sank into his sandals (which he no longer had), he saw the Levite approaching. "Thank goodness!" he thought. "This man knows the law, and he knows he must be willing to help

people in need!" But once again his hope was dashed when the Levite pretended not to see him.

His heart sank when he saw a Samaritan approaching on a donkey, straight towards him. Would he allow this unclean foreigner to help him? Their ideas about the law were totally different, and for any Jew it was unacceptable for a Samaritan to touch him, not to mention caring!

I think Jesus' audience gasped for breath when Jesus told how that hated Samaritan treated the Jew's wounds. He loaded him on his donkey and further paid for the man's stay in the inn where he had to recover.

So this story is about accepting the help of an enemy or someone you dislike. When this law-man asked the question, he assumed that you could beacon off your neighbour, and decide for yourself where your boundaries lie. However, he did not take into account Jesus breaking through those boundaries. The law-man attached certain

values to the law. Now, however, Jesus made way for the Samaritan, someone who had totally different values for the law. From this parable Jesus shows that it was actually the Samaritan who really understood what the law meant, and who also carried out the law. The teacher of law was right when he said that you should love your neighbour. But the Samaritan practiced this law of love by genuinely caring for someone in need. Through this parable, however, Jesus also reveals another shocking situation: a non-Jew can also belong to the covenant, but even worse - an extremely religious Jew such as a priest and a Levite may end up outside!

Jesus did not disagree with the Jewish religious leaders about the authority of the law, but He did disagree radically with them about its interpretation and practice. This law-man wanted to know who was a neighbour of his, Jesus changed the question to: For whom are you a neighbour? This means that you have to be actively involved

with other people. We must forget about social differences and all kinds of religious barriers. In the case of the Jewish religious leaders, they wanted to keep their religion pure at all costs. However, Jesus totally changed this kind of exclusivity.

In our own situation in South Africa today, we live in much the same kind of circumstances as the Jews of old. We grew up with the idea of exclusivity, that we are better than others. And it's not just about ethnic differences. As Afrikaners, we have set ourselves one step higher than any of the other nations in the world. Some people even referred to us as the "new chosen people of God." Jesus asks us to clear the table and forget about all the differences. Indeed, believers are the chosen people, but certainly not the exclusive people. By living out our love according to Jesus' model, we are the instrument to make others who are still outside also part of the elect.

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me where I often still look down on others. Teach me to live out true love.

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Martha, Martha

Luke 10: 38-42

Many sermons have been preached based on today's very short story, and I do not think any preacher can ever get enough of it!

Jesus and his company stopped at Bethany on their journey to Jerusalem. This village is located just outside Jerusalem and this is where Martha and Mary lived with their brother Lazarus. The two main characters in the story were sisters Martha and Mary.

At first glance, the drama that unfolds here is just an incident that you may soon forget again. Martha was very busy in the kitchen to get everything ready for the men, but her sister decided that she would rather sit with Jesus and listen to what He had to say. Afterwards, Martha gets hot under the collar about her sister's laxity, and she goes to talk to Jesus about this. But then the surprise

comes when Jesus rebukes Martha for being so busy. The "lazy" Mary is actually the one who is acting correctly.

When we read the story for the first time, it seems so bitterly unfair to you. Why is the one who works hard tapped on the fingers, and the sister who sits and does nothing is praised? We really need to judge the actions of these two sisters in light of what it really means to be a follower of Christ.

We truly sympathize with Martha who showed her love for Jesus by serving Him and His disciples. Actually, Maria should have helped her sister, but she was passive. In light of the parable we just talked about yesterday, of the Good Samaritan, we really need to appreciate Martha's service. She did exactly what Jesus preached about the Samaritan. Yet Jesus says that Mary "chose the best part." What is the "best part" Jesus is referring to here? To let go of all other things and drink in Jesus' words. Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to be busy and to work

hard in the Kingdom. Nor does he say that you should rather neglect your household duties to be busy with the things of the Lord.

The big secret is that you need to know when the time is right for work and when the time is ripe to keep quiet. Mary just realized that now was not the time to run around and do things for the Lord, but that it was the time to allow the Lord to do something for her. She had to be open and receptive at that moment, because Jesus said things that were very important to her. Yes, she could do her hostess duties again later and solve all her household problems. However, Jesus was only with her for a short time, and she had to make every moment of it quality moments.

Through this story the Lord also teaches me to be very sensitive to the moments in my own life when He wants to speak to me through His Spirit and make me and make me strong. Of course, it is of great value if I am willing to roll up my sleeves and approach Kingdom work with passion and

zeal. It should be a part of my life and it makes me spiritually strong while at the same time living the commandment of love and being of service to God and my neighbour. But there are times in my life when I have to realize that I now have to be silent before the Lord. That I must stop scurrying around with my daily tasks so that I can only drink in what He wants to whisper to me. It is at such times that I also have to sit at the feet of Jesus and just listen to what He is saying to me. Such moments are extremely precious. This is where I am filled with power again. This is where I experience Jesus' nearness. This is where I realize again how dependent I really am on Him!

If you face the long road with your car, you can not just keep driving and driving - somewhere you have to stop for fuel! In addition, it is equally important for you as a manager to just relax a bit, otherwise you will burn out. In the same way, it is also necessary to "keep quiet" spiritually and take in the much-needed fuel of the Holy Spirit.

You can not do this while standing and running, but you need to calm down.

That is why it is very important sometimes to just break away and go somewhere alone with the Lord. John the Baptist, Elijah and Jesus went to the wilderness to be alone. It can be precious moments to just sit somewhere next to a mirror-smooth estuary or in the woods and maybe drink in the silence while you talk to the Lord. I have many such times burned into my beautiful moments room, which I want to remember forever!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for those quiet times You give me - for the heavenly moments when You speak to me through the silence and tranquility.

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Our Father ...

Luke 11: 1-4

Jesus' followers constantly saw Him praying, and it certainly encouraged them to pray in the same way. When one asked Him to please teach them to pray as well, He taught them a short model prayer, a framework that would serve as a basis for prayer. Then He also tells them a parable that emphasizes the value of prayer and encourages them to pray.

We can talk for many hours about the meaning and symbolism behind the "Our Father Prayer". We certainly can not discuss it in a single devotion. But what exactly did Jesus want to bring home to them?

Jesus begins the prayer by addressing God as Father. We see that Jesus uses the same form of address in Luke 10:22 after the 72 returned, and also later in Luke 22:42 when He wrestled with God in Gethsemane.

"Father" indicates an intimate relationship between Jesus and God and now He gives His followers the right to talk to God in the same way. They therefore get the right to have the same intimate relationship with God. In reality, this means that God is not only the exalted Lord who rules over everything, but that He also cares for His children in caring love like a Father. With this form of address, Jesus then tells his followers that in a sense they get exactly the same status as Him, to become children of God.

Of course, the exact same thing applies to you and me today. God is our loving Father, and we can talk to Him in prayer at any time. Is it not wonderful!?

The prayer consists of five prayers, the first two of which have to do with the glory of God and the last three with our own needs that we lay before Him.

In the first prayer we ask that the Name of the Father be sanctified or honoured. With

that, I declare myself willing to do everything in my power to honour and sanctify the Name of the Lord. It puts a huge responsibility on my shoulders. What does it mean? That I want to know Him as He truly is. That I will make an effort to see His omnipotence and the greatness of His works and tell everyone about it. That with all that is in me I will praise and glorify the Lord. That I will be the catalyst to inspire other people to do the same.

With the second prayer, I declare myself willing to acknowledge at all times that God rules. He's in charge! We have said this to each other so often through these daily passages. The book of Daniel is just one of many that only make you realize time and time again that He is in full control, even if it sometimes does not seem so to you at all. With this prayer I place my full trust in Him and then I resign myself to events beyond my control.

In the third prayer I declare my full dependence on God. It is often very difficult

for a rich person to pray this prayer honestly because everything is there in abundance! Why then should I still ask the Lord to provide? Yes, Job may have thought so too, and in the blink of an eye everything was gone. Covid-19 made many wealthy people poor overnight. Even if you have in abundance, you must still realize and acknowledge your dependence on Him. All that you have, you have only by His great grace.

The fourth prayer is about forgiveness of sins. We can literally write books about it! Over the years, many people have asked me with tears if it is ever possible for God to forgive their great sins. Naturally! Just read what our Father says in Isaiah 1:18: "You are stained red with sin, but I will wash you as clean as snow." Romans 3:23 says, "Everyone has sinned but by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free."

However, there is a twist to this prayer

because I solemnly declare before the Lord: "for we also forgive everyone who is guilty against us." This is the hard part, because it's not always that easy to forgive someone else. For years, believers often walk around with resentment in their hearts toward someone who has come too close to them. How can I ask God to forgive my sins, which are endless, if I am not willing to forgive someone one single mistake against me? To forgive means to normalize my whole attitude toward that person, and to accept him as a friend.

The last prayer is about temptations that come my way. If I pray to the Lord to protect me from it, it means that I will actively avoid it. The song from *My Fair Lady* goes: "The Lord above gave liquor for temptation, to see if man can keep away from sin. But with a little bit of luck, when temptation comes, you'll step right in!" The song has a total misperception of temptation. We must not seek the temptations, we must stay away from them!

Let's look at this prayer with new eyes, and go live it out.

Prayer:

Father, I feel so small when I pray this prayer, for I fall so far short in my own living out of it!

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Prayer

Luke 11: 5-13

After teaching His followers the "Our Father" prayer, He goes on to explain the value of prayer in the form of a story. He uses images that they understand very well. In the Middle Eastern world, hospitality was a very important thing. Even if someone came to you in the middle of the night, you would still go out of your way to give him hospitality. It was a part of life, and if you did not go along with it, it would be a disgrace. Today we live differently. For the sake of convenience, I will pretend not to have heard the doorbell, and everyone will agree, the crime situation, you know

The parable is about a man whose friend wakes him up in the middle of the night and asks for three loaves of bread to borrow so that he can show hospitality to an unexpected visitor. Jesus explains that for

the sake of friendship he will help his friend. And even if it was just to not bring shame on his name, he would still help the friend!

Immediately we want to ask what this story then has to do with prayer? Jesus himself answers the question by explaining. With this, He wants to encourage every believer to persevere in prayer. Through the example Jesus set by often being in prayer himself, He encouraged people to pray. He also repeatedly emphasized through parables the value and necessity of prayer. In this passage, however, the central message is God's willingness to give to those who ask. Jesus wants to make it clear that He will hear even the most untimely and shameless request.

Jesus encourages the listeners to go to the Father with an open mind. "Ask, and it will be given to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you." (v.9). He wants to hammer this thought into the listeners' minds, so He repeats it in other

words. And then He explains that God, like a loving Father, cares for His children. In the previous passage we have already seen that Jesus represents God as our Father, and that we can therefore go to Him in boldness without any fear. Now Jesus wants to emphasize that He is also the caring Father who not only provides in our daily bread, but also gives when we ask.

Jesus explains that an earthly father will certainly not be unsympathetic to his children, he will provide for their needs and when they ask him something he will certainly not answer by giving them something completely useless. We realize that we are all sinful people, and that even the holiest person is not without sin. If such a sinful father can be good to his children, how much more the Holy Father in heaven!

However, this brings us to a major issue that many people struggle with. If Jesus then promises here that God will give everything we ask - then why is it that I have been

praying for something for years, and the Lord does not give it to me?

We must realize that you and I are insignificant, fallible, sinful people who usually do not even have a clue of what life is about. Often our wish lists for the Lord are like the laughable letters that children write to Santa - "I want a bicycle and a plane and a computer with lots of games on and". We can only laugh at the requests of our children, and then we want to say very quickly: "But my requests to the Lord are not so ridiculous!"

If we look at it in perspective, we see that children are very honest with their requests. They certainly do not see it as ridiculous! Yet we will often give something completely different, because we realize all too well that what they ask for will not be good for their well-being. In the same way, we often do not realize what the Lord is planning for us, and then we wonder why He does not give us the things we ask for, even if they are sometimes

very noble things.

Often, years later, we only see what His purpose was. An example from my own life is that I wanted to become a preacher, but things did not work out that way for me, and I often asked why the Lord did not want to give me that very noble heart desire. Only years later, when He gave me this ministry in daily passages, where I can reach thousands of people every day with the Gospel, did I begin to understand. He gave, but much more abundantly than I could ever dream of! As a minister, I would only be able to minister the Word to a few hundred people at most once a week.

Jesus concludes by saying that the Father gives us the greatest when we ask, namely the Holy Spirit. Can we ever ask for anything more? We can write books on this subject, but I want to suffice with this.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the wonderful gift of

prayer, and that we can go to You with this.

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Jesus and Beelzebub

Luke 11: 14-26

A few years ago I had the wonderful privilege of spending time in one of our country's smaller and lesser known game reserves - Mkhuze. It is not a popular game park, because Simba the Lion King had not yet settled there, and that is what most people visit the game park for. The success of your visit to a game reserve is measured by how many lions you have encountered! We did not even see a single rhino, and only a single elephant in the distance. But the experience of the bush made up for it over and over again.

I remember one particular morning when a blanket of fog hung over us. Each cobweb shone like a necklace of fine pearls. At the tips of the acacia thorns, the fog formed tiny droplets that shone like diamonds. The drab winter veldt had been transformed into a

fairytale paradise!

Mosbolletjie and I sit down early in the morning at a game shelter. The blanket of fog hangs heavily and grey over the waterhole and paints a bleak picture. A herd of blue wildebeest comes to drink, but they are wrapped in the grey gloom. The first people arrive full of anticipation, but leave again soon, because there is nothing to see here this morning, everything is grey. With a mug of steaming Boeretroos, however, Mosbolletjie and I are trapped in the enchantment, because the greyness of the mist forms mysterious paintings of trees and bushes shrouded in mystery that changes every moment. Everyday things suddenly take on new meaning. We marvel at an ordinary turtle dove that puffs out its feathers and looks as big as a falcon!

Isn't it funny that many people stare blindly at the less pleasant or boring things, and never see the beauty behind them? If your mindset is set, you will see the beautiful things in life.

However, if you do not look for the beautiful, you will only see the negative.

Jesus experienced this truth very pertinently on His last journey to Jerusalem. Here Jesus experiences confrontation more and more intensely. He drives an evil spirit out of someone, something He has done a thousand times. But this time the people do not see the positive in it, but only the negative. They accuse Jesus of doing this with the help of the devil himself, Beelzebub, the leader of the evil spirits!

"Show us a miracle from heaven!" shouted someone from the crowd. Hadn't they seen enough breathtaking miracles yet? Weren't the thousands of people He fed with five loaves of bread a breathtaking miracle? And the many blind and lame who had regained the use of their senses and limbs - were not these "miracles from heaven"? Were they all then blind to the things Jesus did?

We can easily talk, but today we are also often blind to the things the Lord does. We

ask Him to give us all kinds of miracles, and then we do not see them. However, if we just start looking around and observe what is happening, we will see miracles happen every day!

When the people accuse Jesus, He answers them that the devil will not harm his own co-workers! How, then, can they say that He casts out evil spirits with the help of the devil? When Jesus casts out evil spirits, it is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of victory over the devil.

And then Jesus calls the listeners to make a decision by simply being neutral or uninvolved is just as good as taking a stand against Jesus. They must therefore decide whether they want to follow Him or be against Him. He who does not go up with Jesus against the Evil One is working against Him.

This is a frightening thought, because today our churches are full of uninvolved members who only come to church to soothe their

conscience or to say that they practice religion. I am not saying that they are not believers, or that they will not receive eternal life. The problem, however, is that uninvolved Christians are doing a great deal of damage to the Kingdom, and so are actually working against the Gospel. An unbeliever sees Jesus in the life of a believer but if this life is faint and half-hearted, the unbeliever will for sure never be interested in participating in the Kingdom. It will repel them rather than attract them. However, someone who is actively living the Gospel and radiating love and joy will attract unbelievers like a magnet and give them a hunger for this "something" that the believer has.

However, it is not only for other people that you have to actively live out your faith, it also prevents the devil from gaining a hold on your own life! Someone who lives a feeble faith is breeding ground for the devil's activities, but active Christianity totally destroys the devil's work!

Prayer:

Lord, cultivate in me the hunger and zeal to live actively for You today!

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The Troop Leader

Luke 11: 27-36

The people crowd in their thousands around Jesus. Everyone is in great anticipation because the sensation of breathtaking miracles makes people come from far and wide to get a glimpse of the miracles of this special Prophet. Today something might happen here that will make everyone gasp for breath! Somewhere from behind, a shrill woman's voice rang out: "How privileged is the woman who carried You in her body and fed You on her breast!"

Then Jesus puts the remark in the right perspective. It is not that single woman who was so privileged, but everyone who hears **and keeps** the Word of God. It does not help that people in large crowds gather around Jesus and marvel at the things He says and does. They have to put it into practice!

I get lots of nice messages that often make me cry from pure emotion! However, if I just read them and feel good about it, then they serve absolutely no purpose. I have to put the message into practice! Only then will it have real value.

A few years ago, during a visit to Mkuze Game Reserve, Mosbolletjie and I sat in the camp one morning and relaxed. It is a safari tent camp where each tent has it's own open-air kitchenette, one side of the tent. There is a big notice that you have to close the kitchen cabinets at all times.

Suddenly we hear a big commotion. A woman screams hysterically, and her husband speaks in languages I can certainly not repeat here. Then pandemonium sets in and screams echo all around us. I jump up in horror to see what's going on. Has the end of the world arrived? The scene I am watching fills me with conflicting feelings and I burst out laughing while at the same time feeling bitterly sorry for everyone who is part of the

drama.

A troop of baboons discovered that the woman did not heed the warnings, and left her kitchen cupboards open. The baboons' sharp eyes immediately noticed this and the result was that they stripped the food cupboards. The woman jumped up and down in frustration, while her husband threatened the burglars with a fire extinguisher!

Meanwhile, two young baboons grabbed a large cardboard box with cereal flakes and made a run for it. While the troop was fighting loudly elsewhere and screaming at each other over the stolen goods, these two sat feasting on the flakes they had thrown out on the ground.

But nothing escapes the sharp eyes of the old troop leader, and this quiet scene is one too many for him. With great noise and threat he storms towards the two and chases them into the trees, and then he takes sole ownership of the grain flakes. Obviously he does not give a damn about his herd! His

own well-being is all that counts in life and if I listen to the rest swearing and scolding each other, then I know from whom they learned those bad ways!

That afternoon, when the sun set between the thorn trees for the night, Mosbolletjie and I sat in a game shelter at a dry waterhole and waited for sunset. A young baboon emerges from the bushes, followed by the old troop leader. Dad walks calmly to the other side of the open field. He sits and waits patiently for his herd to pass so that he can protect them from a leopard that may be stalking from behind. Very clearly it is not the same bunch of noisemakers from the morning because the whole troop is "well mannered". Only when the last baboon passes does the old man get up and form the rear guard. You could clearly see that he cared about his troop!

I learned an expensive lesson: the example you set, especially when you have high prestige, has a huge impact on everyone

under your authority. So, live the Word of God practically! Jesus told the people who were so stubbornly after miracles and all kinds of signs, that more than enough signs had already been given to them. Even Jonah's very half-hearted sermon drove the whole of Nineveh to repentance, but when Jesus, the Son of God, does all the miracles, the sensation seekers still do not listen to Him!

Jesus concludes with a parable about a lamp and light. When you put the lamp under a bucket, no one can see the light. It should be set high so that everyone can see it. A pastor can preach a touching sermon, but it will soon be forgotten again. However, when someone sets an example with an exemplary act, it will be remembered for a long time! The impression of the two baboon troop has burned into my memory, and I want to live like the good leader!

So be careful that the light you emit with your example is not a dark, smoky light, but a

bright, clean light that will give a hunger to those who come in contact with you to also want from that Light of God and to follow it as you do.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to radiate Your wonderful Light.
Holy Spirit, lead me to keep the Light pure.

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Priorities

Luke 11: 37-54

Why did Jesus not wash His hands before the meal?

In the previous pericope we see an awkwardness building up between Jesus and the crowd. They demand miracles, but Jesus does not want to give them to them. Then you raise your eyebrows when you read that a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner. I think the man had a hidden motive for this beautiful gesture! He and his friends wanted to try to trick Jesus. And then it just so happened that Jesus fell into their trap when He did not wash His hands before the meal! However, this was not just an ordinary hand wash to kill germs, but a religious ritual that had to be adhered to and of course they reprimanded Him about it!

However, we soon begin to realize that He

may have done it on purpose to provoke a conversation and He also gets it Masterly right! "Yes, you Pharisees!" Jesus said to them. "You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness!" If they knew what was good for them, they would all have chosen turn tail and run. But of course they are clever! So they continue the conversation, but instead of being the prosecutors in the conversation, they now suddenly become the accused! Jesus rapped them on the knuckles because they are so preoccupied with all kinds of rules and regulations that they completely overlook the important things. Their preoccupation with cultic correctness of things like a religious handwashing means that they never get to things of eternal value such as the love of God and justice!

He tells them that they are polishing the outside of cutlery, but the inside - the part that is really important - remains dirty! By this He means that they set up a beautiful pious front of people who are holy and apply the

law diligently, but their personal lives are greedy and evil. Everything is just a show religion and therefore they are foolish, because as church leaders they do not realize that the same God who made the outer also made the inner. In their actions they also seduce the common people to keep only their outward right. The inner does not matter!

Then Jesus makes three misery statements in which He tells the Pharisees directly why He criticizes their actions in this way.

They obey the law of tithing down to the smallest detail, even giving herbs and spices! However, for the sake of convenience, they forget the most important thing, namely to do justice to people and to love God.

Secondly, they only seek people's honour by sitting on the most important seats in the synagogue, and by wanting to be greeted by people in public places, so that everyone can see how important and holy they really are.

Thirdly, they are spiritually dead and through that they lead other people into perdition as well. Jesus says that they are like "unmarked tombs". What He means by this is that they are like graves over which people walk ignorantly and thus become unconsciously unclean.

With this, Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are not fulfilling their task as spiritual leaders. They do not know God and they do not really serve Him, even if they think so. They actually serve only themselves and with their short-sighted view of the law they stand in the way of people for whom they should provide guidance.

Things are starting to get too much for the group of law-teachers who are also sitting there and they are protesting. Jesus is now stepping on their toes as well. But Jesus calmly turns to them and says that they themselves are deceiving the people by all the extra precepts they have created in addition to the law. They make it impossible

for people to truly serve the Lord. Moreover, as law-teachers they are actually the people who have knowledge of the Word of God. They carry the keys of knowledge that give people access to God's plan of redemption, but they are not willing to open that knowledge to other people.

The reaction of these "holy" men makes your hair stand on end. They are fuming! They are furious!

We must not be blind to the Pharisees and scribes. These statements of Jesus speak just as loudly to each of us today and it is very necessary that we constantly have to do introspection in our own lives to see if we might not even begin to become like those people. Are we not often so preoccupied with external things that we forget the important internal things? Less important matters often drain our energy into heated debates so that we no longer have the power to live out love. It has become time for us to return to the basics and for love to fill our lives.

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me where I so often forget
where my true priorities should be.

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Three Sermons

Luke 12: 1-12

Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem, but progress seems to be painfully slow. The further they progress, the more intense the criticism and resistance against Jesus. Yet the crowd that gathers around Him is growing. Luke writes here that thousands of people gathered around Him, and that they trampled on each other to hear Him. Jesus uses the tension that begins to build up to breaking point, and the hostility to teach His disciples what to do when they themselves would later be wronged and persecuted. Indeed, a cruel persecution awaited them by these very people who were following Jesus' blood.

In today's pericope, Jesus makes three short sermons or pronouncements. The first warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, with two parallels in which He says that their

hypocrisy will not benefit the Pharisees because everything that goes on in the heart will be known. Jesus uses the beautiful example of yeast.

It is tradition here with us to make something with a dough on Fridays for supper. On Friday afternoon, as usual, I kneaded a few grains of yeast with flour. I was still standing there wondering if the concoction would rise properly, then things started happening in the dough here and it rose and rose until it just stood bulging in the bowl. The dough was barely in the oven, when it started to look like the atomic bomb explosion! What those few grains of yeast can cause is breathtaking!

It only takes a few grains of gossip and incitement to finally whip up a large crowd of people. We have experienced this so clearly again with the uprisings we have had recently that have paralyzed the whole country. The sad thing is that one single person who sows evil in a congregation can also disrupt the whole congregation and

plunge them into lovelessness.

In the second sermon or utterance, Jesus calls his followers "friends." Indeed, a large part of the crowd that had gathered around Him were certainly not friends, but merely curious ones who would later all turn against Him. In this statement, Jesus wanted to encourage the believers not to be afraid or worried when persecution and physical suffering should come their way. Spiritual death is the thing you should be afraid of!

Incidentally, for those who want to claim that there is no hell - here Jesus says loud and clear that God has the power to throw people into hell! The Greek word for hell is gehenna, derived from the valley of Hinnom where children were once sacrificed. Read about this in Jeremiah 7:31. This valley was the garbage dump of Jerusalem, and there were constantly fires and smoke bubbling up here, which was of course associated with the torture of sinners in hell.

However, a coin has two sides, and on the

other side of this coin we see that even the tiny humble sparrows are cared for by the Lord. In the same way, He holds those who believe in Him in the hollow of His hand and cares much more for them than for the sparrows. A relationship with Jesus not only saves you from the horrors of hell, but gives you eternal life and all the glory that comes with it!

In the third sermon we again see two parallel utterances. The theme of this sermon is confession and denial. What you are willing to do for Jesus on earth determines what He will do for you in heaven. This verse, Luke 12: 8,9, is often horribly abused so as to work on people's consciences. Very often I get emails or Whatsapps, sometimes very heart-warming, asking at the end that you forward them. If you do not do this, then you have lost your reward in heaven! This is a total misunderstanding of what Jesus means here. Jesus is asking here that we take it seriously to carry out His Gospel, and not dare to deny Him.

However, there is a second, very serious sin that Jesus is talking about, the sin against the Holy Spirit. Luke does not explain what Jesus exactly means here, but from the context we can see that the Holy Spirit was considered here as the One who acts as God's Mediator. By rejecting Him, you are also rejecting God, and with it His forgiveness. In short, anyone who stubbornly rejects God's grace will also be rejected by God. Often it is "good Christians" who regularly come to church and often hear the Word, but still flatly refuse to make a full surrender, which is spoken of here. A large part of the huge crowd that stood here and listened to Jesus counted among those who committed this terrible sin.

The great sadness is that many of those who read this passage this morning are in danger of qualifying as someone who has committed the unforgivable sin. Dear reader, I plead with you this morning, if you have not yet given your heart to Jesus - do it NOW before it may be too late!

Prayer:

Lord, my plea this morning is that everyone who reads this passage, and is not yet part of Your Kingdom, will make the choice for You today.

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Greed

Luke 12: 13-34

I am amazed each time how Jesus turned simple events around to teach the people great life lessons. While thousands of people were still crowding around Jesus, someone complained that his brother did not want to share his inheritance with him. Jesus had to please help, and tell that stingy brother that he had to share! Jesus was a Rabbi, so He had the authority to rebuke the brother! Jesus soon saw through this man because his seemingly innocent request was actually based on greed. Moreover, Jesus did not come to resolve all kinds of domestic disputes. However, he Masterfully turned this request around and taught the crowd something about the dangers of greed. In a single sentence, He rejected the man's request. "Your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.," Jesus then told the people. Then He

told the story of the rich fool.

When you read the parable, you soon realize that it is not about wealth, but about greed. Notice how strong the word “**my**” stands out in this simple story: **My** barns, **My** grain, **My** other goods, **I** will say to **Myself** Everything this man did was in his own interest. Nowhere do we see that he thought of anyone else.

The man did excellent financial planning and set aside more than enough for his old age. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that! He even saw that his barns became too small for all his riches, and he planned to build larger barns. Satisfied with everything he has accomplished for himself over the years, he then said to himself: “Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!”

Yes, the man thought he was in control, full control of his own life. But then God comes and demands his life from him, and the man

had to find out that he only had control over his earthly possessions. In death, everything was totally useless to him! He only had control as long as his earthly life lasted!

This man wanted to organize his life without God. Great was his shock and disillusionment, however, when he had to find out that it does not work quite like that! Jesus concludes the parable with the words, "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight."

Of course, you need to do good financial planning. The big secret, though, is that it should not just be about yourself. Greed must have no place in this. Unfortunately, it is true that wealth and greed often go hand in hand, and it is then that wealth becomes dangerous. It is much more important to have the real life than to have many possessions.

Jesus goes on to explain to his disciples that a believer does not have to worry about his life or his standard of living. Jesus points to the birds, and how God gives them care and

food, and how He adorns the plants with breathtakingly beautiful flowers. After all, man is worth much more than birds and plants and therefore believers do not have to worry about living standards, it is in fact a trifle.

However, there is something far greater than earthly comfort: the Kingdom of God. This is what a believer should strive for in the first place. This means that you will use your energy to live in such a way that the world can see that you acknowledge and serve God as King. When you get to that point in your life, you do not have to worry, because the King of the Kingdom will take care of you. Of course, God's care does not mean that your life will never be threatened or that your high standard of living and wealth will be assured. Take Paul as an example. He gave up a brilliant career as a Pharisee to become a follower of Jesus. This meant that he had to undertake gruelling voyages and in the process had to suffer shipwreck several times. He also ended up in jail several times. He was stoned, cursed, chased away and

flogged. But the bubbling joy and gladness of that man who had the greatest treasure of all, eternal life, completely overshadowed these "little problems of life." Paul had no earthly wealth, yet the inheritance of inestimable value he left behind affected millions of people!

Yes, indeed, Paul purchased that purse that does not run empty, of which Jesus spoke, the one with inexhaustible riches in heaven. And out of this purse he just kept giving and giving and giving. The same purse was given to me and you too! The problem is that most believers keep their wallets closed. Open it! Share the priceless riches of God's Kingdom with the world. At the same time, we should not be stingy to open our wallets and share the worldly treasures that God gives us with others and also to use these treasures for the expansion of the Kingdom.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can put my whole life in Your care today - not only spiritually, but also

my finances.

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Are You Ready?

Luke 12: 35-48

"Be ready, gird up your loins and light the lamps!" Jesus is very serious that the people who listen to Him must be ready, prepared and faithful! He tells a series of parables to encourage them to do so. This sentence literally means that you must be ready and prepared for Jesus' return.

In the first parable we see an owner who has departed for a wedding. He did not tell his slaves what time he would be back, it could be any time of the night! His slaves therefore wait patiently for him to return. However, some of his slaves are not so patient, and they decide to go to sleep. But there are still some faithful old die-hards who stay up and wait patiently for him until he comes, so that they can open the door for him and welcome him.

Imagine the picture. In those years, a wedding easily lasted a week or longer. Their boss has been gone for a few weeks now and he could be back at any moment. Some of the slaves were excited and cheerful because they missed him. Someone sings a cheerful song while polishing the brassware so that his boss will get the house in perfect condition. Somewhere, however, somebody lies sleeping and snores loudly while his partner desperately tries to wake him up. He does not want the guy to get into trouble! Some of his mates just hang around bored, while others enthusiastically get everything ready for the boss' return home. "I hear a horse galloping! Is this not perhaps the Master?" The anticipation is great. But very tragically, there are a few that have completely disappeared!

Indeed, it is the same with us when we speak of Jesus' return. Jesus wants us to be excited and ready at all times, because no one knows exactly when He will come. We already hear the horse galloping somewhere,

and we know that He can come at any time now! The question is whether we are getting ready, or are we passing the time in small talk? Worse - maybe we're lying somewhere sleeping!

In the second parable, Jesus uses an image we know very well today, a burglar. He always arrives at the most unexpected time. Similarly, we cannot predict Jesus' return at all, it can be any time.

Peter was, as usual, the spokesman of the disciples, and he wanted to know to whom these parables would now actually relate. Jesus did not want to feed them everything with a teaspoon. They had to start learning to think and reason independently, so He did not answer them directly but with a long detour in the form of another parable.

Jesus tells of a manager who was appointed over a group of slaves. He held a very responsible position and his job was to look after everyone under his care. How would this manager fulfill his responsibility? Would

he make sure everyone got enough to eat at the right time and that they were well cared for? Or would he rather abuse his responsibility and just think of himself and eat and drink and exert himself?

This parable was aimed at the followers of Jesus and especially at those in a leadership position. It was not only the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes who opposed Jesus but even His own followers, the disciples!

However, Jesus' message also comes very directly in our own direction today! As a believer, I have to ask myself on a regular basis the question, how do I fulfill the responsibilities that the Lord gives me. Every believer usually has someone entrusted to his / her care. If you have someone in your care, you are a leader, and then you have certain responsibilities towards that person. The further you grow spiritually, the more people are left in your care, and the greater your responsibilities become. A pastor of a

congregation has the whole congregation under his care, and with that he has a huge responsibility on his shoulders. He does not dare to let go for a single moment, because it is the spiritual lives of people that he has in his hands. It is for this reason that we will constantly carry our pastors in prayer and strengthen their hands for the great task on their shoulders. We must not neglect our pastors!

Jesus explains how a leader must fulfill his responsibility. If he is faithful and does it with zeal, his reward will be very great in heaven. However, the opposite is also true, that a leader who abuses his position of authority will one day have to account for it!

Two questions summarize this passage: Are you ready to meet Jesus? And are you fulfilling your responsibilities toward those in your spiritual care?

Prayer:

Lord, please forgive me my failure to bear my

responsibilities, and help me to fulfill my duties.

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Time is Running Out

Luke 12: 49-59

There is a tense urgency in Jesus' sermon. Time is running out and there are still so many things His followers need to learn and know. The often unlightened questions that His inner circle disciples ask Him, you wonder if they will ever succeed!

In this pericope Jesus uses images of fire and baptism. The fire to which He refers is the judgment of God and baptism is the image of His terrible crucifixion. The judgment of which He speaks here is not the final judgment, but rather the judgment that comes upon the people of this world, upon those who do not buy into His baptism of atonement. John 3:18 makes it very clear that those who do not believe in Jesus have already been condemned because they do not believe in the only Son of God.

The sad thing is that this judgment of God will inevitably bring division, not only among strangers but often even within families! Years ago a woman came to me, crying bitterly. She took her relationship with Jesus very seriously but her husband was totally antagonistic to this "Religious nonsense" of hers. He did just what he wanted! She wanted nothing to do with worldly things, but he loved the world with all its sins and pleasures. One morning a cardboard box was delivered to her house. Her husband had bought them a TV set. In large red letters it was written on the cardboard box: "Now you have the world right in your house!" It was the last straw!

Jesus foretells this division, and I have had numerous sad letters from broken people writing about the disagreement in the house because the spouse is unbelieving and totally indifferent.

Jesus now turns to the crowd. There are two urgent issues that they need to address. The

first deals with their total inability to judge time correctly. Jesus tells them that they know very well how to spot weather patterns and know when it will rain or when it will be a scorching hot day. But when it comes to the most important thing, recognizing the signs that God gives, they totally put out. It has been three years now that Jesus has been preaching and performing miracles. The heavens have already literally opened while God speaks from heaven. Still, they do not want to notice it! The time of decision has arrived! It is especially now closer than ever, now that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to be executed!

Indeed, there was a huge crowd of people around Jesus, but only a few made a choice for Him. The rest were just curious to see what would happen next.

Then Jesus makes an urgent call for the people to settle their case with an adversary before it is too late. At first glance it seems like a practical way to stay out of court, but in

fact it goes much deeper here. The adversary Jesus is referring to actually refers to God as Judge. These people Jesus is talking to know very well what is the right thing to do. They know how to respond to everyday events and circumstances in their lives. The tragedy, however, is that they do not respond at all when Jesus speaks to them. A true relationship with God is something that is completely lacking. In this statement Jesus then wants to plead with them that their daily relationship with God should be wise. This is not just an old piece of life advice, but a serious call to repentance.

Today we are in a different time. Jesus' crucifixion is over and the new dispensation has arrived. However, this does not mean that we can just rest on our laurels now, because there is a very serious urgency in the air. The signs we need to look out for today are those of Jesus' return, and the sky is already blood red. His return is at hand. The sad thing is that there is a huge crowd of people who totally ignore these signs and are

indifferent to these things. I am talking about the "curious" who have already heard the Word so many times, but still do not respond to it. With the believers, however, these signs speak equally loudly, for there are still so many people out there who have not heard the Word. There must be an urgency in all believers to spread the Word to everyone who can listen.

Maybe the time may have come again for me to ask you to forward the link of this daily devotion to friends, colleagues or family who have not yet received it. A big thank you to those who regularly distribute it. In this way, people are reached who may be hungry to have Jesus as their Saviour. Remember, it's not only in Afrikaans but also in English.

Prayer:

Lord, I realize this morning that time is running out - please give me an urgency in my heart to carry Your message of salvation.

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Where was God?

Luke 13: 1-9

We drive to the airport with my daughter Anita. She is flying to Israel to work there for a year or two. On the way we stop at a Wimpy and first have lunch. Then Mosbolletjie's phone rings, it's my son Jaco: "Anita, don't get on that plane! A terrible plane crash has apparently happened in America, and the world is on fire - something to do with terrorists." I'm confused: what does an accident in America have to do with Anita's flight? I turn on the radio. News report on news report sounds over the air. The whole world was in a panic - it was September 11th, 2001!

We all remember the terrible disaster where thousands of people died in a matter of minutes, and how it shook the world. We also remember the questions that were asked afterwards, all the why's Why did God allow

this? Is it about the sins of the people? Did the Lord want to punish America? Where was the Lord? Why did He not stop it? Questions, questions, questions

Let's turn the clock back some 2000 years. A terrible disaster happens in Jerusalem. One of the landmarks, the tower of Siloam, collapses for some inexplicable reason. It's a busy part of town and there's a commotion around this tower. Tragically, 18 people died in the gruesome accident. "It's about their sins", the people whisper in the corridors, "God punished them for not keeping the law!"

Not long after that another horrible thing happened, this time right in the temple where people were offering sacrifices and worshipping. Jesus was preaching when there was a sudden disturbance in the crowd. A few men came running out of breath: "Something terrible has happened", they gasped. "It's that Pilate, he sent his soldiers into the temple!"

"Yes," said another, "and the poor people

were still slaughtering their sacrificial animals, when the soldiers just grabbed them and killed them in cold blood!" Shocked, bystanders listen to the horror story. There is a disturbance among the crowd: "Poor people! Were their sins so great that God had to punish them in such a cruel way?"

Jesus hears what the people say. He hears the anxious questions in their hearts. However, he does not answer their question but he uses the situation to get a much more important matter penetrated in them, the matter of repentance. People worry about all kinds of theological matters, but the most important thing is that they repent. Are you ready to meet your Creator when such a disaster strikes you? If the Siloam Tower were to fall on you, would you be ready? Are you sure of your salvation? If Pilate's soldiers were to kill you, do you know where you're going?

If you are not ready, your fate will be much worse than that of the people who perished

so cruelly! It is this truth that Jesus wants to bring home when the shock wave hits the people.

Then He tells a parable, a story of a man who planted a fig tree and waited patiently for the tree to produce delicious juicy figs. When that did not happen after three years, he ordered his gardener to cut down the tree. However, the gardener pleads for the tree to be given another chance. He will take care of it, and if the tree still does not bear the following year, it can only be cut down.

With this parable, Jesus wants to say that God is merciful, and that He will still give someone a chance to repent. However, there is a limit to His grace, to the waiting time. Someone who continues to reject God's grace and His supplication will at some point exceed his grace period.

Maybe the Lord has been talking to you for some time. You have heard His pleading voice many times, and each time you say again, "I am not ready yet." Maybe you say, "I

want to live a better life first before I can choose Jesus." or "I do not know how to get to Jesus". Be warned that your grace period may be running out slowly. In the hourglass of God's grace there may be only a few grains of sand left. September 11th happened totally unexpectedly. For those in the two giant buildings, there was no more time to first repent or get to know Jesus better. Within minutes it was all over! Forever! Listen to the pleading voice of God and take that step today to allow Jesus into your life!

There were many questions about September 11th. "Where was God?" it echoed it around the world. Numerous stories have since come to light of people who were given another chance. Heartbreaking stories of people who missed a flight at a critical time, or of someone who was not on time because his new shoes pushed him. One person says that he got a flat tyre and could not get to work on time. The Lord's grace is much, much greater than

His judgment. Indeed, there may have been thousands in the building who are in eternal damnation because they kept procrastinating. However, the believers who were in the twin towers are sitting at Jesus' feet today, in a world without any pain and suffering.

Prayer:

Lord, I pray this morning for everyone who hears Your call through this devotion.

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Mustard seed

Luke 13: 10-21

On a Sabbath day, Jesus was preaching in a synagogue. Among the large number of people who came to listen to Him, there was a woman who had been warped for eighteen years by an "evil spirit" that had made her suffer hard and had weakened her completely for eighteen years. She could not get up at all. According to the Jewish faith, most diseases were caused by "unclean spirits" or the devil himself. So when Jesus loosens these bonds of the devil and frees her from her sickness, He has shown that He was doing the work of God, and that God is in control of everything, even your health. The woman's response was that she immediately got up and praised God. She therefore saw Him as the One who healed her and delivered her from her disability.

But not everything was kosher in the

synagogue. The head of the synagogue was extremely indignant! Why, then, did Jesus have to go and heal the woman specifically on the Sabbath? "You must bring your sick to Jesus on a weekday!" he reprimands the people.

Jesus' counter-reaction was to call the man and his colleagues "hypocrites." He went on to point out to them that they themselves take care of their animals on a Sabbath. This woman was worth a lot more than an animal and how long has she not suffered? Miraculously, we see how the church leaders became ashamed of their own actions, and that the crowd rejoiced at the wonderful things they saw happening. Indeed, it was the same crowd that was so skeptical of Jesus just before that. Was there still a need for repentance among them? Would they respond in a timely manner? Jesus' journey to Jerusalem has now become very short and time is running out!

Jesus seized every moment that was left to

teach the people. Parables were all they would remember, so He brought home precious truths by making parables with things that were well known to the people. He used the example of a mustard seed and yeast to explain the Kingdom of God.

The mustard plant is an annual plant that can grow up to four meters high. It's seeds weigh a meagre 1mg, and are the smallest of all the cultivated seeds. The idea behind the image is that what may seem small to some, may be the beginning of a mighty Kingdom. The tiny seed thus becomes a giant plant, and only a little bit of yeast can cause a large batch of flour to rise.

Indeed, this crowd of people would eventually disappear completely and Jesus' followers would shrink to a small handful of very-scared people who had to gather behind closed doors for fear of the church leaders. And then came the Pentecostal explosion that made the church of Jesus grow into a mighty Kingdom in a very short time.

In a sense, we are in the same situation today, where the church often consists of a small handful of believers fighting for survival, just like the disciples of old. With great concern we see today how membership numbers are shrinking drastically. In congregations where there were still a large number of members a few years ago, there are now only a handful left. Congregations that were financially strong a few years ago are now struggling to stay afloat. And no, that's not the result of Covid 19! Yes, the virus did have an effect, but it only helped the process along a little.

In the two gambling houses north of Durban, there are more people every day than we will see in a year of worship services - a writhing mass who are hungry for money. Brothels, even though they are illegal, are popping up like mushrooms! We feel powerless against the terrible superiority of sin. The wave of crime that is sweeping over us like a tsunami and the police are just shrugging their shoulders. Often they themselves are

involved in the crime!

But then, when we start looking at these things in perspective and we listen to Jesus' parable, then things start to look a little different to us. You and I are those tiny mustard seeds that Jesus is talking about. We are the nonsensical little old grains of yeast in the giant bowl of flour. We must not stare blindly at the awful force of evil. We simply have to do what the Lord asks us to do and then we will see that this tiny, little mustard seed can grow and grow and grow, and that the leavened grain can leaven through the whole dish of flour. We must return to the principles of the early church, where every believer was a missionary who, already fleeing from the persecutors, preached the Word to everyone they met. Let us follow their example, and we will see how the Kingdom grows like never before!

Prayer:

Lord, make me willing to proclaim Your Word to all who want to listen.

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Is God Unjust?

Luke 13: 22-30

There is a heated debate around the braai fire. The conversation is about religious matters. "I'm telling you now, it's not fair! Why is the Lord so unjust? The pastor preached the other day while he pointed the finger at us. Then he wanted to tell me that only a select few would pass by old Peter and enter the gates of heaven!"

"No, that pastor certainly doesn't know what he's talking about! I believe that ALL believers will go to heaven. You just have to believe! Whether it is Buddah or Rama or whatever god, as long as you only believe in one god! "

Is God unjust? Or do all believers go to heaven no matter how they believe?

On Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, He went to every village to teach people. Remember, His

execution was just around the corner and He knew exactly what was waiting for Him. If it was me, I would sit on a heap somewhere and cry, but Jesus used every moment He could to preach the Gospel so that as many people as possible could experience the message of salvation.

The good news is not something that is exclusive to a few people in the church, it is meant for the whole world. Every believer, like Jesus at the time, must have an urgency in his life to proclaim and live this message in a timely and untimely manner. It should almost be an obsession with you!

Someone asks Jesus if there are only a few people who will be saved. Maybe the man hoped that Jesus would say that if you are a Jew, then you automatically have your ticket to heaven. "Not so easy!" says Jesus. He explains that many people will try very hard to obtain salvation, but that they will simply not succeed.

“But it's unfair! Is not it? ”

No, it's definitely not unfair! God has set certain conditions for access to salvation, and if you do not meet those conditions, you are definitely excluded. Its conditions are extremely simple and easy. Why then is it so terribly difficult for so many people to fulfill it?

I have a long list of letters from people who asked me how to become a Christian. I had already explained at length to people the simple way to Jesus. Most of them never even answered back. Only a small handful wrote to me and told me excitedly that they were now children of the Lord!

But I will continue on and on to send the message of salvation as long as it is within my power! Jesus does not want one single soul to be lost, and neither do I!

To the question the man asked Jesus, He replied that many people would knock on the door, but that they would be turned away. The big problem is that people want to attain salvation on their own terms and their own methods. Man's best efforts are simply not

good enough for God's standards that He sets. His standard for someone to get to heaven is that you should be sinless. Show me the man who is absolutely sinless! Even the greatest of the pillars of the faith sometimes stumbles, and sometimes falls very hard! Some people go to great lengths to fight their way to heaven. Some torment themselves by whipping themselves or even had themselves crucified. Some slide along for kilometers on a raw grazed bloodied stomach to some or other temple to show their devotion. Everything is in vain! It gets you nowhere! The gates of heaven will still be closed.

"There will be weeping and grinding of teeth," Jesus says as He tells how many people will be driven away.

Is God then unjust?

But then in the following sentence Jesus said: "People will come from the east and the west, the north and the south to eat in the kingdom of God." Who are they? Selected?

Privileged? Preferred? In Joh. 3:16 Jesus says that God gives eternal life to everyone who believes in His Son, Jesus. Point! Two verses further He emphasizes this: "He who believes in Him is not condemned."

Let me explain: God's condition of absolute sinlessness for access to heaven can only come to fruition in Jesus who has already paid the full price and taken the blame for our sins all on Him! Faith in Jesus is therefore ultimately the only condition for gaining access to heaven. Of course, this faith does not just mean that you believe in His existence. The devil believes it too! Faith in this sense, however, means a living relationship with Jesus. It means placing your full trust in Him alone unconditionally. In any relationship there is respect, love, gratitude and service and it should be an integral part of your relationship with Jesus as well. If it is not, then I strongly doubt your faith! Just like in a love relationship where you put your partner above everything and will do anything for him or her, so should my relationship with

Jesus as well. Only then can I speak of true faith!

Prayer:

O Lord, my relationship with You leaves so much to be desired. Help me to fully live out my love relationship with You!

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Jerusalem, Jerusalem!

Luke 13:31-35

Not all Pharisees are necessarily “bad” people! In Afrikaans there is a saying that you should not throw the baby out with the bathwater! Ever wondered where this expression comes from? A linguist explained on the radio the other day that in the old days bathing was not as frequent as it is today. By bath time everyone was pretty dirty, and of course running water was not something they knew either. So on that day water was fetched and heated, and then Dad first got his turn to bath in the zinc bath. This is followed by Mom, and then the children, all in the same water. Last but not least, baby gets to take a bath. By this time, the water already looks like pea soup, and you have to look carefully to notice Baby in it. Therefore, you need to be careful not to miss Baby and throw him out accidentally with the dirty water! So yes, we must not only see the bad

in other people but look carefully for something good in even the worst person!

A group of Pharisees come to warn Jesus to stay away from Jerusalem. His life was in danger because Herod wanted to kill Him! However, they did not understand at all what it was about because He had to go to Jerusalem to carry out God's will. Jesus answered them in a prophetic way that is totally Greek for the uninformed. But what exactly did Jesus mean by all that He said?

He begins by referring to "today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow (the third day)". By this, He probably did not think literally in terms of three days, but Jesus wanted to emphasize the fact that time was running out, and that the great day of His execution would soon come. Remember, it was a prophecy and prophecies are often spoken symbolically.

Then Jesus says that He first had to finish His work. He therefore first had to achieve His purpose. What was His purpose? To go

to Jerusalem so that He could finally be crucified and atone for the sins of mankind.

The question is, why did it have to be Jerusalem? Could Jesus not have been crucified anywhere else? Would it really matter? Why was there a terrible urgency to go to Jerusalem?

Jerusalem was a place of cardinal importance to the people of God. Since the time of David, this city has been the focal point of the entire Jewish people's existence. This is where the Ark of the Covenant, the so-called "pedestal" of the Lord in David's time, found its final resting place. In Jerusalem, David's dream of a Temple for the Lord finally materialised in his son Solomon. Jerusalem was considered the last stronghold of God's people. After the construction of the temple, it also became the place of worship. Pilgrims went in their thousands up to Jerusalem to come and celebrate with every great feast. But it is also in Jerusalem that they offered sacrifices to

the Lord.

Indeed, Jerusalem also experienced bad times. Even though the city was known as a fortress of format, it did not stop the enemy every time, and was occasionally destroyed so that even the impressive walls were leveled to the ground. But the walls were rebuilt after the exile, and Jerusalem was restored in honour.

However, Jerusalem has also built up a bad reputation over the years. Often the Lord was rejected and other gods were worshipped. That is why Jesus cries: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone the one who is sent to you!"

In several places in the Old Testament we read of prophets who preached the Word of God, and who were rejected and even killed for the message they were to bring. Even the great prophet Elijah had to flee from Jerusalem for his life. After Pentecost it would get even worse, and believers would have to flee for their lives.

Like a sad parent talking to his children, Jesus comes and reproaches the city. He so wanted them to take refuge in Him, but they did not want to. A bitterly severe punishment awaited the city, but there was still time and opportunity for repentance. His grace is so great that He still invited them in spite of all their crimes against Him. But they had to know that the time of reckoning is approaching rapidly!

Indeed, grace has run out! A mere forty years later, the crown of the people, the temple, was destroyed to the ground. To make matters worse, a Muslim mosque was built on the site of worship of the Jews, a mosque that still stands today as a monument to the Jews' rejection of the Messiah.

In spite of everything, the Lord still extends His hand of grace today. The good news is that many Jews today are being converted and are beginning to see the Truth. We never dare stop praying for the fallen people of God. They need Jesus just as much as we

do.

Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, for Your great mercy - that
You even saved me and gave me eternal life!

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Modesty

Luke 14: 1-14

Despite the hostility of the Pharisees and other church leaders towards Jesus, Luke paints a scene for us where Jesus goes to eat with a prominent Pharisee. Did the man perhaps have veiled motives for inviting Jesus to dinner? If you read between the lines, then it does seem that his motives may not have been so pure at all!

It was a Sabbath day, and everyone was lounging around the table eating. Along with them were a number of church leaders, and Luke tells us that they kept a very close eye on the situation! They were just waiting for Jesus to do something wrong so that they could condemn Him. Along with them at the table was a man suffering from water retention, a disease that causes your body to swell because fluid accumulates. Possibly the Pharisees "planted" this man there as a

snare for Jesus! But Jesus saw hypocrites throughout this bunch. Masterfully, he threw the ball into their court asking if you could heal someone on a Sabbath day. Strictly speaking, it would mean work, which of course would be taboo. But healing on a Sabbath was nowhere inscribed in their strict laws. They did not have an answer to Jesus' question. If they said "no" then it would seem that they did not care for the sick man at all. But they were equally afraid to say "yes", because then it would seem as if they themselves had disobeyed the law. This question put them in a very tricky position!

Jesus simply continued to heal the sick undisturbed. Then He repeated his question about what one may do on a Sabbath and what not. "Which of you, if his son or his ox falls into a pit, will not immediately bring him out - even if it is on the Sabbath?" Again the Pharisees were silent like the grave. They simply did not have an answer. Whatever they answered, would put them in a very bad light, so they preferred to remain completely

silent!

This incident only confirmed once again that Jesus' statement that he made in Luke 6: 5, that He is Lord of the Sabbath, is a reality. Even the Pharisees had to admit that Jesus was right, even though they refused to say it out loud.

However, Jesus was not yet finished with the hypocrites. He remarked that the important men had chosen the best places for themselves and the rest had to sit where they could find a second-class place. Then He tells two parables to explain what place humility should have in your life.

He first tells of the guy who sees the best seat, and then sits there, little knowing that it was actually meant for a guest of honour. To his shame, the host then asks him to sit somewhere else. In this way, one's ambition and own honour can often put you to shame. The honour the man sought was genuinely human, but it resulted in humiliation. This is because one often tries to pursue false

values and gain honour for oneself, usually at the expense of someone else who actually deserves that honour.

Jesus explains that it is much better to be humble and to take the back seats. If you truly deserve honour, then the host will make you sit in the seat of honour in front of everyone. In practice, this means that your achievements do not go unnoticed, even if it often feels that way to you. Do not advertise yourself, but remain humble and modest. Eventually you will be rewarded, perhaps even much more than the person who is outspoken about himself and shows it to the world!

The second parable Jesus points out to the host: When he arranges a meal, he should not just invite the elite so that they can invite him back to their grand meals later. Rather, invite the poor and needy, from whom you can expect nothing in return. What it comes down to is that you do good out of love for the cause, and not to get anything out of it.

Someone who runs a soup kitchen for the poor, and toils and sweats for hours in front of the pots, gets absolutely nothing out of it. If he does not have to pay for the ingredients himself, it costs him at least to go to supermarkets and beg for contributions. There is absolutely nothing glamorous about such an enterprise, and often you do not even get a thank you from many of the poor who are standing in line! Why are you still doing this? Because Jesus did so much more for you, and showed you so much more love! It's just to thank Jesus for all He has done for you.

This brings me to the question: Why do I give my thanksgiving sacrifice to the Lord? Why do I give my tithe? Is it perhaps to "buy" the Lord's favour? Is it perhaps because I expect that if I give my tithe, that the Lord will give it back to me tenfold? The same goes for the work I do for the Lord. Am I doing this because I expect favour from the Lord? If that's the case, then I'm doing it for totally the wrong reasons. My only motivation should

be: Gratitude! The Lord has already done so much for me, and now I serve Him out of gratitude and because I also want to show that I love Him, without expecting anything in return from Him.

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me to be humble, and to fully live out my gratitude to You.

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The Feast

Luke 14: 15-24

A few years ago, during a mission festival in our congregation, a group of students from a mission station in our area performed a play. It's the story of a wealthy man who decided to have a big party. He puts in a lot of effort and spends a lot of money to prepare an unforgettable evening for his friends. When everything was ready, he sent his liaison officer to fetch all his friends. When he got to the first one, she was so busy talking on her cell phone, that she barely gave him a chance to state his case. "Sorry", was her reply, "unfortunately I cannot - I'm too busy!" A second was a student who was preparing for exams, and she could not tear herself away from the books. When he came across a famous model, her new contract she landed was more important than parties. And so he finally had to convey the news to his boss that no one could or wanted to attend

his party!

The man was furious! To the great surprise and frustration of his liaison officer, he sent him to the streets to gather the homeless, street children, beggars and bums. And did the bunch of outcasts of life celebrate! There was dancing, eating and singing until late at night!

A modern version of Jesus' parable that He told while they were at the table at the house of the prominent Pharisee. If we look in Jesus' story at the excuses that the people dished out, then not a single one was unreasonable. But if we put them a little closer under the magnifying glass, we will see that in each case it was the people's possessions that were more important to them than their friendship with the man. The people were selfish, and therefore their materialistic interests came before relationships with other people, even before their friends!

By the way, the apology of the one who

argued that he had just been married and therefore could not come has to do with property here as well. A woman was considered a man's property or possession in those years!

Jesus tells that the man became very angry because the people insulted him so much by rejecting his invitation. He urgently sent out his slave to gather the outcasts on the streets for the feast. He even sent the slave a second time to look outside the city for more people. He had to bring anyone he could get his hands on and he had to insist on them coming! We see a definite urgency in this man's orders. There was no more time for sending invitations and small talk!

What should we make of such a story? How should we understand this?

In the first place, the story went for the people who sat at the table with Jesus. They were all people who considered themselves "friends of God", because they were the church leaders and people who had Bible

knowledge. However, they were also the people who were very skeptical of Jesus, and who would eventually reject and persecute Him. Therefore, He rather addresses His invitation to the common people and even non-Jews, because they would accept Him!

However, this story also speaks very loudly to each of us today. How much time do we really still have for the Lord? How much time do we spend each day in the presence of our Father? Unfortunately, for most believers, "time with God" has become a quick prayer, reading two verses from a Psalm, and if there is still time, quickly read a page from Uncle Solly's diary. To take quiet time seriously and truly seek the Lord's presence - there is simply no time for that! Our work is very important and we wear ourselves out for the boss, but the One who is really important only gets a fraction of our time!

"Where should I find the time?" By getting up just half an hour or an hour earlier, you are making more than enough time for yourself.

Early morning, I found, is ideal because then everything is dead quiet and there is no one bothering you. It is as if I can hear God's voice clear and distinct in the morning silence. Personally, I experience Him even more intensely as I write down what I experience from the Word. These morning devotions are for me personally a wonderful adventure that I experience with my Father every morning. Therefore, I also cannot help but share it with the whole world. I want to shout it out, trumpet forth that the Lord is wonderful!

The time I spend with the Lord in the mornings also has another effect: it makes me simply unable to wait for it to become Sunday, because the worship service is the highlight of the week for me. I do not want to miss it for anything on earth! I am excited about my experience with the Lord, and it is wonderful to be able to live it out. Are you excited too?

Prayer:

Lord, every day with You is a wonderful feast.
Thank you, thank you, thank you Lord!

Calculate The Cost

Luke 14: 25-33

I was just a young man, when one day I decided to build a house for myself. I worked for a builder, so at least I had gathered some building knowledge. From my savings and the help of a loan I bought a stand and then the building process began. Quickly, I drew up a plan for my dream home and started building. There was not much money really and all I could afford was a load of bricks, a few bags of cement and a few door and window frames. And then I started building!

There was also no money to hire craftsmen, but that did not bother me. Every night after work I jumped in to build my house. But before long my bricks were up and so was my cement and the work came to a standstill. When I arrived at the building site a week later, all my window and door frames were gone - stolen!

I felt totally powerless and discouraged! My dream crumbled simply because I did not sit down to calculate the cost before I started. After all, not everything was lost, I finally got the stand sold and paid off the debt I made. But the huge embarrassment, that I as a builder failed so horribly, stayed with me for a long time!

Every day there were a large number of curious people who gathered around Jesus. Gradually, however, a large number of people came who were really serious about Jesus. They walked together everywhere He went and thus became His followers.

After the meal with the Pharisee, Jesus explained to His followers that discipleship places great demands on you. If you truly want to follow Jesus, you must be willing to make certain sacrifices. It may even mean that you have to give up your family. You should even be willing to give up those closest to you. But even worse - you have to be willing to put your own life on the line if

you want to take Jesus seriously. You are shocked when you think soberly about this! After all, it is almost impossible to meet such requirements!

But then Jesus comes with a second demand, to carry your own cross and follow in Jesus' footsteps! That is, you must follow Jesus in everything He has done!

Your mind automatically goes to a man like Paul who preferred not to marry at all. The demands that his discipleship placed on him would never, ever make a marriage work for him. Paul must have had family — brothers, sisters, his parents. However, he left everyone behind to enter the world as Jesus' disciple. Paul was willing to sacrifice absolutely everything for the Gospel - even his own life!

However, Paul calculated the cost of his decision to follow Jesus fully and then decided that he would be willing to pay the price. He did not walk in there blindly, but calculated.

And that is exactly what Jesus wanted to bring home to His followers, calculate the cost! He used two parables to emphasize the importance of this. In the first he explains that a builder must first do his calculations properly before he starts building, otherwise he will be sorely mistaken. And I know! I myself was mocked by the town for my poor planning! In the second example, Jesus says that a king must first draw up a good strategic plan before he goes to war. He must determine exactly how many men are needed for the battle, otherwise it may cost him to flee tail between the legs even before a single shot has been fired. The world will laugh at him!

If you look at these demands that Jesus makes, then it seems totally impossible to become a follower of Jesus. But actually this is not the case at all. It is true, however, that discipleship places many demands on one. This means that you will have to give up certain friends simply because they drag you into perdition. This means that you must be

willing to give up certain types of fun such as the kind of parties where the Name of God is not worth a penny. Or think of the gambling house where the money god crows king and the evenings in the bar with the men where everyone drinks themselves to a stupor.

On the other hand, it will also ask you to be willing to throw your weight fully into the working field of the Lord. As believers, we are all on "heaven's train." Some are merely passengers, but others are staff who often work until late at night. Discipleship means giving up your comfort and becoming one of the "staff". Discipleship also means that you must be willing to live out love practically - fully! Yes, being a Christian is definitely not for sissies!

Today I want to challenge you to calculate the cost, and then make a decision. Do not be like the worthless salt that Jesus speaks of - the salt that is thrown away, but becomes valuable and serviceable in the Kingdom.

Prayer:

Lord, I have calculated the cost, and I want to follow You, whatever the price.

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The Lost Sheep

Luke 15: 1-10

Years ago, one day I was talking to a woman in Durban. She tells me very proudly of her son who cares so much about people. She says that a few days before, an elderly Zulu had climbed the steep hill in front of their house down the street. The old man was dressed in rags, clearly very poor, and he struggled to walk. She says that her son suddenly felt very sorry for the old man, and then he went to him and picked him up on his back and carried him up the steep ascent to the very top where the road was level.

I listened in disgust to the woman - how could the young man humble himself so much? This was during the apartheid years, and such contact was simply not acceptable! I felt sorry for the woman, that she could be so blind, and could not see that her son was betraying his culture. I smiled hypocritically at

the woman and said, "How nice!" and then I turned and walked away.

Today I feel ashamed of my thoughts and actions of those years - how insensitive and hard-hearted I was not in my young days!

The church leaders in Jesus' day had the same problem. Luke tells us that the Pharisees and scribes were filled with disgust because Jesus had fallen so low as to mix Himself with the scum of the earth, the sinners and publicans. Luckily they did not know about the Samaritan woman at the well! The church leaders only came to listen to Jesus for the purpose of criticizing Him and trying to catch Him out. However, the tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus because they realized that they were lost and that Jesus might just be their salvation.

Based on this, Jesus told some parables, not only to show the Pharisees how wrong they were, but also to tell the tax collectors that there was hope for them. The parables are about "Get Away and Get Away." He wants to

show how God truly cares for people who have lost their way.

The first story tells of a good shepherd who cared deeply for his sheep. When one strayed from the herd, he left the other 99 sheep in the field to search for the stray one. Your first reaction is that that shepherd now leaves his sheep to their own mercy. But actually it's not like that at all, because where they are all together in the herd, they are safe precisely because they reinforce each other. However, solitude is fox food!

Then, however, we also see another side of the shepherd. What does he do when he finds the stray? Does he give him a slap and tie his tail? No, he is very happy, and excitedly tells all his friends that he has got his sheep! Lovingly, he counts the sheep on his shoulders and carries him back to the herd.

Jesus concludes this story: "I tell you, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who has repented, rather than over the ninety-nine

righteous who do not need to repent."

Believers can sometimes be very ugly! When someone who has strayed returns to the "flock" one day, we say to one another, "Have you seen who is back? I wonder how long it will last this time? " Then we compassionately and omnisciently shake our heads in the direction of the poor man. We write him off even before he has properly got his stand!

The fact is, however, that our Good Shepherd is so concerned about each of us, even those who have strayed and fallen into sin, that He wants to prevent anyone from getting lost at all costs. And when a wanderer is back, the whole heaven rejoices and is glad! The warning we need to read in this story is that we too must share in that joy and that those of us who stand strong in the faith must support and carry that one who staggeringly finds his feet until he is fully part again. of the flock.

In the second story, Jesus simply puts the

stamp on the message of the first one. It's about a woman who lost one of her ten coins. There is an urgency in her search for the lost coin, and when she finds it after a big hunt, she goes to tell all her friends that it has finally been found. Her joy knows no bounds! God rejoices in every lost person who repents.

The message today to each of us is that if you may be sitting in sackcloth and ashes today because you are a stray, you can be assured that God is earnestly seeking you. He is not looking for you to punish you but to save you! The second message is that if you are one of the privileged 99, then you should welcome the lost in love and with open arms.

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me where I often stand so aloof from someone who has strayed. Please give me an all-encompassing love in my heart.

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The Father Who Almost Lost Both His Sons

Luke 15: 11-32

After the brief parables of the sheep and the coin that were lost and found, Jesus now tells the story of a man who so nearly lost both his sons.

The story begins where the youngest brother comes to ask his father for his inheritance. It was a shocking thing to ask, because with this he actually wanted to say to his father: "I wish my father was dead now so that I could get my money!" The fact is that there was a tension between father and son, and that the son wanted to be free from his father's say and stand on his own two feet economically. This is a problem that has torn families apart for centuries, even today!

The father's reaction is strange and very surprising. Maybe my reaction would be to

tell the ungrateful boyfriend his fortune, shout and cage for six months after I gave him a fired beating!

But no, this father granted the request! In short, we see how the boy wastes all his inheritance and then ends up in a big predicament. He will stay as an attendant with one of the citizens of the country, of course a heathen. The conditions are dire and pigs have to look after them, something that will make every Jew shiver! Eventually he realizes how stupid he was and then he crawls back to his father, hat in hand. He realizes that he has done wrong, not only against his father, but also against God!

And it is precisely here that the story once again takes such a surprising turn. Again, the father does exactly the opposite of what we expect. We see the father doing five very strange things: He sees him arriving from afar - so he is still waiting for him all the time !, He feels deeply sorry for him, runs to meet him, embraces him and kisses him.

Nowhere do we read that the father says to his son: "Yes, I told you so!" or "It will teach you!" not. He does not indulge in his son's misery, but rather does the unheard of and unworthy thing and runs towards him. He gives up his own dignity because he's glad his son's back, and so he makes those awful painful last steps home easier for his son. In this father's action we read clearly and distinctly that he had long since forgiven his son for the terrible injustice he had done to his father.

While the boy was on his way home, he walked and worked out exactly what he would say to his father, and how he would offer to become one of his father's day laborers if only his father would accept him. And here he is so overwhelmed with love that he does not even get a chance to tell Dad that he is willing to work for his lodgings. His father has already proved that he accepts him unconditionally, and just to put the stamp on it, he arranges a big party to welcome him home.

But the story also has a dark side. In the field, the eldest brother was working when this festival was put together. When he got home, he could not believe his eyes. Kleinboet actually had the audacity to come back, and what does Dad do? No, he does not throw himself into a concentration camp, but holds a party for him! And that after all he had done to his poor father! Right away he's fat. He refuses to attend the party.

What is his father doing? With the same patience and love he welcomed to Kleinboet, he now talks to his eldest. Then he explains to the boy that, unlike his brother, he was still with his father all the time and shared in all the blessings of the household. On top of that, all his father's possessions were his anyway. So there was absolutely no reason why he could still be blamed at all!

What was the brother's reaction? We do not know. The story has an "open" end - one that we have to write ourselves. It actually forces us to answer the question regarding

ourselves. How do I personally respond to this? What is my own reaction when someone who has lived recklessly comes to repentance?

If we look at the story in perspective, we see that neither of the two boys was worth their father's love. However, he loved them unconditionally, and all he wanted from them was to reconcile with each other, to accept each other and that they would both accept their father's care and love.

Maybe today you are the younger boy who turned his back on God and strayed. The story tells you that God is waiting for you with open arms and tons of love to come back.

But you may also be the boy who has always done your part, been faithful in your service to God and experienced the nearness of Him. For you, the story this morning wants to remind you not to act arrogantly towards those who have strayed. Be part of the welcoming committee. In that way you show the Lord that you sincerely appreciate His

goodness and love with which He so overwhelms you every day.

Prayer:

Lord, please give me love in my heart today to everyone who comes my way. Make me forgiving, and teach me not to look down on others.

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The Sly Manager

Luke 16: 1-13

When it comes to money matters, you get a lot of “smart” people, guys who invent every trick under the sun to get rich quick, and in the process he does not care how many people are left in the lurch. Day-by-day we read in the newspapers of the cunning men who have been caught out, and every time there are simply many millions at stake. The sad thing is that it is often pensioners who wanted to invest their pension money, who had to suffer and lose everything. And this while the scammer often gets away with it, simply by a technical point in the court case. Yes, and what about all those who are never even caught out?

Jesus is actually telling His disciples a story about such a guy who managed his boss' affairs very suspiciously. The boss became suspicious and then he asked the manager

to come and give a report. The manager immediately saw great trouble coming and so he started making plans to save his own skin. He does not even try to apologize to his boss because he knows he is as guilty!

What is he doing? He bribes all the people who owe money to his boss, hoping that he would get into their good books and that they would help him in turn if he was later unemployed! He already saw the boot coming!

When the boss discovered the conspiracy, he said to him: "Now that was very clever!" Actually, it was meant to be sarcastic, because the boss was the one who suffered under the manager's cheating.

Jesus' comment on this story was: "The children of this world act more wisely toward one another than the children of the light." (v.8) In other words, the worldling is not afraid to apply all sorts of worldly principles to his own advantage. People of the light (believers) can go and learn from the worldly,

not to use dishonest principles, but to use the principles of the light - God's precepts and apply them practically for their own benefit as well as the benefit of other people.

The following statement of Jesus is also often misunderstood: "Make friends for yourselves by means of the dishonest Mammon, so that when it comes to an end, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." (v.9) Mammon is a name for your earthly possessions or your wealth. It can very easily lure you away from God and make you a slave. This is fake security! With this statement Jesus wants to say that you must use your money in a good way. You have to use it literally to make friends. In practice, this means that a believer must use the money that God has placed under your management in such a way that it becomes an instrument in the hand of God. You (and your finances) thus become a tool in God's hand through which He cares for other people.

A believer should not live like a thief, because a thief says: "Your money is mine! Thank you very much, I'll take it! " On the other hand, the mortal's life is also wrong, because he says: "My things are my things, leave them alone!". The humanist has a very "noble" outlook with: "My stuff is yours, feel free to take it for yourself ...". Now what should the believer's motto be then? "Everything I own actually belongs to God, and for that reason I will share it with you."

The question we each have to ask ourselves this morning is how do I handle my finances? Am I clinging to the goods and money that the Lord has entrusted to me? We are increasingly living in a world where the gap between rich and poor is widening. On the one hand, there are the people who drive around in very expensive shiny cars and stay in palaces. And on the other hand, there are the millions who, in appalling conditions, try to stay afloat - perhaps even having to sleep on a sidewalk somewhere in the bitter cold at night. Maybe you're one of the privileged. Do

you ever think of the plight of the poor? Money has absolutely no security value in the future life! It is a much better investment if you decide to invest in human lives. Yes, I know many wealthy believers who always have an open hand and an open wallet for the poor. The one characteristic of their lives is the happiness and joy that radiates from them!

Jesus concludes the story with the words that you have to make a decision. You cannot serve God and Mammon, the money god, at the same time. It is either the one or the other. You must realize that everything you have belongs to God and that you therefore manage it only for Him. I therefore often have to ask myself the question: "Do I manage God's assets effectively? Do I manage it the way God wants me to manage it? " Again, the standard that Jesus gave in the commandment of love, that I should love God but at the same time my fellow-man, is of cardinal importance. If we truly live love, we will be willing to share God's gifts with the

underprivileged.

Prayer:

Lord, I must confess this morning that I am not even close to a good manager of the assets You have given me. Please help me to use Your goods properly.

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The Law and the Kingdom

Luke 16: 14-18

The old dirt road is bad and full of potholes - some so big that a Volkswagen Beetle will easily disappear into it. We throw sharp turns to miss the rocks and trees, and at a crawling pace. Mosbolletjie and I visited Mkhuze years ago, one of the beautiful game reserves of KwaZulu-Natal. All the big five except lions are there in their full glory. Like all big game parks there are laws, and one is that you are not allowed to get out of your vehicle. We're on our way to a game shelter and we have no idea what's waiting for us. We are curious and excited when we face the last bit of bad road.

Finally, the parking lot is in front of us. But there is no sign of a game shelter. A small footpath that disappears between the trees indicates the direction for us to walk. We grab our cameras and binoculars and take bravely

to the path. The footpath disappears in front somewhere around the bend. The walk through the veldt is wonderfully exciting and at any moment you expect a rhino or a big-foot elephant or an angry animal waiting for you among the thorn trees. A giant golden-orb spider hangs quietly, awaiting in it's strong web and waiting for a stupid bug to fly into it. We drink in the nature around us - insects, trees, bushes, shrubs, grass - an impala that runs when it gets a fright.

And then suddenly the game shelter's long, winding, wooden walkway is in front of us. As I close the gate behind us, I feel an anguish gripping me. Quietly we walk down the long, narrow, winding corridor. Finally the steps of the game shelter! My heart was pounding excitedly in my throat. What are we going to find there? Will there ever be anything?

I gasp for breath as we enter the thatched roof building. In front of us the panorama of a waterhole unfolds literally buzzing all the animals and birds that congregate there. It is

life in all abundance! Zebras, wildebeest, wart hogs, impalas, nyalas and flocks of birds darting between the tree branches and the water. What a feast!

In a sense, there are many similarities between our journey to the watering hole and history. The rough dirt road is the Old Testament, where it often went extremely rough. Very strict laws applied, and you dared not deviate from them for one moment. In order to receive salvation, you had to stay on the path that God had outlined there, and not deviate from it. This was made even worse by the Pharisees with their man-made laws hanging like millstones around their necks. Then came John - who now owned the parking lot - and great excitement reigned. Somewhere ahead is the new dispensation, but no one can really see it yet, and everyone is wondering about it. The breathtaking time begins when Jesus lifts the curtain ever so slightly for three years. With Him, you discover the freedom that awaits you when you walk down the footpath. Yes,

the law is still there, and you dare not deviate from the path, but now you are no longer stuck in the rigid law hubcap of the car.

We witness with Jesus the oppressive dark passage of His trial, crucifixion and death. But at the end of it, the New Testament explodes in all it's glory before you as you enter the cool game shelter.

The Pharisees laughed at Jesus over His parable of the wise ruler. But Jesus saw through them. Their attitude towards the law was totally skewed. They try to pose terribly pious in front of the people. Every title and iota of the law is observed down to the finest detail, but from within they are rotten. Outwardly they must appear very good to impress people, but for them it is simply a matter of keeping laws for the sake of the law.

Jesus emphasizes the fact that the law is important, but it is the attitude with which you uphold the law that is of crucial value. The coming of Jesus did not mean that the law is

now thrown out the door. The fact is, in short, no one can get salvation by keeping the law, because no one can do it perfectly, and only 100% perfection is good enough for God.

In Jesus, however, believers have complete acquittal. You keep the law now, not because it will get you into heaven, but to live out your gratitude and love for God. Example: In the game shelter there is a sign that says SILENCE! It is deadly quiet, not because the sign (the law) says so, but because we do not want to spoil it for the other people. And I'm definitely not going to walk through the opening to the waterhole, because then the animals are going to run away, and I'm going to spoil everyone's fun. The law serves as a guideline and out of love for God and my fellow-man I will try my best to abide by the law. However, I also do not see it as a difficulty, but rather a joy and a challenge to abide by God's guidelines.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the wonderful freedom

You have given us. Please help me not to abuse my freedom.

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Lazarus and the Rich Man

Luke 16: 19-31

Have you ever been thirsty, terribly thirsty? I remember from my years of military service what scorching thirst feels like. We were driven day-after-day by the sergeant to absolute breaking point! I still remember how my throat felt like a fireplace. My tongue was glued to my palate, and I longed for just a drop of water. When I finally got the chance to drink, I filled my steel roof (it's now that steel hat that the troops wear in battle) full of water and drank and drank and drank until my stomach was full. I just simply could not get enough. Someone else tells of a survival course he did in the army, and where the most terrible thirst overtook him. His little water supply was up, and the sun shone down on him mercilessly. To his great joy, he found a small muddy pool of water in the veldt. Right in the middle was a large cake of elephant dung. Without even thinking twice,

he pushed the dung aside and swallowed the muddy brew with fervour! How thirsty can one become?!

Jesus opens the curtains of the afterlife for us very slightly. In fact, He is still talking to the Pharisees after they have laughed at His statements about the dangers of wealth. He tells a story of a rich man who lived in great luxury while a poor man sat and cringed in misery in front of his house, hoping that he could get a few crumbs to eat. The contrast that Jesus paints between the two is enormous: the rich man's cup overflows, and parties are the norm of his every day life. The poor fellow named Lazarus is, in addition to his poverty in great pain and his body is covered in sores. The only relief he gets is from the stray dogs licking his sores. By the way, this is the only parable Jesus tells where one of the characters has a name. His name, Lazarus means "God Helps" and Jesus probably used it symbolically.

Jesus tells that both died, and suddenly the

roles were reversed. For the last time the rich man was spoiled with a lavish burial, and for the last time Lazarus' body was probably thrown away on the rubbish dump in the valley of Gehinnom. But then comes the transformation, and Lazarus is carried away by angels to Abraham. The rich man? He ends up in the realm of the dead, and now it is suddenly he who endures the pain while Lazarus rests and finds happiness next to Abraham!

A terrible thirst overwhelms the rich man, and he pines for a drop of water. He probably would have drunk the elephant dung mud water too - if only there had been any. But there was nothing! Only scorching, exhausting heat of the fire consuming him! Worst of all was that he could see Lazarus across the gorge. He begged Abraham to help, but Abraham was powerless. Then he begs Abraham to send an angel to warn his family who are left behind. But Abraham just shook his head!

The fact is that the rich man on earth had more than enough time to alleviate the plight of poor Lazarus. He also had more than enough resources, but he did not bother to pay any attention to this poor man in need. The only love there ever was in his life was love for himself. For others and especially the poor, he did not give a damn!

The purpose of Jesus' parable was not to show us what it looks like on the other side of death, although we do get such a slight glimpse of the "other side". The period immediately after your death is actually a kind of intermediate state, where your body and soul are separated. Your perishable body remains behind as your soul enters eternity, where there is already a separation between the saved and the unsaved. For the saved, there is heavenly salvation along with all the other saved through the ages. For the unsaved awaits the terror of the grave. This is apparently not Hell yet! With the return of Jesus, something wonderful happens, when people get a new body again. But this is a

discussion for another day!

What is Jesus' message for us modern people today? No, not that it's wrong to be rich. The question, however, is how to mangle and manage your wealth. Yes, and this applies not only to the stinking rich, but also to you and me, the ordinary people. Are you willing to live with an open hand and open your eyes to the needs of other people? Everything again comes down to love: Jesus pressed on people's hearts on several occasions that you should not only live out love for God, but just as important that you should live out love for your fellow-man in all areas.

Prayer:

O Lord, I stand so guilty when it comes to living out love. So often I prefer to look the other way. Forgive me, and please help me to live out my love to the fullest.

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Difficult Assignments

Luke 17: 1-10

If yesterday's Scripture passage, which dealt with the need for an open hand for the poor, was a problem for you, then the statements Jesus makes today might be an even bigger problem for you. The reaction to yesterday's devotion was that people asked: "How do I know who to give to? How do I know it's not just for a bottle of booze?" The answer is not so simple at all! I personally have often been done in by slick-mouthed swindlers who cry a sad story, and then you give in. But in the meantime, the person is laughing at you for falling for his trick! The fact is that you will not always be able to distinguish between true need and scams. However, it is on that person's conscience. God is the One who will judge!

This morning Luke tells of four difficult statements Jesus made - situations that

come our way every day, and which we handle completely wrong most of the time.

The first one can be a very annoying assignment, because it requires of me to give up certain things for the sake of other young believers. In short, someone who has just come to faith is still like a baby, extremely fragile and the slightest thing can make him stumble. So I have to be very careful what I say to that person or what I do so that I may not be the cause of his fall. For example, there are many issues in the Bible for which we simply do not have a clear answer. For the "old" believer this is not a problem, because he accepts it in faith. For the brand new believer, however, it can be an insurmountable mountain, so I should rather avoid the subject when I talk to him. There can also be things that I take for granted, and that can be a stumbling block for him. Then I rather make the sacrifice to stay away from it for the sake of him.

The second commandment is to speak to my

fellow-believer if he does something wrong. It's something I do very easily! The hard part, though, is that I have to forgive him if he has offended me. And if he does it seven times? Then I forgive him seven times! Elsewhere, Jesus tells His disciples to forgive someone seventy times seven times! That does not mean I have to sit down and count! It is certainly not easy to forgive someone who irritates me boundlessly but over and over and over again without holding anything against him!

The disciples realized how difficult it is to abide by these precepts of Jesus, so they ask Him to give them more faith. Jesus' response is that He makes it even clearer to them how radical His demands really are. He explains that if only they had a faith as small as a mustard seed, then they could move mountains!

If a little bit of faith could accomplish such an overwhelming action, then only a little bit of faith is needed to be able to carry out Jesus'

commands. Yes, indeed, Jesus' demands are very high. Often it looks like Mount Everest in my path! The fact is, however, that anyone who wants to venture into faith gets the surprise that that step is accompanied by near-impossible strength. Many missionaries today can testify that wherever they met with impossible situations, miracles happened. The great secret is that we have the Holy Spirit in the first place who gives us the inexhaustible source of immeasurable power.

However, there is a serious warning: I never, ever dare abuse this Source of power by trying to twist God's arm or manipulate Him! I cannot force God! Secondly, I never dare to ever believe faith as a kind of "magic" that I can use to my own advantage! It must be for the glory of God at all times.

This brings us to the fourth commandment, which is partly contrary to other statements of Jesus. Through a parable, Jesus explains that we must be like slaves to God. Now you want to protest immediately: "But we are His

children!"

Yet, in a sense, believers are like slaves! A slave deserves absolutely nothing, because he is his owner's property. After all, the owner bought him! We were indeed bought very expensively! You and I have done absolutely nothing to earn God's favour. Everything we have done is an abomination in His sight. Yet He saved us and gave us salvation. For that reason we serve Him with all that is in us, without expecting favours from Him in return. We serve Him because we are thankful that He snatched us from the clutches of the devil and eternal damnation and gave us the privilege of being part of His "family." So to say: "Lord, I will work hard for You, but then I would like a nice house," is totally wrong. Yet, in spite of all our shortcomings, and in spite of the fact that we grieve Him so often, He overwhelms us every day with gifts of grace. Let us live gratefully, and serve Him with all we have!

Prayer:

Lord, all I can say this morning is, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" I do not deserve any of Your goodness to me!

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Ten Lepers

Luke 17: 11-19

Luke reminds us once again that Jesus and his followers were still traveling to Jerusalem. He does not say exactly how long it took, but it feels to us as if these few miles lasted forever. Did it perhaps go so slowly because of the large number of people who were constantly seeking Jesus' attention? He constantly taught the people wherever He went, and there were rows of sick people who needed His attention.

Luke describes a sad picture when they arrive at one of the villages. A group of ten very helpless men stood at a distance and shouted at Jesus: "Jesus, Lord, have mercy on us!" These poor men were outcasts from society. They were forced to stay in the veldt outside the city and they did not dare make contact with anyone. They were lepers!

It was a hopeless and comfortless situation. They must have heard of Jesus a long time previously and they sat patiently waiting for Him to visit their village. Nights went by, when their conversations went about the possibility that this Jesus would one day come their way. One of these men was different from the others - he was a Samaritan. Now we already know that Samaritans did not mix with Jews. However, their terrible disease bound them together in such a way that they even tolerated this Samaritan in their midst.

That morning there was great excitement in the group. They heard that Jesus was heading in their direction. Then someone notices a movement down in the plain - not just one or two people walking, but the whole valley was in motion with thousands of people together! The man with the many sores on his body shouted excitedly to his accomplices: "Look! He is on his way! "

"What are we going to do?"

"Stand together men, stand together so that He simply has to see us."

The hours drag by slowly as the procession in the plain moves closer at a snail's pace. "How much longer? How much longer!" The men become impatient. "Why are they moving so slowly?"

Almost a day later, Jesus and his entourage finally arrive at the village. The crowd around Him reluctantly recoils as the ten lepers suddenly block their way. Like one man, the ten beg for help. They are at the end of their strength. With us as readers, a huge tension has already been building up, because something is going to happen here. A great miracle must take place here today! It is an anticlimax when Jesus simply tells the men, "Go and show yourselves to the priests!"

The priests were the only institution that could declare someone suffering from leprosy clean and healthy again. Not even a medical doctor (like Luke) could diagnose this terrible disease in a healthy way. Like

one man, the group turn around and run to the priests. As they run, the miracle happens - their sores disappear!

However, unbelievably one of the men, the Samaritan, stopped abruptly. Suddenly there was something much more important to him than getting to the priests to be declared clean. He turned and ran back to Jesus and fell at His feet. "Thank you Lord, thank you, thank you, thank you!" Tears of gratitude rolled down his cheeks. He was bubbling with joy and he praised God aloud for the miracle that happened to him!

"And the other nine?" Jesus wants to know. "What happened to them?"

This Samaritan - he is not even a Jew - personally committed himself to Jesus with his turning around and gratitude. Not only because he had been healed, but because in Jesus he saw Someone much more than just a Miracle Worker. We never heard from the other nine again.

Over the years, I have received numerous letters from people asking how they can become a Christian. For each of them, I outlined the gospel message. Only a few of all these people ever came back and related that they really met Jesus and committed themselves to Him. What became of all the others? Did they also vanish into thin air like these nine men? There must have been thousands of people healed by Jesus, but only a small handful of them committed themselves personally to Him, and followed Him to the bitter end. These few men eventually became the core of the church that spread like wildfire around the world.

If you have heard the gospel message and experienced Jesus' wonderful salvation, it simply cannot be otherwise, that you flourish in your gratitude to Him. To live out your love for God and your fellow-man must simply be a natural response. The question is: how do you experience your Christianity? Like the nine that disappeared? Or like the grateful Samaritan?

Prayer:

Lord, I want to fall down in gratitude to You again this morning. Thank you for everything you have done for me. Teach me to live out my gratitude to the fullest.

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The Son Comes Again

Luke 17: 20-37

"Let Your Kingdom come, Lord", we pray the Lord's Prayer, without actually realizing what we are praying for. Where and when is this "Kingdom" and what is it? Is this perhaps Jesus' return?

No, Jesus explains Himself when the Pharisees confront Him with this issue. "It is here with you," says Jesus. "Do you not see Me then?", Jesus might have shouted at them. God's Kingdom came with Jesus' coming to earth. The greatest highlight of the Kingdom time was the day when Jesus paid the great ransom for our sins. For the men who asked Him that question, that time was very near. They could experience it in person. What an incredible privilege! But they chose to ignore it.

With Jesus' last word on the cross,

everything was accomplished. The full price has been paid and the new dispensation has arrived, the dispensation in which you and I are currently standing. We are in the midst of the heyday of the Kingdom. Maybe not quite like that, because once again the time is running out very fast, and we can already see the dark clouds building up for the big day of Jesus' return.

September 11 is still fresh in our memory. People went their usual ways. They went to work, did business transactions, read their E-mail. And then suddenly there was a deafening blow that shook the shopping center. Panicked, people tried to flee the building, but it was already too late. Minutes later, the twin building next door was also hit, and before the elevators could deliver the first people below, the two buildings collapsed with thousands of people inside. Within minutes it was all over! In the blink of an eye!

On the other side of the world, people lie

around on the white beaches of an exotic island. The sea is like a mirror, almost not even a ripple. What a paradise! And then a very strange thing happens, the water suddenly starts to recede. People are amazed at this phenomenon of a supernatural low tide. Then the tsunami wave hits them totally unexpectedly. Thousands of people are swept away from the face of the earth in the blink of an eye. No one ever expected that. Just like no one ever expected the September 11 disaster!

Jesus explains to His disciples the calamity of Noah's time. Jaco Thom wrote a marvellous series of booklets years ago: "Die Bybelkoerant". In it he tells of Bible events in the form of newspaper articles. One report said that everyone thought that the old man (now Noah) had become completely cuckoos and that he wanted to build a ship in the middle of the desert. And when he chased that bunch of wild animals into his ship, they laughed. Yes, and then came the rain. But even when the water rolled down in rivers

from the mountains, the people still mocked Noah. Everything was over very quickly, and the loss of life was a catastrophe. Only a small handful in the belly of the big ship survived!

In the two villages, Sodom and Gomorrah, people lived in sin. Then came the day of the great calamity, of "brimstone and fire." The only survivors were Lot and his two daughters. Even his wife was left in the lurch when she began to long for the good life in Sodom. For thousands of people there was no escape. Years later, the same fate befell the prosperous city of Pompeii. All that was left were the ghost shapes of thousands of people who longed for another chance while engulfed in ashes and toxic smoke.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah must surely have seen the signs and the inhabitants of Pompeii must have heard the rumbling in the mountain. Noah warned the laughing, mocking crowd that had gathered around his ship, but they did not heed to him.

Today all the signs are already there that the return of Jesus will take place just as it is described in the Bible. The day and time no one can predict. It may be ten or a hundred years from now, or it can still happen today! The tsunami in the East was the result of tensions that built up in the earth's crust over several years. No one could predict exactly when the earthquake would come, but all the signs were there that it would happen. Still, people did not heed the warning signs.

Do not be caught unawares at Jesus' return. Make sure you're ready for it, because if you are not, death that awaits is a horror I do not wish on anyone. The flame hell of September 11 is child's play against what awaits for the unprepared.

What about those who are ready? Like Noah and his family, they will be safe in the ark as well. However, there is one very big difference, because Noah was still earthbound. When you are ready for Jesus' return, your safe haven is the new Jerusalem

as described in Revelation. Breathtaking!

Prayer:

Lord, I look forward with great anticipation to
Your return!

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Prayer

Luke 18: 1-14

Jesus tells two parables about prayer. In the first, He wants to say that prayer bears fruit, and that you must keep praying. In the second, He clarifies with what attitude we should pray.

I have had many sad letters over the years from people who say that they keep praying and praying for a certain cause, but that it feels as if the Lord does not hear the prayer. Others say that it feels as if they are praying against a ceiling, and that they do not reach the Lord at all through prayer. My own, very noble prayer was that the Lord would let me serve as a minister in a congregation. I had to watch my dream slip through my fingers. The Lord did not grant my prayer, and I could never understand why - it was such an honest and noble request. Only many years later did my eyes open when the Lord gave

me the opportunity to minister thousands of people with the gospel daily through the internet.

When Jesus relates the parable, He begins by describing a judge. From someone in such an office, we would expect compassion and justice. However, this judge totally ignored the woman's request. Then we hear that this man had no respect for God in the first place, and that he did not bother about people at all. All he thought about was his own self-esteem. When the woman kept nagging that he was handling her case, he finally gave in, simply to protect his image. The woman's actions were shameless according to the social norms of the time. But she was desperate and on top of that determined!

Jesus commented on the story with a comparison between the unjust judge and God. From this we learn that God is so much more just than this man who only thought of himself. That judge cared nothing for people,

but the Lord has infinite compassion for His children! In many places in the Bible we read of His wonderful, incomprehensible love for us, and how He has mercy on us. We read that He takes interest in every believer. We may therefore go to Him in prayer and ask Him for things. Even though it often feels to you as if He does not hear your prayer, you can know for sure this morning: He is listening to your plea!

Why then is my honest prayer often not granted? The problem is that you and I think and reason very small. Our minds are smaller than mustard seeds compared to God, and therefore we often only see the small circle presently around us. God sees a much, much bigger picture. Moreover, he sees not only the present and past that we see, but also the future! After all, he has been designing the future for a long time! That is why He often gives in a different way and much better than we ask. I know - I have first hand experience of it! I can only proclaim with great praise that He is great and good

and omniscient, and thinks so much greater than I, insignificant man. The big secret is that He wants us to keep praying in order to, among other things, declare our total dependence on Him!

The second parable Jesus tells about prayer is about our attitude. We see the high-ranking Pharisee standing in the temple and actually singing his own praises before the Lord. He tells God, and especially everyone who listens to him, what a good person he really is, and what he does for the church.

What is prayer really about? Prayer is an honest conversation with God where it is primarily about the most important Conversation Partner. Let's take an example: if you had the opportunity to chat with a world-famous icon, say the Queen of England, what would your conversation entail? You will be so excited, that you will not think of yourself at all for the time being! You will tell her how you admire her, and thank her for the wonderful privilege she has

given you. Because she has great power, you might ask her to share some of her incredible wealth with the people in South Africa who are in great need. The opportunity is so great, that you completely forget about yourself.

When we talk to God, then it is with Someone so much bigger! The mere thought of it makes one tremble with excitement! Do we still ever have that respect and admiration for Him? Do we still feel small and insignificant and powerless before the King of all kings? Do we still want to burst into jubilant, excited praise for Him every time we have the opportunity to have a conversation with Him? When we talk to Him, then our minds should be so big, that we do not see ourselves and our insignificant needs, but the bigger picture of thousands and millions of others who are so much worse off than ourselves. Oh, and of course we may also lay our own needs at His feet. After all, He is our loving Father and we are so dependent on Him!

Prayer:

Almighty Father, this morning I want to trumpet forth Your greatness for the whole world!

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Jesus and the Children

Luke 18: 15-17

A few years ago I was watching a TV program where an interview was conducted with a very famous playwright. As the conversation progressed, an annoying noise began to build up outside the house where the recording was made. Suddenly the big stage personality (Celebrity?) gets up and steps outside while the cameraman follows him. In the street in front of his house, a bunch of children were playing very loudly. With great patience and love he went to talk to them nicely and explained about the TV recordings and the sound and that there had to be silence. They just had to please go and play elsewhere for the moment. They could come back later.

And then the thought struck me that this bunch of noisy kids really had the guts to play here right in front of the famous man's

door. He definitely had to have a love for children! If it was any other celebrity, then his bodyguards would have already span a cordon around the house to expel any unwanted persons! Just look at how Hollywood's celebrities react, and how curious people are often even assaulted by their guards. No child will risk it near those celebrities because they are "troublesome" and certainly do not fit into their high lifestyle!

Today, children have all kinds of constitutional rights. In biblical times it was very different. Back then, children were worth hardly more than a man's property. In the company of adults, they certainly would not have been welcome. Besides slaves, they were at the very bottom of the social ladder - unlike today where children often have more rights than adults. So when some mothers brought their children to Jesus so that He could touch or bless them, the disciples were immediately warm under the collar. They wanted to "protect" Jesus, so they chased away the mothers and children. He had much

better things to do with His time than to talk to simple children!

However, the men did not take Jesus into account. They very clearly did not understand at all what is was about. Not only did Jesus care for tax collectors and sinners and even “unclean” Samaritans, but now also for these lowest of the lowest, with absolutely no rights - little children!

Jesus stopped the disciples in their tracks, and asked them to let the children come to Him. I can imagine the little children gathered around Jesus in amazement and the disciples standing and shaking their heads in horror. They do not understand at all! First the meal with the tax collectors and all the scum of the city, and now this! What about Jesus' self-esteem? And of course they are also dragged into this, because they are Jesus' disciples! No, it's time for Jesus to start getting direction in life!

Then Jesus looks at them sympathetically: "The Kingdom of God is for people like

them", Jesus explains to them. "He who does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

The disciples were devastated, utterly dumbfounded. What did Jesus mean by this? Their traditions that had been drilled into them through the ages were now crumbling. After all, faith is something you practise by keeping the law and sacrificing and worshipping in the temple. But now Jesus says that you must become like a child. No, it cannot be!

It would take a very long time for these hardened men who were so deeply rooted in their traditions to truly understand Jesus' words. Even today, it is difficult to understand exactly what Jesus meant here. But let's take a look at what childhood means.

In the first place, there is his weakness, fragility and powerlessness. Only when I begin to realize my own weakness, fragility and powerlessness can I come to Jesus. Someone who is strong and independent

often thinks that he does not need God in his life. He is a self-made man who can take care of himself, even on the spiritual level. When you realize that day that you really have no chance of gaining eternal life on your own strength, then you are ready to accept the Lord's help.

Secondly, there is the total dependence that a child has on his parents. Without them he cannot survive. They feed him and give him clothes, love and care. No little one can support himself! Likewise, as a believer, I must realize my total dependence on God. I need to know that everything I have comes from Him, and that I can only go to Him for my daily needs.

Third, there is the childlike confidence and admiration. Dad will protect me, no matter what. My dad is the strongest and most wonderful man in the whole world! Is this also how we feel about God? Is He still for us the most wonderful Father there can ever be?

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me to be able to believe like a child again.

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Desires

Luke 18: 18-30

Desires have meant the end of many people. The whole thing with desires had already begun in paradise, when Eve had such a terrible desire for that forbidden fruit. I mean, the whole garden was abundant with the juiciest fruits to choose from and taste! But Eve? She specifically wanted that one on which God had placed a ban. Yes, and history has proved that she got her fruit and that she also seduced Adam with it and that they were kicked out of the garden!

Years ago I had a bush cottage in Marloth Park. There was not a normal green lawn but barren soil around the house on which not even a blade of grass had grown. It was not my own choice that it should be so. Originally I planted a lawn and it grew lushly. The warthogs kept it at just the right length. But then there was a great drought and so the

snouts shoveled everything out until afterwards only a single blade of grass was still visible here and there.

The next summer I planned a lawn again. When the first green blade sprouted above the red soil, I could already see the desire glistening in the warthogs' beady little eyes for my patch of green grass. I chased them away, but it was no use. I threw thorn branches over the fragile young shoots, but the hogs' desires were so overwhelming that they cautiously wormed their snouts between the thorns to come and pluck my tender sprouts. Even though there was an abundance of green grass in the veldt!

The tenth commandment says that you may not desire. This is the most difficult of all the commandments to keep. And this is precisely the problem of the rich young man with whom Jesus spoke. He was a good guy - he tried his best to live strictly according to the law. He also had great respect for Jesus and he knew exactly where to look for the one

answer that kept eluding him, how to get eternal life. Jesus mentioned a series of commandments and the man honestly said that he kept them all from an early age. However, one commandment that Jesus deliberately left out was that tenth commandment. He knew that this commandment was also the young man's great obstacle.

"Sell everything you have, and distribute the money to the poor." Jesus pressed his finger right on the sore spot. The poor man just turned around and walked away without being able to get what he came for, eternal life! The man was so attached to his earthly possessions that it came to stand between him and God.

But now this made me think about the warthogs on my lawn. Wasn't I maybe the hog in the story, the guilty one? Maybe I was the culprit because I did not want to share my lawn with the warthogs. Maybe I became so attached to my sacred green grass, that it

stood between me and true happiness. Maybe I should make peace with the fact that I only planted grass for the warthogs!

As the man walked away with bowed shoulders, Jesus turned to his disciples and explained to them that it was virtually impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. He used the example that it is easier to push a giant camel through the tiny hole of a needle's eye than for a rich person to get to heaven!

His disciples were dismayed! But then it is totally impossible to ever get to heaven! No one will ever make it there! Jesus reassured them, because with God nothing is impossible. What seems to us totally impossible is with God second nature. The fact is that if you are willing to allow the Lord to change your life, then you can become a whole new person, even in the most impossible of circumstances.

Note that Jesus is not saying here that it is a sin to be rich. However, it is what you do with

your wealth that can be sin. It all comes down to attitude: with what kind of attitude in your heart do you handle your money? Unfortunately, wealth can easily become an idol. When the millions start pouring in, you cling convulsively to every penny you earn. And the further it goes, the harder it becomes to share your wealth with the poor. You begin to build, as it were, a wall between you and God with money and possessions.

However, I also know many wealthy people who are deeply religious and constantly stand with an open hand. To them, their possessions were only lent to them by God. They are the stewards to use these possessions and money to the glory of God and to serve their fellow-man. There are some of them in our own congregation, and you can clearly see how happiness and love radiate from their lives. But there are also poor people in our congregation with the same attitude - people who are willing to share the little they have with underprivileged people as well. The true desire to cherish is

the desire to live close to the Lord, and to fully live out His wonderful love!

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me not to be attached to my possessions.

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"I'm Going to Die!"

Luke 18: 31-34

When I walked into Uncle Ted's bedroom, I just knew - things were not looking good at all. Uncle Ted D'Alton was co-editor of our congregation newsletter - a dear believer. At one point, he started writing an article every month about his life experiences. I could not wait for the end of the month to read the next episode. It was exciting and very interesting. And then came the damning news: Uncle Ted has liver cancer and his health is deteriorating drastically.

When I visit him where he lies with golden-yellow features on his bed, it is a deeply religious person who talks to me. He is ready to meet Jesus, and the pain he is now enduring only intensifies the longing for his final journey even more. I try to cheer him up, and say that he cannot leave now until his story has been written. We are all sitting in

suspense waiting for the next episode. He just laughs the remark away, because now there are much more important and much bigger things in his life to look forward to. A few days later he left for a place where the pain of the cancer no longer gnawed at him.

Jesus takes the twelve chosen men aside and has a very serious conversation with them. These are the men who have been by His side every day for the past three years and have gone through every miracle, suffering, being mocked and preaching with Him. They were there with His very first miracle when He had stone jugs full of water turned into the most delicious wine at the wedding in Cana. They were all present when the terrible storm hit their boat and Jesus silenced it with a single word. They know Jesus through and through! Or do they ever really know Him? Jesus gave them a very intensive training for three years, because the great responsibility of the leadership of the church would soon rest on their shoulders. They were the men who

would have to carry on the message that Jesus began to preach.

Jesus looks directly at the men and then He tells them what lies ahead for Him. This is the third time He has given them this shocking news! This time, however, He does not mince matters, but spells it out straight that He will be delivered to the gentiles. In detail, Jesus describes to the men exactly what is going to happen. He is going to be mocked and insulted and the people are going to spit on Him. The men's hearts beat in their throats as Jesus describes to them how the soldiers are going to whip Him and then after all the torture, kill Him!

I think the men wanted to cover their ears so they would not have to listen to this horror story any further. How can people be so terribly cruel to Someone who has never harmed anyone? How could they want to whip Him if He never committed any sin? What then did He do wrong? Jesus explains that it is all written in the books of the

prophets. Everything has been described in great detail by the messengers of God for a very long time. Now all the prophecies recorded in the Word are going to come true one by one.

But Jesus does not tell them about His death only. He also gives the wonderful news that He will rise again from the dead in a mere three days after all these happenings. I do not think the men even heard this sentence! Their minds were so clouded by the disturbing thoughts of their Master's suffering and death, that the prospect of His resurrection did not even reach their ears.

How tragic that after two thousand years, the news of Jesus' resurrection has still not reached the ears of some believers! A few years ago it resounded in the corridors of the theologians where they argued about Jesus' resurrection. "He did not rise physically!" some learned men wanted to claim. "He only rose spiritually, and the disciples experienced it in a spiritual way in their hearts!"

That's not what my Bible teaches! My Bible says very clearly that Jesus had a physical body, one where Thomas could put his fingers in the holes caused by the nails in Jesus' hands. He even roasted and ate fish with the disciples on the beach.

We often stare so blindly against the "finality" of death that we do not want or cannot see the reality of it. Death is only a finality if the person's name is not written in the book of life. However, Jesus opened the door for every believer to eternal life, where death is only the gateway to the glory of life - a perfect life with Jesus! Uncle Ted looked forward to that wonderful day with great anticipation and excitement!

Unfortunately, it is very difficult for those who are left behind and still have to wait. Yes, we may be sad and you may cry when your loved one walks down that path. The loneliness and longing for your partner of many years makes you sad. But the wonderful knowledge that one day you will

meet again can only give you a wonderful expectation and joy.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for leading us and making room for our wonderful life after death.

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Jericho's Blind Man

Luke 18: 35-43

The poor wretch is sitting under his usual tree along the highway outside Jericho, where he has been sitting for many years now. He knows every sound of the environment like the palm of his hand. If Zebedee is still walking from afar, he already recognizes him by his footsteps and he exclaims cheerfully: "'Morning Zebedee!" Yes, indeed he is blind and therefore there is no work for him anywhere. It's so unfair! But the blindness sharpens all his other senses. He knows every woman in the area by the scent of her perfume and no voice of a local is foreign to him. But how he longs to be free from his struggle for existence! How he wishes that he could also do a normal day's work instead of having to look passers-by in the eye (?) for alms!

Excited, he dreams of the day when that

exciting Prophet Jesus would pass by here. He has heard of the miraculous healings that this Man of God does. The people whisper that He may be the Messiah, the Son of David of whom the prophets wrote!

He listens with a smile to a bird singing near by in a tree. And then a strange sensation comes to him. In the ground he feels a strange vibration, as if thousands of human feet were stamping the earth. Suddenly his heart starts pounding wildly. Supposing - just supposing that it might be that Jesus! The vibration becomes more and more intense, and then softly in the distance he hears the shuffling of thousands of feet coming closer and closer. It must be Him! The time crawls by slowly, very slowly. He wants to run towards the crowd, but his blindness stops him. No, maybe he should just wait here, because they're going to have to come here past his little tree!

The rumble of voices and the crunch of sandals on the gravel path become a

deafening roar like a giant millipede approaching. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He shouts as loud as he can to try to get above the crowd's noise, but no one seems to hear him. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He screamed again, over and over, from full chest. "Oh keep quiet, you're making a noise!" someone is trying to silence this annoying guy.

Suddenly it becomes quiet. The procession comes to a halt when Jesus stops. "Bring that man to Me," He asked His disciples. They still reluctantly want to remind Him that there is no time for miracles now, because Jerusalem is waiting! But then the blind man is wormed through the oppressive crowd to stand before Jesus. The man feels he wants to faint! Could this ever be true? His knees willy-nilly beneath him. Then he hears the soft voice full of compassion: "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, that I may see," he stammered. A holy silence descended on the crowd. You can

actually hear the neck vertebrae cracking as people stretch their necks to see what is happening. Then the blind man hears the compassionate voice again: "Right, you can see! Your faith has saved you."

Suddenly the whole world opens up to him. Confused, he stared into the faces of thousands of people around him. "I see! I can see! " Jubilant, dancing, the praises to God flowed over his lips while the tears of gratitude flowed down his cheeks. Suddenly the realization comes that he is no longer bound to his old tree where he has to sit day-by-day. While cheering, he becomes part of the crowd that follows Jesus. He never, ever wants to let go of this Jesus again! His excitement is very contagious, and in an instant the whole crowd dances and rejoices with him and sings praises to the glory of God!

What happened that day was a real gasping-for-breath miracle, and it could not help but capture everyone's imagination. Even with

today's incredible medical knowledge, it still remains a breathtaking miracle. However, if you think about it, today we are experiencing just such great miracles as well. What a breathtaking miracle it is when one day someone who is spiritually blind can suddenly see. It only takes someone who has been sent by the Lord to talk to the person, and suddenly the shells fall from his eyes and then he knows that he is a child of God! Suddenly that wonderful realization that his name was written in the Book of Life! It happened to me in 1974, and my joy knew no bounds! It was many years ago but still I want to trumpet it forth for everyone to hear: "Jesus saved me!"

The big secret is that you and I have to live out that happiness, excitement and joy in such a way that it is contagious. I challenge you to live out the wonder of your salvation also enthusiastically today! Rejoyce it out so that everyone around you will feel like singing along. Just think what effect it will have on the unbelievers with you. Maybe they will

also crave this glorious life. Be an ambassador, a very excited ambassador for Jesus!

Prayer:

Lord, I want to rejoice this morning so that the world can hear that You have healed my blindness!

The Man in the Tree

Luke 19: 1-10

Zacchaeus is a lonely man, rejected by society. Everyone tries to avoid him but a meeting with him is inevitable because at some point everyone has to see him to pay toll money! Yes, he worked very hard to get where he is. Since receiving the contract from the Romans that day to collect tolls, he has worked his way up to the unenviable position of Chief Customs Officer. Unfortunately, with the work came a huge price: everyone he could call his friends turned their backs on him one by one. It prompted him to just work harder and harder.

Today, Zacchaeus is a made man with everything you could wish for - anything but good friends. Oh yes, there are the other tax collectors and Roman officials, but one can hardly call them friends! A rough lot!

But there's something wrong with Zacchaeus lately. Ever since that John prophet preached the world on fire, he has been sitting with this feeling of dissatisfaction - that troublesome little voice in him that keeps saying that there is something much bigger in life than this false existence he is leading. Slowly a thought began to take hold of him that there was a great mistake somewhere in his life, and that he was rapidly on his way to eternal damnation! Yes, and now he cannot even talk to John about it anymore, because Herod had gone and chopped off the man's head! Stupid man! Wonder what had animated him!

But not all is lost - there is still the exciting Prophet, Jesus! Zacchaeus had heard much of this Man, and he was burning to see him. He had just heard via the grape vine that this Jesus was on his way to Jericho. Maybe now would be an opportunity to see Him.

There is great excitement in Jericho. Jesus, the Great Prophet of God, is on his way. Everyone is streaming to the city to see Him.

The news of the blind man having just been healed outside the city gates makes it buzz all over the city. It also reaches Zacchaeus' ears and he is excited. "Today is the day I might be able to talk to that Jesus too!"

He staggers on his short legs behind the crowd through the dusty streets of Jericho. But then his heart sinks in his shoes when he sees the thousands of people gathered around Jesus. With his short stature he cannot even see Jesus in the crowd! He tries to push through the crowd, but they push him away in annoyance. What is this traitor doing amongst them?!

But Zacchaeus does not give up. Some distance ahead there is a huge old fig tree along the street. Zacchaeus runs around the crowd and while panting and huffing the clumsy old man climbs into the fig tree. He smiles in excitement because from here he gets a great view of the procession that passes by. Why did no one else think of it? Of course, it does nothing for his dignity to

stand and climb trees at his age! But what the heck!

Slowly the masses pass under him. And then his heart misses a beat: Jesus! It's Him! And He comes to stand here right under His tree! Zacchaeus wants to talk to Him, but suddenly there are no words. His throat is dry and his heart is pounding so hard he can't get a word out! Then the miracle happens when Jesus looks up at him: "Zacchaeus, come down quickly! I want to stay over with you tonight."

Zacchaeus cannot believe his ears! Jesus spoke to him, wretched old Zacchaeus! And He wants to sleep over with him! It's impossible! Isn't this just a dream?

There is a murmur from the crowd. Everyone knows Zacchaeus, the blackmailer, the traitor! How can Jesus so humiliate, so pollute Himself by wanting to dwell with this wretched man? Even Jesus' disciples look at him questioningly. "Master, this is a sinful man, we cannot stay with him, can we?"

In Zacchaeus' luxurious house, everything is in turmoil. Everything has to be just right because Jesus is coming! Zacchaeus has already made a decision - this insane glamorous life of his is now a thing of the past. Today is the turning point in his life because he is going to turn his back on the greed that has driven him to this point. He's going to fix where he has left up, giving up half of his possessions to the poor people he's milked over the years for their hard - earned money. With tears in his eyes, he tells Jesus later that evening that he has blackmailed and cheated many people. But he's going to fix it all! He's going to give that money back fourfold to his victims. Sincere repentance is what Jesus sees in the heart of this broken man. "Today salvation has come for this house." Jesus' words are like soothing ointment on the raw wounds of Zacchaeus, the man who opened his heart to Jesus.

If you are possibly sitting in a fig tree today, perhaps extremely unworthy, you can be

assured that Jesus is already there! He has been waiting for you patiently for a long time. If you want to listen, you will hear Him lovingly say to you, “My child, come down today, I want to be a part of your life. I want to celebrate with you!” Won't you just submit? Won't you, like Zacchaeus, open up your heart to Him?

Prayer:

Lord, my heartfelt prayer goes out to everyone who reads this passage today, who is searching for You.

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Ten Gold Coins

Luke 19: 11-27

There is very great excitement amongst the crowd of people slowly moving up the mountain with Jesus from Jericho. In the distance, the impressive walls of the beautiful city of Jerusalem loom. Whispers go up among the people, that the Kingdom of God will come as soon as they reach Jerusalem. After all, Jesus speaks of Jerusalem from time to time, and in recent weeks there has been such a terrible urgency with Him to get to Jerusalem on time. Who knows - maybe He is the Christ after all, and now God is going to raise Him to be King over Israel! He is going to sit on the throne of His ancestor David, and He is going to deliver Israel from the domination of the hateful Romans. The expectation among the people reaches breaking point! Any moment now the Kingdom will be coming!

In a sense, these people were completely right. Jesus was and still is the Christ, the Messiah they were looking forward to. Yes, and He would indeed sit on the throne of David and reign as King! But He would rule not only over Israel but over the whole universe! In a sense, they were also right about the salvation, but the salvation that this King would offer them would be totally different from the one they were expecting. What they also did not realize or wanted to realize is that this coming of the Kingdom would be accompanied by rejection, suffering and persecution. This was all an integral part of God's Master Plan of salvation.

Jesus heard the whispers, and then He told them a parable to put the coming of the Kingdom in a little more perspective, and to explain that there is also a great responsibility on the shoulders of the people who are waiting for the Kingdom to dawn. Jesus' message to His followers is in short, that the Gospel is entrusted to them, and that they must use it to give God a good return.

If we are going to analyze Jesus' story, we see some very interesting things - truths that were not only meant to inspire the people of that time, but which today, two thousand years later, are still fresh and speak to each of us.

In the first scene we see a man of noble descent who would go away to receive his kingship. This Man is, of course, Jesus. Jesus therefore describes that the Man was hated by His countrymen and that they even sent a delegation to let them know that they did not want Him as king. How tragically this "prophecy" did not come true, so that the vast majority of Jesus' countrymen, the Jews, even today still fight against His kingship - something He received in spite of their rejection.

The command that the Man gave to his slaves was to make good use of the gold coins that he handed out to them. They had to trade with it and generate more coins.

Only a few months after this statement of

Jesus, the first results of the commission were already visible. The Apostles were the "organizers" in the congregation, and the believers were busy with the "gold coins" (the Gospel) they received. Everyone they came in contact with simply had to listen to their story, and the result was an explosion of the Gospel in Jerusalem. Before long, the Jewish church leaders became very worried about this wildfire that they could not stop, and then they started a persecution campaign. The result was that the believers fled into the wide world. But still they continued to indulge in their "gold coins". And so the Gospel sweeps over the outside world like waves.

Jesus' story tells of those slaves who worked hard and produced results. But the tragedy is that there was also one who went to bury his gold coin. Oh dear! How many believers do not bury their coins today! In New Testament times, people were cruelly persecuted for engaging in the Gospel. Still, they steamed on. Today we are not really being prosecuted for it - maybe rejected, yes. Why then are we

so terribly afraid to indulge in the Gospel? Are we then more afraid of people than of God? I am not saying that we should live in fear and trembling for Him, but if we refuse to carry out the simple commission He has given us, we can certainly not expect blessing on our lives. In Mat. 28: 18-20 Jesus spells out this command: "Go therefore and make new disciples of all nations"

I do not know about you, but I certainly do not want to be in the position where the Lord has to say to me, "You are a bad slave!" He has given me eternal life, and so I want to do things to show that I am grateful and that I love Him. That's why I'll also make good use of my "gold coin."

Prayer:

Lord, please give me a passion for the Gospel - give me zeal to carry it out and live it.

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The Great Entry

Luke 19: 28-44

When I think of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, I hear the music of the Great March from the opera Aida! That incredibly beautiful music depicting the great triumphal procession brings to life this procession of thousands of singing, palm-branch-waving people dancing so excitedly before the King. Yet it was so terribly different.

Our scene begins this morning where Jesus and His impressive entourage reach the outskirts of Jerusalem. There is now a great excitement among the crowds, for here just before them are the centuries-old stone walls of the city of Jerusalem. On the Mount of Olives they walk through two small villages, Bethphage and Bethany.

Suddenly the whole big procession comes to a halt when Jesus stops. The tension builds

to a breaking point - what is He going to do? Jesus sends two of his disciples to fetch a donkey from the village in front of them. But it's not just any donkey - He describes to them exactly where they will get that donkey, on which no one has ever ridden, tied up. "The Lord needs him", they explain to the owner of the donkey as they hastily take the animal to Jesus.

Now you might be asking why Jesus' donkey had to be one that has never been ridden before? In the first place, the Old Testament precepts for a sacrificial animal are that it should be one that is set apart for the Lord, and therefore should not be used for everyday tasks. In a sense, this donkey is a "sacrificial animal". But there is also a second reason: The steed of a king is used only by the king! No one else dares to ride on it and it must be set apart for the king alone.

But why a simple donkey? Could it not have been just a proud horse? In biblical times, a donkey had a much higher status than it

does today, and it was considered a royal animal. The mere fact that Jesus would enter Jerusalem on a donkey confirmed His royal status to the crowd following Him. They understood very well exactly what was happening here.

So Jesus enters the city triumphantly and says by it that He claims that the beautiful city is His! But more importantly, the temple in Jerusalem also belongs to Him.

The crowd is in ecstasy! Not only do they throw their clothes on the donkey's back for Jesus to sit on, but they also throw their clothes on the road in front of the donkey so that the King can ride over them. In my mind I see the singing, dancing, cheering crowds all around Jesus on the donkey. The great triumphal procession has begun! From the top of the Mount of Olives, the road descends downhill to the city gates. When they take this last down hill, the crowd becomes frenzy with excitement. Singing with gusto they roar praises over all the

miracles of Jesus. "Praise the King, who comes in the name of the Lord!" They echo Psalm 118 over the gorges! "Peace in heaven and glory to God in the highest!" Thus the echoes travel through the valleys and hills and finally Jesus gets the honour that belongs to Him. After all, he is the Christ!

But not everything is kosher in the crowd, there are some men who are very bitter. They see the things that are happening as blasphemy. "Please silence your followers!" A Pharisee tries to persuade Jesus over the noise to keep the people quiet, but Jesus makes it very clear that this will not happen. Even if the people do not honour Him so much, the stones will still rejoice!

In the closing scene we see Jesus just before He enters the city. Tears streamed down His cheeks. He weeps over His beloved city that does not want to acknowledge Him as the Messiah. Outside the city the crowds rejoice over their King; inside, stern faces await Him with murder in their hearts. The judgment that

Jesus pronounces on Jerusalem is damning. Not many years later, every word of this prophecy of Jesus came true. The Jewish historian Josephus describes in his voluminous history book the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He tells of the terrible devastation when the temple was demolished in such a way that not two stones were left on top of each other, exactly as Jesus predicted. Today there is a Muslim mosque to the horror of every Jew, where the temple once shone in glory - a memorial to the Jews' rejection of Jesus. How terribly sad!

When Jesus enters the gates of Jerusalem, only confrontation, opposition, persecution and torture await Him. Deliberately, He literally rode into the lion's mouth, because it was part of God's great plan of salvation. The things that happened here in Jerusalem grab us as believers at our hearts, because these are things that hurt painfully. We see how our Saviour, Jesus, had to be so cruelly humiliated, flogged, and nailed to a cross.

How badly did He not suffer! And all because so that you and I can live!

Prayer:

Lord, in my mind's eye I see the rejoicing crowd, but also the cross on the other side of the walls. Thank you Lord, for the costly price that You paid for me as sinner!

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Cleansing the Temple

Luke 19: 45-48

Soon after the great entry when Jesus triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem amid great cheers from thousands of palm-waving, praise-singing fans, the first confrontation was already there. He sent out the message very clearly that the temple was the dwelling place of God. Since the day Moses pitched the first tent of worship, this tent, and later the temple that replaced it, was symbolically seen as God's dwelling place.

However, what Jesus found at the temple was anything but a holy site. The problem arose with the numerous pilgrims who constantly visited the temple. They had to offer sacrifices to the Lord. However, it was very difficult to travel with sacrificial animals for days or even weeks. In addition, the regulations for these animals were very strict.

They had to be spotless, without any flaws. A long journey usually took its toll and the animals often arrived there in a battered condition.

A few men saw the potential here to start a lucrative business! They could provide a service and provide sacrificial animals for the people who could not bring their own. At a price of course! They certainly looked at the battered animals that some people brought there and then shook their heads and told the people that such a battered sheep would most certainly not be acceptable to the Lord. And quite by chance, they now had a nice fat, acceptable sheep in the camp that they would gladly exchange for his old skinny sheep! At a price of course! And then there were the people who arrived there from abroad with foreign money, which of course would be totally unacceptable in the temple as a thanksgiving sacrifice. At a price (of course!) They were willing to exchange the money for real genuine acceptable Jewish money!

People were exploited, often by the temple officials themselves who had to oversee. And it happened right in the temple courtyard! It was, of course, the poor people who had to go through the worst here. When Jesus saw what was going on here, he threw out the band of robbers. John writes in his Gospel that Jesus was so angry that he braided a whip and chased the lot out after he threw down their tables, so serious was he about the scam that was desecrating the "dwelling place of God."

After clearing the temple of conspirators, Jesus made it his headquarters from where he began teaching the people in the temple courtyard. In the evening he and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives where they spent the night.

In the previous meditation we heard how He condemned the city in a very sad verdict. But still He tried to persuade the people of Jerusalem to accept the gospel message. Jerusalem was given one last chance to

settle her case with God. Would the city ever do that?

If we had been there, we would have seen a group of ringleaders standing in a circle, heads together in a very serious conversation. They were the chief priests, scribes and leaders who stood among themselves and grumbled and made plans to finally get rid of Jesus. He had to die! However, there was one very big problem, that the whole nation was still standing firmly behind Jesus. In the eyes of the people, Jesus did only very beautiful things. Their eyes still glistened over the breathtaking miracles they had witnessed time and time again. They still clung convulsively to the idea that He, as the Messiah, would deliver them from Roman oppression. Large crowds still flocked to the temple day after day to hear Jesus. Everyone eagerly clung to His lips.

Following the events in the temple, I want to stir this morning and ask the question

whether a church building is still a holy place today? I was at the inauguration of a new church building one day where the architect said in his speech that that building was not the “house of God”, but rather the Lord's workshop! After all, this is the place where people would be trained as full-fledged disciples to carry the Gospel to the whole world, as Jesus' command was in Matt. 28. The church building is the place where believers gather to, among other things, strengthen each other's faith by singing hymns and praying together.

Indeed, the temple was still seen as the abode of God, but it was in its last convulsions. A few days later, everything would change, when God tore down the veil. That act would make every believer become the temple, the abode of God. Today you and I are those temples. Indeed, it is no longer stone temples, but living churches and temples that symbolize the abode of God. We dare not allow this temple to turn into a den of robbers through sin. Let us give Jesus

free access today to also cleanse our temple so that we can be useful to Him.

Prayer:

Come Lord Jesus, and cleanse my life. I want to obey You and serve You with my life!

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Jesus' Authority

Luke 20: 1-8

It was again one of those gasping-for-your-breath-hot days in the Lowveld. Eventually the sun goes down, and Mosbolletjie and I go for a sundowner on the banks of the Crocodile River. We are lucky to get a thorn tree that at least casts a shadow – although a small one, because the sun was already setting. It clings tighter to the edge of the horizon to spit out some poisonous rays for the last time before the bushes swallow it.

We open our comfortable folding chairs in the half-shade, and sit back comfortably to enjoy the last light next to the calm, cool water with a glass of refreshment in hand to finally rinse off the scorching heat of the day. Our eyes are immediately drawn to a large sandbank in the middle of the river. A pair of grumpy old buffalo bulls took up residence on the cool sand, and they lay lazily stretched out - like

sun worshippers on Durban's beach. One guy even took it a step further, and he lay halfway in the river. I wonder to myself what he would do if a crocodile started nibbling on his toes?

But then something else catches my attention: in the middle of the sandbank stand two blacksmith plovers. No, actually they do not stand, they dance excitedly around, then this way, then that way. And they chirp and curse and scream endlessly. Every now and then the one runs right up against the nose of one old buffalo and I shudder for twhen he opens his mouth and swallows the troublesome little bird.

With a heavy sigh the sun falls, as it were, between the knob-thorn trees, and suddenly it's dusk. It is as if the whole Lowveld sighs with relief, to get rid of the scorching sun for now. But for the buffalo, it's also a sign that it's time to move on. One by one they begin to choose their course, until it is only the one who is so harassed by the plover who

remains lying down. And then he decides: enough is enough, and he lifts his bulky body out of the sand. The plover now becomes completely koekoes, and he storms at the buffalo. For a moment I thought he was kicking the buffalo against his shin, but I might have imagined it. Slowly the buffalo gets into gear and starts walking. Now Plover is totally beserked. It screams and flies and runs and charges, but Mr. Buffalo does not seem to mind the little nuisance, and walks his course - his eye steadfastly fixed on his destination.

We gratefully sank back into our chairs when the commotion finally subsided, and Mrs. Plover sat down on her nest, barely a metre from where buffalo had steamrolled past, without stepping on it.

This hysterical plover reminds me so much of Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees and scribes and chief priests. During the three years of Jesus' ministry, they were stubborn. Every now and then we see how they confront Him,

and then you wonder if they now really think that they can take on the wonderful wisdom of the Son of God? Who do they actually think they are? All the time we see "attacks", mostly half-hearted.

But suddenly they are terrified when Jesus enters their headquarters, Jerusalem. Now they get very excited and they launch attack after attack. The case starts becoming very serious, because it gets uncomfortably close to their "nest". During one such attack, Jesus is confronted by them with the question with what authority He does these things? Jesus immediately sees the dangersigns of. If He says that He does those with God's authority (which would be the truth), then they will just arrest Him there and then for blasphemy. So He answers with a counter-question that they dare not answer, because no matter how they answer, they will still get into trouble. "Does the baptism of John come from God or from men?"

The bunch of learned men struggled to get

out of this difficulty, because they have dug a grave for themselves. "No, we do not know!"

Jesus' answer to them, that He is not going to tell them with what authority He does these things, has the ringleaders furious. They knew exactly what the answer was, but they refused to accept it.

The "plovers" have never stopped breeding, and even today their offspring still lament hysterically. In the high theological circles, some clever men huff and puff who refuse to accept Jesus' authority. But I think we may also have to put our hand in our own bosom, because sometimes we ourselves are also guilty. Sometimes we get angry with Jesus, or we become very unhappy when things do not want to go the way we wanted them to. The plover made noise because he thought his nest was in danger, but the buffalo knew exactly where to tread. Similarly, we often expect the worst coming, but we do not want to realize that Jesus knows everything, and that He knows exactly what to do. Let's trust

Him for once!

Prayer:

Lord, I am often so guilty because I do not fully trust You. Please give me confidence.

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The Farmers and the Vineyard

Luke 20: 9-19

While Jesus was waiting in Jerusalem in anguish for His impending execution, He did not sit on a heap and feel sorry for Himself. No, He seized every moment to teach the large crowds of people who were still crowding around the temple around Him. And yes, the Pharisees and Scribes were there too, but they were present with a hidden agenda. They wanted to spy on Him, and they were desperately searching for something He would say or do that they could use as evidence against Him to have Him killed.

Jesus saw through these hypocrites, and then He told this parable that was actually aimed directly at them. He tells of the landowner who rented out a vineyard to farmers and then he went away from his property. When harvest time was over, he

sent his slave to collect the rent, but the slave was abused and returned empty-handed. The farmer did not give up and sent a second slave. He too was harshly chased from the property with abusive language. Still, the owner did not give up and sent a third slave. The abuse suffered by the poor slaves got worse and worse each time, and he too suffered from it.

Jesus did not say this directly, but it is very clear that He was referring to the fact that this vineyard is actually the people of Israel, and that the landowner is God. The slaves are, of course, the many prophets who were sent to Israel through the ages by God. If we go through the history books of the Old Testament, we will soon see how many prophets have already been sent by God to His people, and how they have been rejected, chased away and beaten time and time again. If you flip through the pages of the New Testament, it does not look much better. Actually, it might look even worse! Poor John the Baptist was the first victim.

After him it was Stephen, Paul, Peter and a line of other prophets!

The farmers made a very big mistake when they could no longer see the owner and then thought that he no longer had a say in his property. The fact is that even if the owner is absent, he still remains the owner of the property. The mere fact that the owner did not return in person still gave the farmers the opportunity to reconsider their actions. Three times the owner gave them that opportunity, and three times they rejected it. How many times did God not give Israel the opportunity to reconsider, but time and time again they rejected Him!

Then the farmer played his trump card and sent his own son to try to persuade the farmers. They killed him. When Israel would not listen to the prophets, God sent His Son, and the Jews killed Him. According to the law of that time, the owner had every right to kill the farmers after abusing his slaves and abusing his property. Yet he was merciful to

risk the greatest sacrifice by sending his son. God had every right to wipe Israel off the face the earth, but His grace is so great that He was even willing to sacrifice His own Son to give the people another chance. His grace, however, is trampled upon. His Son is brutally killed.

We read that the Pharisees and scribes understood exactly what Jesus meant by this parable. They realized all too well that they were the modern farmers, and that they were the ones Jesus was talking about. It was only their fear of the people so attached to Jesus' lips that prevented them from summarily capturing Him.

However, the background of this parable did not end after Jesus was executed. Jesus says that the vineyard was given to other people. Today, those very "other people" are doing exactly the same thing. The many prophets God has sent over the past 2000 years have been repeatedly abused. Today it continues, and anyone who dares to preach

the Word of God can be assured of opposition and rejection and often even cruel persecution. Someone who rejects such a prophet is in fact rejecting God. Yes, and often Jesus, the Son of God, is still mocked, yelled at, and rejected. We are still living in a time of grace because God still has not destroyed mankind. But grace time is fast running out. The hourglass has very little sand left in the upper sphere. The question I have to ask myself today is whether I am absolutely sure that I am not one of the farmers who rejected Jesus. If I did not choose Him positively, then I rejected Him.

Jesus puts it in clear-cut language, that although He was rejected, He is still the most important. He further says that those who reject Him will be slashed and crushed. Do not let this happen to you. If you have not yet chosen Him, now is the time!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your great mercy and Your untiring patience with us.

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Tax?

Luke 20: 20-26

Last week's election just showed once again what our relationship with the government looks like. Indeed a thorny issue! Just the mere mention of the name of that institution makes most of us already hot under the collar. Many of the guys who get this meditation somewhere abroad this morning are right there where they are precisely because they could no longer endure it with this government!

In the days when this Gospel had its origin, things were not really easier. Worst of all you could not even flee overseas if things became totally unbearable for you, because the Roman government ruled the whole world! Wherever you go, the emperor is still your boss, whether you like it or not! For the Jews it was even worse because for centuries the land was ruled by believing

Jews like their beloved King David. There were ugly times when wicked kings ruled, but at least they were still Jews! But now the emperor who ruled from Rome was a total heathen who could not even speak their language. Instead of the God who knew and served them, this emperor and his entire government worshipped foreign gods that they had not even heard of!

I think the poor Jews must have suffered greatly. Wherever you went, there were the eternal Roman soldiers who watched their every move. They could even force you to help them or to carry their luggage. If you just dared to resist, then you were in big trouble! On top of that, there were all the foreign cultures that these pagans brought into the country to poison the spiritual and cultural values with which the Jews lived for centuries. Worst of all was that the Jews had to pay heavy taxes, in part precisely to maintain these structures that they so hated. On top of that, their hard-earned money ensured that the emperor could live in

absolute luxury while they were having to cringe with misery!

Against this backdrop, the Pharisees sent a number of innocent-looking men to Jesus. They pretended to be very honest with their question to Him about taxes, but actually their only agenda was to catch Him! At first they soft-soaped Jesus and pretended that He was such a wonderful Rabbi in their eyes. It is so ironic that all the praises they bestowed on Jesus were absolutely true! The tragedy is that they did not mean a single word of it. After all the praise, they asked Him if it is right for a believing Jew to still pay taxes to that wicked emperor?

This was a very ugly trap to which Jesus certainly could not just answer "yes" or "no". If He said "yes", that you had to pay, then His followers would shrink considerably, because no one had any respect for the emperor. However, should He say "no", then He would be in great trouble with the Romans. But these clever men certainly did not take Jesus

into account, and the way He handled the extremely explosive situation could only be described as brilliant. He asked them for a coin, and someone brought out a Roman silver coin. The emperor's head was depicted on the coin. "Who is that?", Jesus wanted to know from them. Of course, they had to admit that the emperor adorned the coin life-size. It was not exactly that they liked what they saw there!

"Well," Jesus said to the multitude of hypocrites, "then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar!" But He did not end there because there was an extremely important part that had to be added. "And give to God what belongs to God!"

These tricksters did not want to openly admit it, but Jesus' answer left even them amazed.

"Yes, there you have it!" we are forced to say when we read this passage. "You just have to do what your government says, even if you do not like it!"

From various statements in the New Testament it is clear that believers had no option but give their share to the government!

But what if this government is corrupt and pagan? We must remember that the government is there because God has allowed it. This means not only paying taxes, but also giving the necessary honour, no matter how difficult it may be.

For the sake of convenience, however, we forget the second part of Jesus' statement, namely, to give to God what is due to Him. Yes, we probably give Him much thanks, honour and worship, but He also asks from us our sacrifice. He asks that we give up some of the time He has given us for His service. He asks us to sacrifice some of the money He has given us for a cause that is close to our hearts. He asks us to love and open our hearts to other people in need. He asks us to sacrifice worldly pleasures and run away from sin. Let us give Him today what belongs to Him.

Prayer:

Lord, I'm standing very guilty before You, for I do not give You what I should.

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Is there Life after Death?

Luke 20: 27-40

How terrible would it be if there was no resurrection from the dead? Then there was nothing to live for except to immerse yourself in worldly pleasure! At the time when Luke wrote the story, there was a religious group that believed exactly that - the Sadducees. The tragedy was that they were terribly religious! They formed the core of the priesthood in Jerusalem. The Sadducees were fanatical law-abiding people, who lived the law to the last detail. Unfortunately, there was nothing in the law about the resurrection after death and therefore they rejected it. If you're dead, you're dead! Final! The Pharisees and Sadducees did not sit around the same fire because their views on life were totally different. However, they had one common enemy - Jesus!

One day they confronted Jesus about the so-

called levirate marriage. For the people of that time, it was crucial that a man's name live on through his children. So if a poor man were to die childless, it would be a very tragic story, because how could his name survive? So a plan was devised. The custom was that the husband's eldest brother was then kind of obliged to marry his deceased brother's wife. The children from this marriage were not officially his, but his deceased brother's because he fathered children on behalf of his brother. If it happened now that that brother would also die childless, then the onus would pass on to the next brother.

These Sadducees must have had a lot of time to work out the trick question with which they wanted to trap Jesus. They used the levirate marriage to try to tell how ridiculous this "life-after-death" story really was. It could not work, could it? That's not logical! This Jesus would not come out of this tight spot - so they thought. No one would solve this mystery!

They did not take into account the fact that they were not only dealing with an "ordinary person", but with Jesus, the Son of God. However, Jesus stated unequivocally that there is a life after death. Although the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, they did believe in God. Jesus' trump card was that He is not a God of the dead, but of the living. Moses spoke of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was still their God, so it could not be otherwise that they had to be alive!

What a wonderful comfort it is to hear these words from Jesus' mouth. It tells us that our loved ones who died in faith were not really dead, but only went through the gates of heaven. The old body may have been left behind, but the important part, the spirit lives on. How exactly they look now, we do not know. That they are recognizable, however, is a fact! You probably still remember the incident when Peter, James and John saw Moses and Elijah with their own eyes with Jesus during His sanctification on the

mountain. For a brief moment, God opened the gates of heaven so that these privileged men could see for themselves what a great reality life after death is like!

When Jesus explains to the Sadducees how it works in heaven, He is, as it were, pulling the curtain open slightly for us so that we can peek inside. We know from various accounts of appearances of specific angels over a period of thousands of years in the Bible that they simply live on forever. They are not bound to a perishable body like us here on earth. Jesus therefore says, among other things, that those "who are considered worthy" will be like angels in this regard. The greater consolation is that they too will be children of God.

But now there is something that raises our eyebrows, because according to what Jesus says, not everyone will have this privilege. Only "those who are considered worthy to partake of the world to come" will enjoy this wonderful privilege. The question is then,

who is worthy? Am I ever worthy? Were my loved ones who died, worthy? Do they live?

What are the conditions for acquiring that dignity? Jesus Himself is also Himself speaking when on another occasion He is questioned by a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Jesus explained to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is recorded in the well-known John 3:16. Several other statements say exactly the same thing, that if you believe in Jesus, then you are worthy to have eternal life! It is not how good a person you are that makes you worthy, but only the wonderful, great grace of God can make you worthy. So let it be the wonderful consolation to you today, that if your deceased loved one believed in Jesus, he or she is now living like an angel, and that the same is waiting for you if you believe.

Prayer:

Thankyou for the wonderful assurance and

comfort you give me, Lord.

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The Grey Hornbill

Luke 20: 45-47

Jesus warns against the arrogant scribes who consider themselves highly holy. In my mind's eye I see those posh, nose-in-the-air men and then I involuntarily think of Yellow-billed Hornbills. Except for starlings, hornbills are probably the most prominent bird species you will encounter in the Kruger National Park. There are quite a few species, first the arrogant, fearless Yellow-billed Hornbills and then there are also the cheeky Red-billed Hornbills with their lipstick beaks. In Zululand's game reserves, it is again the horrible Trumpeter Hornbills with their melancholy cries that can give any person nightmares! Sounds exactly like a baby crying with colic!

Mosbolletjie and I were relaxing at Afsaal one day having breakfast during a day visit to the Kruger Park. Around us the branches were

packed with hornbills sitting and watching us like vultures. Our neighbours accidentally dropped some crumbs from their table, when suddenly a blanket of Yellow-billed Hornbills fell from the sky with writhing and fighting and pecking! One of the other neighbours is frying bacon and eggs on a gas grill. Suddenly she screamed! I looked around, just in time to see one of the yellow-billed horrors fly away with a piece of bacon he stole from the hot braai. Neighbour giggled hysterically!

One of these arrogant Yellow-bills planted himself on the table right across from me, shifting to a position until he he looks me square in the eyes. I pretend not to see him, but he actually stretches his neck to draw my attention to him. Every now and then he glances at my toasted sandwich, and the desire drips from his bill. I cover the sandwich with my hands. He stared. I stared back. I felt guilty. He noticed it and immediately he put on his I-am-so-terribly-hungry face. Self-pity!

I was about to hand over my sandwich just like that, when I suddenly came to my senses. I remembered how it was these very same Yellow-billed Hornbills that so dominated all the other smaller birds. I just now saw a Yellow-billed Hornbill chase a poor delicate Grey Hornbill when it discovered a piece of bread. He sat aside and begged and begged with his sweet melancholic whistling voice for a tidbit, but Yellow-bill swung his razor-sharp yellow saber menacingly and chased poor Grey away. I ate my sandwich alone without leaving him a crumb. Annoyed, he flew away!

Late afternoon Mosbolletjie and I relax on our veranda in Marloth Park, when a Grey Hornbill comes and sits on a twig and sings his melancholy song: "Phee, pheephee, phoe-e-phoe-e.." My heart just crumbles and I throw some breadcrumbs on the porch. Nervously, he landed and gratefully picked up the crumbs one by one. Two starlings see the set table and attack it noisily. Grey stands apologetically aside as the starlings

greedily gulps down the poor bird's lunch!

Beautiful bird, this Grey Hornbill! Maybe not as outgoing as his yellow-billed cousin, nor does he have the terrifying voice of the Zululand crowd. But he is delicate and beautiful in his own way. In his dark grey jacket with creamy-white feather tips, he wears a pure white shirt. An almost black face with pure white eyebrows, and then this long black bill with cream-coloured inserts, gives him the most beautiful facial features. And Madam actually wears lipstick! She boasts a red beak! Delicate fine streaks on his lower jaw complete the picture. But it is when he opens his mouth that you see his teeth! Really a formidable row of them. It just gives one new respect for this humble member of the bird world.

If you listen to this beautiful bird's melancholy song: “Phee, pheephee, phoe-phoe ...”, then you actually feel sorry for him, deep in your heart. He suffers so much in the tribulation. It is not only the other bully

hornbills that chase him away, but the Grey Louries snap at him, Starlings shout at him, and even cheeky Bulbuls step on his toes, even though he has all the right equipment to be able to stand his man - his status as a horn bill, his useful bill and then the fact that he has “teeth!”

Grey Hornbills are so genuinely human. One can identify with them. Which one of the hornbills are you? Are you perhaps the arrogant Yellow Bill who treads on everyone and thinks he is the only one with a right to exist? Or are you the cheeky Red-bill biting here and pinching there like a Jack Russell? Some of us are just like the lamenting Trumpeter Hornbills, who moan and whine about every little thing. And then there are the Greys who will meekly stand back when the others storm in. The Grey Hornbill is such a beautiful example for us as believers. Yes, we have all the equipment to stand out above the others, but there is a much bigger issue that is important, namely the Kingdom. Therefore, we must be willing to be humble

and the least, even if it is sometimes difficult.
To keep quiet and not fight back when we get
offended - it takes a lot of courage!

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to turn the other cheek, and
to be humble.

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Two Coins

Luke 21: 1-4

Their old house was very small, not even painted. There was no tap in the kitchen that you could turn on for water. They fetched water for washing dishes (the little that they had) in a duck pond near the back door. For drinking water they had to walk a little further to where the fountain water was still fairly clean and to at least escape the duck manure.

I was just a boy in primary school when this disillusioned family moved into a little old house on the neighbour's farm. I don't believe he ever made them pay rent because they had nothing. The father lost his job on the railroads, and then he got cancer. The terrible disease had eaten away his jaw, and the doctors could do nothing for him. The mother had her hands full to keep the bunch of kids alive.

I went to visit them a few times, and then the aunt gave our children each a slice of home-baked bread with lard and salt to taste. That was all she had, but the little bit she could afford she shared with others.

Suddenly one day they were just gone. Where to, I do not know. Today I want to cry when I think of the poor people, and that woman who, despite her dire circumstances, always smiled and was still generous even though she had absolutely nothing to give.

In the previous section, Jesus warned against the scribes with their fancy clothes. These high-ranking gentlemen drank in all the attention they received, and there were always places of honour reserved for them because they were very important! They all made it very clear exactly who and what they were. Hypocritical lot, because while in public they rattled off long, impressive prayers, while they robbed the poor widows who had nothing in life. The little that the widows still had to live on was strangled out of them!

This statement of Jesus about the scribes set the scene for an almost unnoticed little incident, something no one else had even noticed. At the entrance to the temple stood a beautifully decorated wooden chest. In this people threw their offerings. As Jesus and his disciples stood and watched, a stream of people passed by, each making his own contribution. Some wealthy Jews threw a bag full of coins into the chest with great display, while making sure that everyone could see how much they were giving!

Unnoticed, a poor woman walked to the chest. In her palm were two small coins. A tear ran down her cheek because she knew this was her last money. Where else she would get food from, she did not know. But she trusted, for the Lord would provide. When the two coins fell into the chest, she was looked at with contempt. "Does the old woman now really think that her little money will make a difference?" An old sour face shook his head angrily when he glared at her with contempt.

When the woman walked away, Jesus looked at her with great compassion. "This poor widow threw in more than all the others," He told His disciples as they looked at Him with a big question mark on their foreheads.

"What, then, would the Master mean by such a remark? All she threw in were two worthless old coins that could not even buy bread! "

Jesus read the question mark on their faces and then He explained that the rich people who came there and threw in their treasures with so much display, actually gave only a few crumbs of their wealth. What looked like a bag full of money did not even make a dent in their bank balance. For this woman, it hurt to give her coins because that's all she had!

I have often been asked the question: how much should I give? Does the Lord expect me to give a tenth of my salary to the church? If we want to answer "Yes" to this, then we become legalistic, just like the Pharisees. In the first place, the Lord does

not want our money, but our lives. He wants us to have a living relationship with Jesus. The day when it happens, I do not give because the law says I must give a tithe, but out of gratitude I give back to the Lord without counting. I help someone in need and give my time for service to the Lord. And if I have money in abundance, I give in abundance without making a show of it. What I give is a matter between me and the Lord, and no one needs to know. I do not trumpet like the scribes of old, that I spend so much time on community work and give so many thousands to charity. It is of course important to remember that my congregation is also part of the work of the Lord, and that I will also do my part to maintain the work!

Prayer:

Lord, please give me an open hand that will not hesitate to give!

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Fall of the Temple

Luke 21: 5-6

In amazement, visitors stare at the incredible buildings - what ingenious engineering it did not take to erect these twin buildings. Like two fingers the world trade centre towers into the clouds, almost to the sky. Building construction has come a long way in bringing about this technological miracle. And then September 11th happens. Two passenger planes crashed into the buildings. Within minutes, the magnificent tower blocks are a miserable heap of rubble, filled with the crushed bodies of thousands of people. There was not even time for them to try to escape. In the blink of an eye, everything was over.

In amazement, Jesus' followers stare at the breathtaking construction of the temple. Painfully neat, the stones were hewn by master craftsmen. Solomon built the first

temple on Mount Moriah, a magnificent piece of building adorned with gold and precious stones. However, it was later destroyed by the Babylonians. After the exile it was rebuilt, but it was only a shadow of the glory of Solomon's temple. When Herod the Great came to power, he wanted to win the favour of the Jews, and then he rebuilt the temple. He also built new courtyards, colonnades and ring walls as well! Herod made sure that his name would be immortalized in this breathtaking building that makes Solomon's beautiful temple look like a matchbox!

No wonder Jesus' disciples stared in amazement at the splendour of this building. And then Jesus drops the bomb: No two of these stones will remain lying on top of each other here! All this beauty they behold here will be utterly ruined. It must have felt like a bucket of ice water in their faces. "But how is that ever possible? It can certainly not be true!"

A mere forty years later, in 70AD the Romans

came and destroyed the temple to the ground. They made absolutely certain that this so-called holy building would never be rebuilt. Literally no two of the magnificent stones remained lying on top of each other. Just a pile of rubbish, that's all!

When Jesus conveyed to his shocked hearers this damning news about the temple, its effect was made even more dramatic by the fact that they were sitting inside this building. Enraptured they looked up and they could scarcely imagine that these pristine walls could ever be destroyed!

You and I are brought to the realization by this of how terribly perishable all man-made things really are. When the tsunami hit the far east and later Japan a few years ago, entire villages were instantly wiped from the face of the earth. Thousands of people were engulfed by a single wave. When the volcano Vesuvius erupted, the entire city of Pompeii disappeared within hours under meters of volcanic ash and there was no escape for the

inhabitants. When the violence of the Buffalo River hit Laingsburg, people and houses were swallowed up by the raging river within minutes. Just in the last few months, we have seen the terrible violence of hurricanes, torrential rains and wildfires that have wreaked havoc worldwide, even in our own country!

How terribly perishable everything is! And therefore we must not become too attached to our earthly possessions, because in the blink of an eye they can disappear. The Covid pandemic and the accompanying economic crisis in which the world finds itself today have caused numerous wealthy people's palaces to disappear like mist before the sun. And many poor people still lost the little bit they owned. Everyone was affected by this disaster. How terribly perishable everything is!

When we think of the beautiful sanctuary of the Jews, their temple where God lives and which faced total destruction, then one must

also just realize once again that our service to that God is not based on outward things, but on the inner. Oh, of course the external things are important too. As we saw in the previous daily passage, I need to make sacrifices with my time, my strength, my gifts, my money. But these actions must stem from what is going on inside my heart. If my relationship with the Lord is right, the outward things will come naturally.

Let's start at the beginning again. Jesus is the One around whom everything revolves. Do I have a living relationship with Jesus? Do I spend quality time with Him? Is there love - Divine love - in my heart and life? Am I a mirror that reflects the glory of God so that unbelievers can see Him through me? Do I allow the Holy Spirit to control my life? These are all the things that matter.

Prayer:

Lord, everything is so perishable - I want the imperishable in my life.

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End times

Luke 21: 7-19

The year 2000 was a frightening year for many people. While the crowds greeted the new year with breathtaking fireworks, champagne and great cheering, there were others who sat in fear and trembling, waiting for the end of the world. Prophets - in fact they are rather doom prophets and false prophets - announced that the last days had come, and that the end was in sight. New year 2000 came, and new year 2000 went, and eventually the whole year, and still the world continued merrily (slightly limping).

This was not the first time that people sat and waited for the end to dawn. If we only think of the many faith groups that have sprung up like mushrooms over the past few years, where the group members sat in total seclusion and waited for the end. Yes, in some cases it ended tragically with a mass

suicide, when their prophet or leader began to realize that his calculations were slightly out!

Jesus warns his followers about this kind of thing. He explains that there are going to be all kinds of signs, and that people are going to think that it indicates that the end is at hand. He also warns that there will be false prophets who make all kinds of statements about the end. But when they see wars, famines, epidemics and earthquakes and it seems like the end has come, they should not be afraid. Indeed, the end of the world will be preceded by such things! However, these are all only indications of God's plan for the last days, but that does not mean that the end is imminent!

Let's be honest with each other now: would it be so much different for you to experience the end of the world than to die in a car accident or with a heart attack, for example? In the end, it comes down to almost the same thing. The fact is, when that happens, you're

going to have an encounter with Jesus. Actually, I'm oversimplifying it a lot, of course, because Jesus' return will be so much bigger, and the wonder of that day will make New Year's 2000 look like a children's party. But of course it will also be so much scarier for those who are not ready!

The fact is that we have to live as if the Second Coming will take place that any moment today, but plan as if it is another thousand years away. The question is, are you ready to meet Jesus if it were to happen that the heavens would open today and He would appear on the clouds today?

Then Jesus changes the subject, and He tells His followers that before these things happen, there will be a great persecution. They would be arrested and locked up in prisons. They would appear before kings and governors simply because they are followers of Jesus. But then Jesus says that He will personally assist them and give them the wisdom so that such an embarrassment can

be turned into an opportunity. This will give them the opportunity to witness to people who would otherwise be totally unreachable for the Gospel.

If we page through the history pages of the Bible, we see Peter standing in court and giving his testimony before the Jewish Council. No, they did not want to hear it, but because they sued him in court, they were forced to listen. We see Paul where he repeatedly testified, often before the highest authority while he was a prisoner. Sometimes he was even called back so that the ruler could hear more. Paul exploited his years of captivity and seized every opportunity with both hands. The letters he wrote from prison were invaluable, and even today, two thousand years later, millions of people read daily from his wonderful letters of comfort, teaching, and foundation.

Persecution of Christians did not stop with Paul and Peter. It still continues today. We are in a very privileged position to be able to

live in South Africa today where we can still live out our faith freely. In most Muslim countries it is a completely different story and often the horror stories seep out of the cruel persecution of Christians. We still hear of believers doing what Jesus asked his followers to do and they take advantage of these opportunities to testify for Jesus. The organization Open Doors, which is very closely involved with believers who are persecuted, tells moving stories of how Christians during the most horrific persecution still stand and testify freely about Jesus. Where do they get the power from to do this? The answer is simple: Jesus promised in Matt. 28 that He will be with us until the end of the days. But then there is also the Holy Spirit - the One who gives us wisdom and strength when we need it most. Trust Him!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, that I may know where my strength comes from!

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Terror in Jerusalem

Luke 21: 20-24

Ever heard of a city called Aelia Capitolina? Or maybe el-Quds? If these names sound Greek to you, then you do not have to feel alone. Both are names given to the city that was once known as Jerusalem. In the year 130 AD. a Roman colony was established after a visit by the Emperor to the dilapidated city of Jerusalem. They renamed it Aelia Capitolina. In 638 AD. the Mohammedans conquered the city and renamed it El-Quds. It is tragic that the proud city of King David had to fall into oblivion!

But this was not a surprise to the followers of Jesus, because He foretold it all in detail. Jesus' prophecy of Jerusalem began during His triumphant entry. You will remember how Jesus wept over Jerusalem just before He entered the city accompanied by thousands of singing, palm-waving praisers (Luke

19:41). And now He prophesies again about the city and He tells of armies that would surround the city and that many of the inhabitants would die violently. Others would be taken away as prisoners of war. The horror of this attack on Jerusalem is emphasized by the fact that it was especially pregnant women and mothers who would suffer. It would be a terrible time, not only for Jerusalem, but for all of Judea. "Flee to the mountains," Jesus warned!

Why? Why do such things happen?

Jesus himself gives the answer: God fulfills His punishment on this beautiful city.

Barely forty years later, Jesus' prophecy becomes fulfilled word-for-word where the Romans besieged and forcibly conquered the city. The city was destroyed and the Jews scattered - those who survived!

One involuntarily wants to ask the question: "Is not this not a little unjust of God? Was Jerusalem so much worse than other cities?"

Let's take a look at facts, and then let each one decide for himself. Jerusalem was given to the Jewish people in the time of King David as a proud ornament, built on the very mountain where Abraham had to sacrifice Isaac, so that everyone could see the city not only as the city of David, but especially as the city of God! Many years later, God poured out His great mercy on mankind when He sent His Son, Jesus, to that very city. He could reign there as King forever, if the inhabitants, God's people would just accept Him. Triumphantly, He entered the city to proclaim Jerusalem as the City of God.

But what happens? The city leaders and church leaders conspire against Him, and soon the whole nation is stirred up against Him. He is lied to, mocked, scourged and crucified by the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem - He, the Holy One, the Son of God! Actually, the wrath of God should have immediately consumed the city! It is only logical that the Lord would level that city that God Himself tried to destroy right there! But it

does not happen because He is merciful. He gives the residents, church leaders and city leaders another chance to reflect on what they have done, and to repent their heinous act. For forty years He was gracious to them. For forty years the Lord kept His hand of punishment from them. Forty years in which first the apostles tried to convince the people, and later all the other believers as well.

What happened? There were men like Saul who fanatically went out of their way to persecute anyone who was a follower of this Jesus, put him in prison, and even stoned him to death, as happened to Stephen. The Jews turned a deaf ear to the Gospel that the believers preached. They hardened their hearts and drove the believers out of the city into the heathen lands!

Forty years later, after numerous attempts by persevering believers who kept trying and trying in spite of ruthless persecution, God decided that grace time had expired. The horrors of the Roman onslaught were

indescribable. Even the beautiful temple was leveled to the ground!

Jesus explained, "**Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until their time is up.**" The Romans did not rule there forever, nor did the Mohammedans who conquered the city in 638 AD. Their time also passed, just as Jesus foretold.

A person who still rejects Jesus today also lives in a time of grace. When do you reject Jesus? If you do not have a personal relationship with Him, then you reject Him, even if you believe that He really exists. (By the way, the devil also believes in Jesus' existence!) The problem is that God's grace time is coming to an end. One day it will be too late. That one day can come any day, and then suddenly there is no chance anymore. Jerusalem's end is a children's party compared to the terror that awaits those who reject Jesus!

Prayer:

O Lord, thank You for Your great mercy, and that You are even merciful to unbelievers and give them another chance.

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When the Fig Tree Buds

Luke 21: 25-33

It is winter in the arid Lowveldt. All the animals are hungry! The grass has been devoured long ago and the herbivores are suffering. The veldt is barren and morbid. But still, there is something in the air - brand new, crisp leaves are forming in the emaciated trees. It's as if everything is in anticipation! The field is filled with excitement as spring and summer with it's abundance of food and life are about to erupt. Buds of pure white flowers are already popping in the Knob-thorn trees. All the inhabitants of the Lowveldt look forward to that wonderful time of the year where no one has to go to bed hungry.

But not everyone is looking forward to summer in the Lowveld, because with summer comes an unbearable heat that often climbs high into the forties, and

occasionally even reaches the murderous fifties. For many people, this unbearable heat is just too much. And of course, with the heat comes the incessant mosquitoes - the kind that carry deadly malaria in their bite.

What is terrifying for some, is still a way out for others and a wonderful time to look forward to.

Around Jesus sits a crowd of people hanging on to His lips. With beating hearts they listen to the things He tells - things that build up a terrible anxiety in the hearts of many of His hearers. He talks about freaks of nature that are going to come, solar and lunar eclipses and scary things that are going to happen to the stars. But it will effect humanity even more direct when the most terrible tidal waves will hit the earth and the roar of the sea will drive people in a frenzy. Everything is going to be disrupted, the earth as well as the galaxy. People are going to succumb to the mere thought of what is happening.

Just think of the events of the past few years,

how terribly everything was disrupted. There were rumours of giant meteorites on their way to Earth. Global warming is causing our hearts to shrink - what will happen if the poles melt? Tsunamis wreak havoc across the globe. Earthquakes, devastating hurricanes and mudslides claim thousands of lives. Covid-19 swings his death-sickle around the world, claiming millions of lives. Crippling droughts and famines are the forerunner of many African countries. Air pollution and the most terrible water pollution are engulfing our beautiful South Africa. And unemployment and poverty are getting worse by the day!

Yes, it's a very dark picture I'm painting, but Jesus says to His worried audience, "When these things begin to happen, stand up straight and lift up your heads, for then your salvation is near." (Luke 21:28). The same things that make the unbeliever sit in sackcloth and ashes are the most wonderful news ever for believers, because it means that the return of Jesus is very near, and that

we can already notice the glow of the new Jerusalem that is descending - that breathtaking city of gold of which John writes in Revelation.

Jesus tells a parable about nature - something we all understand. If the fig tree starts to bud, then we know that summer is near. Here on the coast of KwaZulu-Natal we do not really see spring break out because everything is green throughout the winter. I actually envy the guys who live upcountry because the breathtaking experience of trees exploding overnight in a mass of white and pink is something to experience! In the Lowveldt, it is the Mopane pomogranate, ugly tangled trees that suddenly turn the plains into a lush courtyard of giant pale yellow blossoms that display God's miracle of creation. As far as the eye can see, it is just one big yellow mass of flowers!

When these things happen, then we know that summer is here. In the beginning, we saw that summer was bad news for some.

Yes, the end times mean that time of grace is running out for the unbeliever. How many times has the Lord not sent messengers on the path of the unbeliever to try to convince them! Never before in the history of the world has the message resounded as clearly as it does today. The TV is full of channels that proclaim the Living God. The internet is available to virtually every human being, and where they cannot be reached by these two, there are radio broadcasts that trumpet forth the message of salvation around the world. In addition, large numbers of believers risk their lives to bring the message to unreachable people.

Yet people live on in this fear of the final terror, because God's plan of redemption is not logical for them.

Dear fellow believer, this message today is not one of fear and terror, but for you and me it is the message of salvation. We're almost there! Just a little while longer, then we are delivered from our earthly bondage, and can

relax with Jesus in the indescribable light of God!

Prayer:

Lord, I look forward to Your return - come soon, Lord Jesus!

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Be Vigilant

Luke 21: 34-37

I was involved with the Voortrekkers for many years. One of my great treats has always been to offer courses that make the kids aware of the beach. The problem is that very few children (and adults!) realize or understand the complexity of the beach. Groups from Gauteng or the Free State showed up here in Ballito. For a day or two I then explain to them exactly how the beach's machinery works, and that the beach is much more than just a patch of white sand where you lie down to burn brown (or is it red?) in the sun.

When I think they understand everything nicely, then the practical part comes. One fine morning they are chased out of bed early and with a backpack they jog to the beach for an exciting hike. Each is equipped with a license to remove shellfish from the rocks,

and they are instructed to survive on the beach until the next day. So they need to start providing food and water as they go along.

This outing is such fun every time, and every sea creature and plant and rock is thoroughly explored and discussed and felt, and soon the children begin to realize the incredible wonder and complexity of the beach. They see how each animal and plant, no matter how primitive, fits into it's special niche. They begin to realize that it takes tremendous adjustments from the small sea creatures to survive in this inhospitable and often hostile world. They are starting to see that the whole beach is alive!

But soon the children also begin to realize that good planning is an absolute necessity for themselves in order to survive here. This is especially when the hunger pangs start to gnaw and the thirst overwhelms them and there is no longer a café around the corner where they can buy something!

It's a long, tiring walk on the beach, but finally, just before sunset, there is a quiet, sheltered bay in front of the group with a bright little stream of water bubbling out of the sand dune, away from civilization and away from other people. The children are excited to hear that they are going to spend the night in this beautiful place under the stars. But this is just where the trouble usually starts, because many of them have long since forgotten what they were taught about survival. I'm not helping them right either, because now they have to fend for themselves and make mistakes. They will soon discover it!

By this time the children are starving from hunger and their mussels, crabs and octopuses that they have gathered throughout the day should be cooked very soon! Making a fire with moist driftwood is the first obstacle, and they huff and puff and stoke the fire to get some heat under the food. Freaking out for that creepy food is another big challenge and the city kids are

trying to swallow something to calm the hunger pangs. Some have to go to bed hungry because they did not gather food in time and only woke up with high tide. They had too much fun and enjoyment on the beach!

The third big challenge comes with sleep. One group woke up in the middle of the night as they were drifting into the sea! They never noticed where the high tide mark was. Quite a few groups became soaking wet from the rain because they did not planned proper shelters. In the end, only a few children were fully prepared for the whole beach experience!

Jesus concludes His sermons with a warning to live alert and prepared. The children were told thoroughly exactly what they had to do on the beach, but only a few took note. The result was that they came off second best! Likewise, most believers receive complete instruction on how to organize our lives. On Sundays the pastor preaches, and

throughout the week we read what the Word warn. The problem is that we do not really care about it, or that we forget it very quickly. For the sake of convenience, we often forget the Lord's commands!

Jesus warns that we may be caught completely unawares, just like that group of Voortrekkers who nearly landed in the deep sea. "Be vigilant and always pray," says Jesus. It is very important that I stay in touch with God at all times. Yes, He is always there, but the problem is that I am not always there. I forget about Him and then I follow my own head. By praying constantly, I not only remind myself of Him, but I also hear His wonderful voice in my life. By praying constantly, I also remember the things that are important. Then I see the need in people and I remember that I have to be kind and radiate the love of Jesus. The more I am in prayer with Him, the more I give the Lord a place in my life, and the more I allow the Holy Spirit to guide me on the right path. Prayer anchors me to God.

Prayer:

Lord, please remind me to continually talk to You today. Thank you for always listening!

Judas Stumbles

Luke 22: 1-6

What makes one of your intimate friends betray you or stab you in the back? There has been much talk, speculation and writing about Judas Iscariot. The question is on every believer's lips: what drove him to that heinous act, to betray Jesus?

There are many theories, and we may need to take a look at the possibilities. Luke simply mentions that the devil invaded Judas, and that he then went to the church leaders to offer his services. Little is written about the man Judas in the gospels. Peter and John are the men who come to the fore every time, and most of the other disciples are mentioned only on occasion. The only thing we hear from Judas however, was when he protested when Jesus was anointed. He believed that the money for that oil could be used better. He was the disciples' treasurer,

and even though they entrusted him with their wallet, it was clear that they did not really trust him with their money. It would seem that money was an obsession with him. We see that he negotiated with the church leaders for payment if he would betray Jesus!

What was Judas' motive for following Jesus faithfully for three years? Was he not perhaps after all heart and soul with the other eleven? I think Judas at the beginning, when he was called by Jesus, was just as excited about his calling as his other peers. When it began to dawn on him that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, his excitement was surely even greater. The one theory is that Judas may have been a Zealot, a group of activists with a very strong Jewish national consciousness. In themselves it was certainly not wrong, but they were often fanatical about their nationalism, and then they did not hesitate to become violent against enemies of the people. They often even acted against the moderate Jews! One of Jesus' twelve disciples, Simon, was certainly a Zealot, as

we read in Luke 6:15. In Acts 5:37 we read of a certain Judas who led a revolt under the banner of the Zealots.

The Zealots had a very strong Messianic expectation, and they believed that this Messiah would come to free the Jews from Roman domination. Perhaps this was also Judas' expectation, but Jesus disappointed him bitterly. When Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, there was a glimmer of hope for him, but very soon he had to see again that Jesus did not come to make war but to suffer.

And then he cracked!

The devil's sharp eyes noticed Judas' disappointment very quickly, and then he exploited it. Judas, of course, knew that the crowd of priests and scribes were aching to get hold of Jesus, but that they were afraid of the people. We saw that Jesus still had a very strong following among the people and there was always a crowd gathered around Him. If the church leaders dared to imprison

Jesus there for trial, the people would tear them apart. Judas also thoroughly realized this. The only way to get Jesus where there were not a lot of followers with Him was to go and sniff Him out where He and the twelve spent the night. In the evening, after the hustle and bustle of the day, Jesus and his disciples went to find a hiding place for themselves somewhere on the Mount of Olives, and only one of the intimate circle knew where they would be.

And so Judas then offers his services - at a price of course! He would show them exactly where to arrest Jesus safely.

This story holds a very serious warning for every believer today. In the first place, we must make absolutely sure of our motives for following Jesus. Why do I do this? Why am I a Christian? Is it to save me from hell? Or maybe it's to get something out of it? Possibly wealth, gifts, prosperity, happiness, fame etc. If that's my motive, then I'm in trouble! Our only motive should be to glorify

God!

Secondly, we must be very careful that our passion for Jesus does not fade. Once you have fallen back, it takes a lot of hard work to get your zeal back for Jesus. I have so often had to witness the tragedy of zealous believers who let everything slip through their fingers. It gives fertile ground for the devil to sow his seed of despair. The ending can be horrible. The devil is merciless, and will exploit every retreating believer with all his might. Judas was one of many victims of the devil!

So: make sure your motives are pure, and never stop working diligently on your faith!

Prayer:

Lord, I want to serve and worship You because You love me and because You are the only true God.

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Instruction from the Master

Luke 22: 7-13

Imagine the picture: You walk calmly on Ballito's beachfront walkway and enjoy the fresh sea air. You carry a heavy clay pot you bought from a street vendor. Suddenly you see two strange men walking towards you. You get scared when you see them staring at you while one points at your clay pot, as if they know exactly who you are.

"No thanks, I'm not interested!" you protest in advance when the two come to stand right in front of you. Are they perhaps some sect that wants to indoctrinate you with their false message? You feel very uncomfortable!

However, the two immediately get to the point: "Sir, where is the place where we have to celebrate Holy Communion tonight? The Master sent us to you."

Your mouth falls open uncontrollably:

“But but where do you know me from? You are total strangers to me! How did you know I have a place to celebrate communion?” Your mind is confused! Who are these men? What do they know about you?

That's probably how the man must have felt when asked by Peter and John for a place where they could go and eat the Passover meal. Jesus gave them very specific instructions to look out for a man carrying a jar and when they saw him, they just knew. "Our Teacher wants to know where the room is that we can use tonight, we want to eat our Easter meal there." I think the guy was so confused, that he did not even try to resist! He immediately agreed and went to show them the upper room.

The question is, what would have happened if the man had refused? Just think of the catastrophic consequences. Everything was precisely determined by God that Jesus had to celebrate communion with His disciples

that night, because that same night Jesus still had to be delivered. It was the only and last opportunity they had and the clock of God's counsel plan ticked off the seconds.

You and I often receive instructions from the Lord. My assignment this morning was to write this devotional. That meant I had to put in a lot of effort. The Bible passage had to be analyzed and I had to read references. I had to choose my words carefully and when I finished I had to translate it into English and edit it properly. Then came the video recording. It certainly does not come easily and I could probably have said: "Is it ever worth it? And what should I write? Maybe I can just skip this devotional! Nobody would even notice it!"

But then came the indescribable awareness of the holy presence of God, and I knew I just had to start writing because He would put the right words in my mind. All He asks of me is my willingness to carry out His command. I do not have to worry about who is going to

read the passage and who is not. So often I wonder about a certain devotional, and whether that message would ever mean anything to anyone. Then I get a message in which someone thanks me for that particular message that she needed so much at that very moment!

The big question I have often been asked is: "How do I know when the Lord is speaking to me? How do I know that He is instructing me?" This question does not have an easy answer. Someone once told me that she wanted to hear the voice of the Lord audibly. Unfortunately, this is not how the Lord works. Yes, He has spoken audibly to people, but that was only in extremely exceptional cases. The fact is that the Lord can speak to you in many different ways. You may be sitting in church and then you just know that this message is just for you today, and that the Lord is speaking to you very clearly personally through the preacher. It happens when you are busy with your daily quiet time, and then suddenly it is as if the words from

the Bible stand out to you, and you know! It can happen that friends, or maybe even a wild stranger, say something to you, and then you know that these words come from the Lord.

The man who carried the jar in Jerusalem only knew that he did not dare ignore the command of the two strange men and he did what they asked. You and I do not dare ignore the instructions we receive from the Lord, even if they sometimes sound very strange to us, and even if we cannot always see the meaning of them.

We just have to remember that the Bible is not a kind of "magic book" that you can open and receive a command from God. It also does not work to start flipping through the Bible and diligently searching for a message from God. The answer is to live close to Him and just be patient. At the most surprising time and manner, He often speaks to you, and then you must be ready to listen, hear, and do.

Prayer:

Lord, please make me sensitive so that I will recognize Your voice when You speak to me, and make me willing to carry out Your commands joyfully.

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The Lord's Supper

Luke 22: 14-23

It is an extremely emotional moment when Jesus sits down with His twelve confidants at the table for the Passover meal. Along with Jesus are also twelve men seated who have been with Him every day for the past three years - men He has come to know through and through. All were ordinary people, each with his own faults - rough fishermen, some of them. There was Peter who spoke impulsively and acted without thinking. Fearless! Later, however, he would kneel before a mere maid and denied Jesus in the hour when he would need him most. James and John were the two with the terrible tempers! Jesus gave them the nickname "the Sons of Thunder!" Definitely not flattering! One of the men at the table presumably had long fingers, his name was Judas. Although he handled their finances, the men did not trust him. However, there was something

much worse about this man, because he was already planning to betray Jesus!

So we might be able to scrape skeletons out of the cupboards of each of the men around the table, not one was perfect! Each one carried with him his weaknesses and sins. We have often seen their doubt, unbelief, anxiety, and inability to comprehend during the three years they spent with Jesus. If these men, who were so close to Jesus, then often failed in their followership, how much more is it not perhaps our own destiny! Yet we see Jesus sitting with these twelve. He tells them that He was looking forward very much to eating this last Passover meal with them!

When Jesus breaks and serves the bread, He tells His twelve friends that this bread symbolizes His body that is going to be broken. When they eat it, they must think of Him. The cup of wine is passed around and once again Jesus tells them that this wine symbolizes His shed blood.

We must remember that they were actually celebrating the Passover, the meal that reminded the Jews of the day when God delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. But suddenly this same meal now takes on a whole different meaning. Now it becomes a symbol of the new covenant where Jesus delivers all believers from the bondage of damnation!

In the Old Testament we read of various occasions where God made a covenant with people, such as with Adam, Noah and Abraham. Now, however, God concludes a brand new covenant with all mankind and Jesus says that His blood that would be shed is the seal of this covenant.

A covenant is, of course, an agreement entered into between two parties. For example, two countries can make a covenant and say that they will assist each other and not attack each other. In ancient times, animals were slaughtered to confirm the covenant. If one of the two parties were to

break the covenant, there would be great trouble! What would happen to these slaughtered animals would happen to them! Blood therefore formed an important part of such a covenant, because it symbolized life.

God's covenant works a little differently, because it is a one-sided covenant where He gives everything and also sets certain conditions. Thus the new covenant reads that God gives eternal life with all the benefits that come with it. In return, He asks for faith in His Son, Jesus. It is also no surprise that blood also plays a very big role in this covenant. In this case, however, it is not the blood of animals, but the precious blood of Jesus, the Son of God that is used as a sign or seal of the covenant.

Immediately after Jesus institutes this communion, He makes a shocking announcement: one of these confidants of His, who is now sitting at the table with them, is going to betray Him. I see in my imagination how the men's faces fall when

this bomb hits them. How is this possible?
How could anyone stoop so low?

But Jesus emphasizes the fact that it happens according to the great plan of God, and that it is not in the hands of the traitor. God's counsel plan must take its course, and must be carried out down to the finest detail. He still remains in full control, even though it seems at first glance that everything has gone out of control! Even in a hopeless situation like this which seems so tragic and fatal, God still remains in control!

Today, you and I can have the wonderful knowledge that our own mistakes, disloyalty, weaknesses, doubts, and failures can never ever affect God's faithfulness and control over everything. Today we can confidently sing the song: "You are in control, wonderful Lord, You who still faithfully sustain Your creation!"

Prayer:

Lord, this morning I cannot help but fall down

before You in worship. I disappoint You so often, but in Your great mercy You accept me just as I am. Thank You that I can know that You are in full control!

Who's the Boss?

Luke 22: 24-30

Holy moments reign as Jesus eats the Passover with His friends for the last time. Even holier and more dramatic are Jesus' words when He institutes the first communion.

But the devil had already seen where this intimate conversation was headed, and he was determined to wreck it. We can only guess about what led to the quarrel, probably about leadership, and who would take over if the Jews persecuted Jesus. Peter, with his big mouth, could certainly claim to have been the rightful leader of the group of apostles. John, on the other hand, was the one whom Jesus loved very much. We get that impression in the Gospel he wrote, that he could certainly be the suitable candidate to

take over leadership. It was not quiet around the table!

One would think that after three years with Jesus, they would already have received the message! If they had just opened their eyes to the example Jesus had set, they might have thought totally differently about the matter. Jesus was their great Teacher and time and again they had to experience His authority. Even forces of nature were obedient to Him! With their own eyes, they also had to see how He was glorified with the very great ones, Moses and Elijah, on the mountain. With their own ears, they heard the voice of God from heaven when He commanded them to listen to Jesus because He is God's Son.

In spite of all this, their Master played the role of Servant throughout. He even stooped so low as to wash their dirty feet!

Jesus had to explain to them nicely about how people dominate each other and that authority is often enforced. We have

experienced this very thoroughly in our own country, throughout the history of South Africa. Leaders who were certainly not popular among all, exercised their authority over those over whom they ruled. Today we are often terrorized by the so-called blue-light convoys - I myself have been forced off the road by them once. People seize authority for themselves and then dominate or bully everyone who comes their way.

Jesus further explains that it must be totally different with believers. In verse 26 Jesus says: "The most important among you must be like the least." I think the men were very ashamed of these deep words of Jesus. It cut to the bone. I think Peter felt he could bite his tongue off because he was the one who said the worst things at the worst times every time! I would not be surprised if the leadership issue came from him again!

Being the least, especially when you are in a leadership position, is definitely not easy! It all comes down to humility. The day I learned

to be truly humble, the other things will also start to fall into place. But even in humility there is a danger - you have to be very careful about your motives for humility. If you live out humility so that people can see you as someone who is humble, then you are mistaken. Humility must be born of your awareness of total dependence on God!

Let's start from the beginning: Where does my salvation come from? Did I work for it? Is it because I have such great faith? No, definitely not! Everything, everything is grace! It was precisely when I was in sin, when He pulled me out of there! The Holy Spirit gave me the faith in Jesus that was needed for my acquittal. He was also the one who gave me the necessary wisdom and perseverance to elevate me so that I could take the lead. Oh yes, it meant hard work for me, of course, but all the credit goes to the Lord for where I came as a leader. Furthermore, we need to realize very thoroughly where the real leadership lies. Jesus is the One who is the true Leader, and I am only His tool!

Let us take an example: a king sends his slave to give orders to his officials. The question is whether this slave can exalt himself above the high men? Definitely not! He is only the messenger, even though he has a very important task. So I have to see my leadership in the same light. I am only the messenger of the Lord, or the one who carries out the command of the Lord, and therefore I never dare to elevate myself to "boss". I am still totally dependent on Him who sent me, no matter how important the task is that He laid on my shoulders!

The practical implications of this are that it does not matter what your position in the church is, whether you are a leader-elder, pastor or even a moderator! You must still realize that you are just an ordinary member like everyone else and that you must be willing to humbly do your job without dominating anyone!

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me where I sometimes look

down on others. Please give me true humility.

Peter, Peter!**Luke 22: 31-34**

This is the disciples' very last night with Jesus before His execution, and distress grips your heart when you realize that these men still do not understand what it is all about. There is still the mutual strife, as we read yesterday, and on top of that there is a viper in their midst in the form of Judas.

Jesus now speaks directly to Peter: Yes, the devil is not very pleased with him and his fellow disciples. "He insisted on sifting you like wheat," Jesus told Peter. I think the devil was desperate because he saw where the thing with Jesus was going. He tried so hard to thwart God's plan of redemption, but he was powerless. Now he turns to Jesus' followers, and he wants to start with the disciples. He has already seen where all their weaknesses are, and he wants to exploit them so that they will fall apart and run off

when Jesus' execution is over. Thus, the whole plan of redemption will only be wrecked and have a dead ending!

However, the devil did not take Jesus into account. He did not think that after this Jesus would still care for these men and even pray for them. Humanly speaking, Jesus must have long ago given up hope with this lot, but He realized the power of prayer all too well. He saw the potential of this rough fisherman Peter, the one with the sharp tongue, who speaks before he thinks. "I prayed for you that your faith might not fail you, Peter!" He goes on to explain that Peter will be the one who will stand strong and strengthen his fellow disciples when things threaten to fall apart. But this will only happen after Peter's repentance!

Peter does not understand. He does not realize that there are weaknesses locked up in him. Actually, he does not even want to know about such weaknesses! Again, it is the old Peter who speaks before he thinks, when

he tells Jesus that he is willing to be imprisoned with Jesus and even die for his faith! He is very confident!

What a rude awakening awaited Peter that night! “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times, Peter! You are going to deny that you know Me!”

Peter cannot believe his ears! His ego is cracked! He was brought back very hard to earth!

It is often necessary to fall down from that throne that you have built for yourself, so that you can realize your dependence on God again. That night would surely be the most bitter one in his life for Peter, but he would rise again! Jesus promised it to him Himself. When you and I descend so hard to earth, then you feel hurt and rejected. But then there is the one Anchor of Hope that prevents us from totally hooking out - Jesus! Just as He prayed for Peter, so He also prays for us. In Matt. 28 He promised that He would be with us until the end! What a wonderful

comfort, especially when you no longer know which way to go!

As the devil at the time tried to bring the disciples to a fall, he is still trying very hard today to make believers stumble and fall so that we will not be able to rise again. The irony is that a believer who is just a passenger on the train of faith, and just travels with for the ride, will not really be bothered by the devil. He is no threat to the devil, so he leaves him to complete his fruitless ride.

However, it is the believer who pulls up his sleeves and tries to keep the machinery of the train of faith going, which is the target of the devil's attacks. Such a person worries the devil, because all his hard work is being undone. Someone who leads people to Jesus is targeted especially, because that is when the devil sees the souls slip out of his eager claws.

So when the devil's attacks strike you, do not worry. In the first place, you know that you

have stepped on the devil's toes, and that he does not like it. But the most important thing is that you can know that Jesus is with you to keep you standing. He will never, ever leave or forsake you, and He prays for you.

But there is also the wonderful knowledge that the Holy Spirit is in you to give you the wisdom and power to handle every situation. Often things seem totally impossible to us, and you feel that it is totally beyond your ability. But then there is the wonderful knowledge that we have the Holy Spirit who will give us guidance and strength to come out the other side successfully. He never promised that it would be easy, but He would keep us standing, even through the hardest ordeal, and make us emerge victorious from the battle.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for bringing Jesus on my path!

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Two Swords

Luke 22: 35-38

This is the year 1099. Triumphant an army of crusaders marches into Jerusalem and kills a large number of the inhabitants to take over the city in the name of Christianity. The order to carry out this bloody act came from none other than the head of the church, Pope Urban II. In their march to Jerusalem from Europe, they leave a trail of blood as far as they go. Several cities are simply crushed, all in the name of the church. They can kill as they please because they have full remission of their actions. It was the first bloody crusade! Many more follow and it continues for almost 200 years until 1272 with the end of the last crusade.

Jesus' last conversation with His disciples before His execution was often misunderstood, even by His disciples, and later thousands of people were killed by

zealous Christians who wanted to impose the Gospel on people with the sword.

It just underscores the fact that you cannot build an entire doctrine around a single sentence in the Bible! You should read it in the context of the passage in which it was written and then test your understanding of it to the message of the rest of the Bible.

When Jesus initially sent His disciples on a "trial run" to get them used to preaching the Gospel, His command was that they should take absolutely nothing with them, not even food or clothing. They had to learn that He would provide for them in everything. They therefore had to practically experience their full dependence on Him.

However, the situation would change completely because He would no longer be physically with them. They would therefore have to be totally on their own and have to stand on their own two feet. So they had to start learning to be self-sufficient. They would depend on other people's hospitality. At first it

would not be a problem because people had a great respect for Jesus and they helped where they could. But there was a wall of hostility building up against Jesus and later also His followers. Of that once-excessive hospitality, there would eventually be little left and people would see them as enemies and a "sect" that would threaten the entire Jewish people. Just look how fanatical Paul was later to eradicate this "disease" among the people, until Jesus finally stopped him in his tracks at Damascus.

So if they wanted to survive, they had to make sure they could be self-sufficient. Paul later lived out this principle, practicing his profession as a tentmaker to finance his travels during his missionary journeys.

The second aspect that Jesus mentions, and which was totally misunderstood, is that they had to acquire weapons or swords at all costs. We want to respond immediately that it does not make sense at all because all of Jesus' statements indicated that love and

certainly not violence is the answer! What became of it? Jesus said that if someone attacks us, we must turn the other cheek so that they can hit there too!

What Jesus said here to His disciples, He meant symbolically. He wanted to prepare them for the violence that was to come. That same night, He was violently imprisoned and the persecution that began shortly thereafter was terrifying. The men had to realize that they would have to flee from the sword of the Jewish leaders who would want to exterminate them at all costs. When we read Luke's story in Acts, we also see how these very men were repeatedly imprisoned, flogged and abused, and repeatedly threatened with death! We see how believers are often stoned - cruelly stoned to death! Stephen was the first to pay with his life in this terrible way while Paul watched approvingly. Later, Paul himself also felt the violence of the stones on his own body!

"Lord, look here are two swords!" The

disciples were satisfied that they were already prepared as Jesus naturally recommended. I think Jesus was humanly stunned by the men's inability to understand what He was trying to bring home to them. "We leave it at that," he simply replied, because to try to explain - there was no more time! Gethsemane was waiting!

Later they did understand this, but only after the Holy Spirit came into their lives. Indeed, they have lived out their love to the fullest, thus setting the example for us today of how you can truly live out your love. The sword is not the answer, even if you sometimes feel like you want to kill the heinous lot! As believers, we must live out love in its fullness - that was Jesus' command throughout His ministry. This means that we will still remain friendly, even if the world punishes us. This means that our love will radiate even through the greatest persecution. Stephen prayed for his murderers!

Prayer:

Lord, fill my heart - my whole life with Your wonderful love so that it will radiate and the world will see Jesus through me.

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In Gethsemane

Luke 22: 39-46

I attended a course with a few friends a few years ago. A huge mountain of work had to be completed and we only finished after midnight. Suddenly we were able to relax, and we decided to go and put some meat on the fire first. Around the crackling fire we relaxed and chatted until shortly before dawn before we first started to fall sleepy. A year later we were again busy with a course somewhere on the South Coast and again we worked there until midnight. One of the presenters of the course, a Free Stater, decided that he would like to see the sun rise over the sea. There was no question of getting up early, so we all decided to just sit on the beach all night and chat and chat until the sun rose like a golden ball from the sea the next morning. And then we continued our

course. Madness!

A few years later, our congregation holds an all-night prayer service. By nine o'clock in the evening I was dead-tired, and could no longer keep my eyes open. Only a few die-hards made it to the next morning. The rest disappeared one by one, myself included!

How extremely difficult it is to wrestle through a night in prayer! With friends you can push through to dawn, but with God even an hour is too long. How easily can we sit through a concert for full three hours, and then ask for more, but if a worship service lasts an hour, it becomes far too long.....

After the stressful Passover and communion, Jesus and His twelve confidants usually went to the Mount of Olives, where they have slept every night for the past week or so. But this time it was different, because instead of preparing His bed among the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus instructed the men to pray. They especially had to pray that they would not be confronted with a very

difficult test. He himself walked a little further on to be alone in prayer.

I think their prayer was very half-hearted because they were tired and the tension of the evening's events took its toll. Consequently, when there was a very big crisis later that night, they were totally unprepared for it. In a fit of rage, Peter cut off someone's ear with his sword and one of the others lost his clothes in the process and ran naked into the night. Even worse things would happen, all because they could not carry out Jesus' command to push through in prayer.

For Jesus, this time was the greatest crisis He had ever experienced in His 33 years on earth. The forty days in the wilderness must have been terrible, and the temptation of the devil much worse. But it was child's play compared to what He experienced in Gethsemane. Just think what would be grinding through your thoughts if you knew exactly what was waiting for you!

That you would be tried and lied to throughout the night and then whipped until pieces of raw meat were torn from your back.

That you could know exactly what would happen next, from the terrible pain that awaited you as the mocking soldiers cut the rough iron nails through your hands and feet at the wooden cross.

That you could clearly foresee everything from the scorching sun that would exhaust your body as you hung there - yelled at by the crowd and totally forsaken by God.

If Jesus had rather not known what was before Him, it might have been much more bearable. But He had experienced these things in His mind even before they happened.

And He was scared!

A fear of death gripped Him. He prayed and asked the Father if there could be another way? Could this torture that was waiting for

Him please not be put aside? A feverish sweat wet His body, despite the cool night air. His sweat pearled like drops of blood from His forehead, and exploded on the rocky ground - an anxious sweat like no one had ever experienced before.

"Yet do not let My will, but Your will be done!" He places Himself under God's will.

His friends, who were supposed to assist Him through this terrible struggle, had long since fallen asleep under an olive tree. Mercifully, the Father sent an angel to strengthen Him, but it was only a small consolation! He was not totally alone and rejected, but the next day it would be different. When He hung there on the cross, there would be no one, not even an angel to assist Him through the terrible torture!

I do not think we fully realize what Jesus went through to pay for our sins. The terrible torture began long before He was even nailed to the cross, all in order to give us complete acquittal. He experienced hell in it's

fullest, so that you and I can escape it and that we do not have to taste it. How do we say thank you for that immeasurably great sacrifice He made? Often our thanks are very half-hearted! We mumble a few quick words, sit through an urgent hour in the worship service and wish the time would fly! Are we willing to truly make sacrifices when we say thankyou to Him? Let's ponder a little today over what we are truly willing to do for Him.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, our thanks are but hollow words, because we can never thank You enough for what You have done for us.

Pitch-black Darkness

Luke 22: 47-53

It's dark - pitch black amongst the thorn bushes of the Lowveldt. The moon is not yet up, and it feels as if the sickle bushes with their awful thorns want to hug you. I throw another piece of wood on the fire. It's just a small consolation! Every now and then I look around, just to be dead sure that we might not be stalked from behind by some carnivore! A twig cracked. "What was that?" says Mosbolletjie with a tremor in her voice. The flashlight cuts through the thorns and bushes in search of an answer, but there is nothing. It's dead quiet! Not even a nightjar or cricket or frog. Nothing! Ominous!

Suddenly I become aware of a movement - a shadow in the outer circle of the dim light of the fire. I almost fall off my chair in fright! A little duiker! Big innocent brown eyes look at me questioningly. He just came looking for

something to eat!

The dark can be scary. Maybe it's because evil often lurks in it. He uses darkness as a cover for his cunning, treacherous plans!

Yes, it was precisely in the pitch-black darkness of Gethsemane, there on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, where the evil one came to commit his treacherous deed. While Jesus was wrestling in prayer, Judas snuck up on the Jewish leaders. "Come," he told them, "it's safe to catch Him now!" In the pitch darkness of the night, he led them through the olive trees to where he knew Jesus would be. After all, he himself had spent many nights there with Jesus - sitting at Jesus' feet while He taught him and his fellow disciples about the things of the Kingdom. Those times in the garden, without the eternal crowds of people were precious. But everything has soured, and now there is only betrayal in Judas' dark heart.

Jesus had just finished praying, and He was still admonishing His disciples because they

could not stay awake, when the crowd suddenly emerged from the pitch darkness, with none other than Judas at the forefront. They were armed to the teeth with anything that could hit or cut. Filled with horror, we must see how Judas steps forward and kisses Jesus - the kiss of betrayal. A devilish kiss!

Suddenly the half-asleep disciples come to life and pull out their swords to defend Jesus. The scapegoat, Peter, starts swinging wildly with his razor-sharp weapon and an innocent slave, who was probably only there to carry a lamp, falls to the ground. Peter's sword hits him on the head, and with horror the poor man must see that his ear had been cut off. He still wants to lament, but then Jesus touches the man's ear in compassion, and this slave becomes the last person Jesus ever heals during His three year ministry.

"Stop it!" Jesus rebukes His disciples. Violence is certainly not the answer to their problems.

"Day by day I was with you in the temple," Jesus said to the chief priests who came to take him prisoner, "and you did not put forth your hand to catch me. But now that the time for the dark forces is here, you have your chance!"

The darkness of the night in which these men marched against Jesus was a symbol of the suffocating spiritual darkness in which these spiritual leaders found themselves. In the light of the day they could not catch Him, because Jesus was always surrounded by people for whom the light went up, people who saw Jesus for Who He really was. They would be opposed if they arrested Jesus. Therefore, they had to use the dark as a cover so that no one would see them.

John's Gospel emphasizes this contrast between light and darkness. In Joh. 8:12, for example, he writes of one of Jesus' statements in which he says: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will never live in darkness, but will have the light that

gives life.” How ironic it is that Jesus, the Great Light, was betrayed in the darkness and was captured under the cover of darkness by servants of the dark forces. How terribly dark the hearts must have been, of those men who pretended to be men of light, priests of God, leaders of the priesthood. How terribly dark it must have been in Judas' heart - he who was a disciple, a friend of Jesus, someone who lived with Jesus for three years and witnessed each of Jesus' thousands of miracles! We can only guess at what exactly went wrong there.

In this depressing story, there is a very serious warning to every believer: Be careful that you do not end up in darkness too! All those involved in the story were people who were active in the religion. Judas was even a faithful follower of Jesus. Through sin they ended up in darkness. Do not walk the same path!

Prayer:

Lord, please keep me from the darkness -

that I do not end up in it myself.

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Peter's Betrayal

Luke 22: 54-62

When Jesus is captured in the garden, all His disciples run away, according to Matthew's description of the events (Matthew 26:56). They left Jesus in the lurch there and then. However, one of them had the courage to follow Jesus' persecutors from a distance - he could not simply abandon his Master! We so easily want to condemn Peter for denying Jesus, but we forget about the other disciples who were all totally absent. They only thought of themselves and fled when their Master needed them most. Have even Jesus' disciples now turned against Him?

The scene now shifts to the courtyard of the high priest's house. Tonight the people are not sleeping as usual - there is a lot of action in this spacious courtyard because that Man who caused the church so many headaches was caught, and He is waiting for the trial to

begin. Everyone is curious to see what happens, so there is no question of sleeping tonight. It's freezing cold. In the middle of the courtyard a fire is burning, and the men are hunching together for a little warmth and conversation. Peter slipped in unnoticed among the men, hoping no one would recognize him. On one side, in the farthest corner of the courtyard, a few men are busy with Jesus.

A young maid walks past the men around the fire. Suddenly she stops - that stranger amongst the crowd, she's seen him somewhere before, but where? Her curiosity is piqued, and she looks at him properly, and then she remembers! "Hey, but you are one of the guys who has always been with this Jesus!"

Peter desperately tries to pull his robe lower over his eyes. "No Miss, no, you are making a mistake, I do not know Him!" His throat tightens, he stutters as he speaks and his heart beats in his throat. If they have to

recognize him here now, he's in big trouble! The girl turned around and shook her head, sure she had seen this man with the so-called Prophet!

Peter's mind is in a turmoil. He does not quite understand what is happening. Everything that has been so beautiful over the last three years is crumbling! Is this now the end of the road?

"Hey you! You are also one of this Man's fans! " The man almost pressed his finger against Peter's nose.

Peter freezes with fright. "Man, I am not! You confuse me with someone else!"

Painstakingly slowly the time drag past. This is the longest night ever in Peter's life. He struggles with his emotions. There on the other side of the courtyard he can see how they mock and humiliate his Master. Senseless bunch of villains! Peter gets a stab of pain deep in his heart, but he does not dare stand closer to help Him. How terribly

lonely must his Master not be!

Peter felt the people's eyes burn on him. He can see them whispering to each other as they look in his direction. "What!?" he still wants to say, but then one of the men points a finger in his face: "You are a Galilean! Truly, you were with that Man!"

"Never!" Peter is furious now! "I do not know what you are talking about!"

And then the rooster crows.

Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. His soft eyes say, "Peter, I will pray for you!"

Anxious, Peter jumped up and ran sobbing into the pitch-dark night with tears streaming down his cheeks. "What did I do? What have I done!"

That terrible night Peter would never, ever forget in his life - the night of his betrayal of his beloved Master!

But the Lord is merciful and omnipotent, and

the very Peter who has fallen so terribly hard is lifted from this pitch-dark pit of misery to the highest heights barely a month later to reign as the fearless leader of the new church. When he relied on his own strength, it was a disaster! However, when he surrendered himself to the Holy Spirit, his Source of power was inexhaustible, endless!

Maybe today you are sitting in that pit in which Peter ended up and you no longer know which way to go. Maybe it seems to you like the end of your path of faith and you also want to run into the night like Peter, crying. Then I have very good news for you: the same Holy Spirit who later so exalted Peter, is also waiting for you to surrender yourself to His care. The same Holy Spirit to Whom I said this morning, "Lord, I do not know what to write!" comes to fill my mind with this message to you.

Yes, He is in you, and He longs to take over the management of your shaky life. But He will only do this if you give Him the steering

wheel. Do it! You will never, ever regret it!

Prayer:

Lord, take over my whole life, and use it to
Your glory.

Jesus before the Jewish Council

Luke 22: 63-71

Jesus never used violence, even though He may have had a very good reason for it. The only incident we know of is when He kicked the bunch of cunning merchants out of the temple. During Jesus' "being human" time, we come to know Him as Someone who avoided confrontation at all costs. Even when He was captured and Peter cut off the slave's ear, Jesus was still the One who made peace and even went so far as to heal His wounded enemy's ear,

What a wonderful examplee did He not set for us! If we only wanted to follow it! But alas! After all, one's temper can flare up so quickly as soon as someone dares to step on your toes!

It hurts so terribly to see how this Jesus, who radiated love and compassion, was treated

harshly by His guards. After the only ones of His followers who still dared to be close to Him, also ran away, into the night, the security guards who guarded Jesus became bored. To pass the time, they begin to mock Him. They blindfold Him and then one of them strikes Jesus. He is then mocked to prophesy which one of them has struck Him. He is the great Prophet, isn't he? Throughout the night, this mockery continues. All kinds of blasphemous things are said to him.

But Jesus remains silent and does not move a finger to defend Himself. He does not answer their mocking questions about who it was that struck Him. Jesus is carrying out the will and plan of God and He is doing it Masterly! Despite His plight (humanly speaking), Jesus is in full control of what is happening here. Without realizing it, these people are doing exactly what God wants them to do, and they are making the age-old prophecy come true.

Eventually the day breaks, and the Jewish

Council is hastily convened for Jesus' trial. According to Jewish law, this trial could only take place during the day. This is in stark contrast to the way Jesus was captured, it had to happen under the guise of the pitch-dark night to prevent the people from revolting. The leaders of the people hypocritically pretend to walk in the light, but their dark deeds are committed in the night!

On the benches they sit lined up, all the scribes and chief priests - men of the church! They pretend to represent God here but murder breeds in their hearts, because Jesus violated their honour when He condemned them there in the temple.

Then Jesus is led into the courtroom - not as Judge, but as accused. How ironic, the Judge who will one day sit to judge mankind of all times, must now stand as the accused before a tribunal who are themselves guilty to death!

It is so important that a judge should live absolutely blamelessly. Over the past few

years, some of our judges have been convicted of misconduct. How can anyone still act as a judge, if he himself has been convicted? How, then, does he dare to pass judgment on others?

Actually, the thing comes a lot closer to me and you, because so often we want to judge people. We gossip and talk about someone who has stumbled in life, and often just want to condemn the poor person. We only dare to do this if we ourselves are spotless, without a hint of sin. I do not think there is a human being on earth who can claim such a pure life. Paul states this unequivocally in Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...". In Luke 6:37 Jesus warns, "Do not be condemn, and you will not be condemned."

The Council wants to try to prove Jesus a "false Christ", but He bypasses their efforts every time. They ask him directly if he is the Christ. His answer? "Even if I were to say it to you, you would not believe it!" But it's like

water on a duck's back - and still the thick-skinned "saints" are trying to catch Jesus. "Then you are the Son of God?", They try to push Him into a corner. "It is as you say: I am!", Jesus answers their question as straight as he can.

Based on the fact that Jesus spoke the truth, He is then condemned. The church leaders judge that His claim is a lie.

And so these men actually express a judgment about themselves, because in John 3:18 clearly states: "He who believes in Him (the Son) is not condemned; he who does not believe has already been condemned" How tragic! It is precisely the many Religious people who could not open their hearts to the Son of God.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for opening my eyes, for recognizing You as the true Son of God.

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Jesus before Pilate

Luke 23: 1-7

The Jewish Council stands up as one man and takes Jesus from Caiaphas' house to the other end of the city, to Pontius Pilate. The Romans should rather interrogate Him because the Jewish Council did not have the power to impose the death penalty on Him. The only way to get rid of Jesus for good would be to cast Him for the Romans!

These men must have been very desperate, because they did not have much respect for Pilate. Of course, Herod was still king over the province of Galilee, but instead of appointing a king in Judea, Rome decided that it would be better to appoint a Procurator or Prefect there instead. So Pilate was appointed there in 26 AD. He was not very popular with the Jews! He was hard, callous and miserly. On one occasion he built an irrigation line to Jerusalem, and then he

expected the rich Jews to help pay. When they refused, he summarily had the money taken from the treasury in the temple! Of course, the Jews revolted and then Pilate instructed his soldiers to disguise themselves and seep in among the rioters. There they attacked the unsuspecting people with clubs. Many people were beaten to death or trampled to death that day.

It is therefore ironic that the Jewish Council turned to Pilate for help in getting rid of Jesus. Their initial charge against Jesus was, of course, religious in nature. He considered Himself the Son of God and that was according to them blasphemy! With Pilate, however, they come up with a completely different story because he would only have laughed at them if they had approached him with that kind of complaint. Suddenly, their accusation took on a strong political colour. Their complaint reads as follows:

1. Jesus incited or deceived the people.
2. He forbade the people to pay taxes.

3. He claimed to be the Christ, the King.

On the first charge, Pilate probably just shook his head, because when did Jesus ever incite the people? The closest thing to incitement we know is when He called these men who tried him a bunch of poisonous snakes!

The second complaint was also absolutely ridiculous, because Jesus said exactly the opposite of what they claimed. In Luke 20: 20-26 we read that the scribes tried to get Jesus to answer the question about taxes, and that His answer to them was: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. " He could not have stated more clearly that one has to pay your taxes, because it is right. So where did they get this lie? Only they would know

Charge number three, however, was something completely different, and I do not think Pilate knew quite well what to do with this charge, because in fact it was Religious in nature, and therefore totally outside his

field of knowledge. So he asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus actually gave a very evasive answer to this. You will remember that right through His ministry Jesus was very vague to the people about His true identity. Towards the inner circle of disciples, however, He did not mince matters.

Pilate therefore had no choice but to acquit Jesus. On not a single charge that the men laid before him, could Pilate find any truth. But then the men began to get anxious because they saw that the whole trial was slipping through their fingers. "But he stirred up all the people with his doctrine," they urged Pilate. They plead with him to please just not delete this case from the roll after all their effort!

Suddenly, Pilate's ear catches the word Galilee. "Is he from Galilee?" he wanted to know. If that was the case, then He was under Herod's jurisdiction! Pilate breathed a sigh of relief. Herod could take over! Thank goodness! Now it was out of his hands!

Pilate had all the power to cut this trial short and release Jesus, but this mighty man was too cowardly to make this decision, which would cause the truth to triumph.

We would like to condemn Pilate for it, but the fact is that we often end up in the same kind of situation, and then we do exactly what Pilate did. Once we start feeling insecure, we would rather move the problem over to someone else.

However, there is another matter: Pilate did exactly what God wanted him to do, because if Pilate had taken a stand that day, history might have been tragically different, and you and I could not have received the acquittance that God brought about for us that dark day. Yes, He even used the wicked Pilate to accomplish His purpose!

Prayer:

Oh Lord, the events that day hurt me deeply, but I realize that everything had to happen that way for my acquittal. Thank you Lord!

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Herod's Disillusionment

Luke 23: 6-12

When Pilate heard that Jesus came from Galilee, it was as if a great burden had fallen from his shoulders. So then Jesus was not within his sphere of influence. That was Herod's problem! Pilate had no time for that cruel man. Herod Antipas was a member of the infamous Herod family. His father, Herod the Great, was responsible for the child slaughter when Jesus was a baby. After his father's death, the Kingdom was divided between Herod Antipas and his brothers, and each was given territory to rule on behalf of the Romans. Herod Antipas himself also had blood on his hands. The creepy saga at his party was still fresh in the memory. Herod was so overwhelmed that day by his stepdaughter's seductive dance moves that he complied with his wife's request. He had the innocent John the Baptist beheaded and boasted in front of his guests with the

bloodied head of the prophet in a dish.

However, there was another side of Herod - he really wanted to see Jesus, as we read in Luke 9: 9. The problem, however, was that it would not befit a man of his status to follow Jesus. And here his desire is satisfied when the opportunity for, as it were, into his lap when Pilate sends that same Jesus to him. Did Pilate ever realize what a great favour he had done for Herod? Herod was overwhelmed with joy - he could not believe his happiness! So he was finally able to talk to Jesus and hear firsthand the wonderful things Jesus was saying that all the people were talking about! Maybe Jesus could even do some miracles for him! Herod bubbled with excitement.

But things worked out so terribly differently for Herod. All he was interested in was hearing Jesus speak, but this simple bunch of Jews kept interfering with their accusations that they threw all the time. He felt like he wanted to scream! And if he still got the

chance to ask Jesus something, then Jesus was just silent as death! Not a single one of those wonderful words came over His lips!

Herod was a very frustrated man! He always got everything he wanted, but this one time when the one thing he so longed for, to be able to talk to Jesus, came his way, it slipped through his fingers! Jesus refused to talk to him!

Herod responded by getting angry. Suddenly Jesus was no longer that Man who filled him with wonder, but for Herod an object of contempt! He did not get from Jesus what he hoped for and so he rejected Jesus. His soldiers made a mockery of Jesus by hanging a fancy robe on him and pretending Him to be a King.

And so Jesus was finally just sent back to Pilate. Herod did not want anything to do with such a Jesus! Pilate can mess up further!

I sometimes wonder if this is not also often the case today? It often happens that people

meet Jesus, but then they see a totally different Jesus than they hoped to see. I just wonder - if Jesus had spoken to Herod, what would He have said to him? Maybe: "Stop sinning", or "Take up the cross and follow Me!" Would Herod have ever considered it? I don't think so! Maybe Jesus also asked those who got lost along the way to do certain things, but they were not up to it!

Let's be honest with each other: Jesus' acquittal is free - it costs you nothing, because He has already paid the full price for it. You cannot earn eternal life! But Jesus demands of every believer a counter-achievement when we **ALREADY** have eternal life, and that is to dedicate our whole lives to Him out of gratitude. Jesus did not say anywhere: "Sit back now and enjoy your salvation"! However, he has told His followers on several occasions that it takes hard work to follow Him. To only come to church on Sundays is just to soothe your conscience. Reading the Bible from time to time and praying is definitely not what Jesus wants.

When the rich young man came to tell Jesus how he had faithfully kept all the commandments, his bubble burst when Jesus told him that it was not even nearly enough.

Every believer must work actively in the Kingdom. In the first place, the Lord asks you not to sin. What is sin? It is NOT doing the will of God. What is the will of God? Love for Him and your fellow-man. To love Him means that you will honour Him with your whole life. Love for your fellow-man does not only mean supporting them physically, but also about the spiritual, and that you will be a tool in some way to bring the gospel message to all unbelievers, because of course it is the greatest act of love you can show anyone.

The question is: were you, like Herod, disillusioned with the Jesus you met, or did you receive Him enthusiastically and with joy?

Prayer:

Lord, please make me an enthusiastic, active citizen of Your Kingdom.

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Crucify Him, crucify Him! ”**Luke 23: 13-25**

Herod became bitterly annoyed because he could not get anything out of Jesus, but the fact is that he also saw no guilt in Him. Herod found Jesus innocent, and so he sent Him back to Pilate for the final trial, the fourth one for the day, so that he could deliver judgment.

Pilate summoned the chief priests, the Jewish council, and others interested in his judgment. He made it very clear to them that he had investigated their case very thoroughly and that his final finding was that Jesus was innocent. This was confirmed by Herod's finding that was in line with his.

However, it is incomprehensible that despite the fact that he found Jesus innocent, Pilate decided to have him beaten before he released Jesus. But the Jews were still not satisfied with this at all! So then he had to

release Barabbas instead. Barabbas was a hardened criminal who was in prison for rebellion and murder. They were even willing to exchange someone for committing such heinous acts for Jesus. But He had to die - be crucified, because they wanted the worst possible punishment for Him!

It is beyond our comprehension that you can build up such a terrible hatred against someone, especially if that Person in His entire life has never harmed anyone and only handed out love in excess!

A second time, Pilate tried. He was firmly convinced that there was no guilt in Jesus. Certainly not the kind of guilt that made Him deserve the death penalty! However, these Jews were now totally obsessed, and they did not even want to hear what Pilate was saying. "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" they just kept screaming.

"What evil did the Man do?" cried Pilate desperately. For the third time he tried in vain to bring the Jews to other insights, but they

just kept shouting, louder and louder: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Now it was no longer just the leaders of the people, but they incited the whole nation with them, including those who only a few days ago still listened very attentively to Jesus. "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

The devil was desperate to get rid of Jesus for good, because he saw where it was going, and that he would lose a lot of power once Jesus was in full control. I think he was very pleased when he saw how well his plan worked and that he got it right to incite the whole nation against Jesus. He also struck his blow with Jesus' confidants. Judas was the first to be targeted then the big one, Peter! These guys were history! They would never be the same again!

But the devil did not take God into account, for with his mean game he was playing right into God's hand. He never realized what God had planned, and that Jesus' execution would mean the end of the devil's reign. But

there is another element that the devil did not take into account, and that is the working - the WONDERFUL working of the Holy Spirit! These disciples whom he chased away - even Peter with his abominable deed would later experience the glorious, immeasurable power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost! There the Lord lifted them out of the misery in which the devil tried to plunge them and made them powerful witnesses for Jesus. So great was the power with which they were filled, that even many of those who shouted together, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" came to new insights and became followers of Jesus.

We often want to stare so blindly at the works of evil that we cannot see the wonderful hand of God. All you read or hear in the news is the horrors of farm murders, kidnappings, rapes, domestic violence and corruption. And then the dark cloud of the terrifying virus still hangs over our heads! We are conditioned to go through life with blinkers and just notice everything that is bad.

It's time for us believers to take off those blindfolds and start looking at the wonderful things that are happening around us every day. Miracles take place around us, events that we can only attribute to God. Turn your head away from the devil's works and see God's wonderful works! Take another look at a simple flower, see how absolutely perfect it was created. Marvel at the breathtaking colour wonder of a little sunbird and realize that it is the incorrigible work of the Creator!

Then make your life available to the Holy Spirit - the same unchanging, immortal Holy Spirit who picked up and exalted Peter and the others. Allow Him to fill your whole life, and you too will be a powerful witness of Jesus. Then you will also begin to look with new eyes at the things that are happening around us and you will see past the devil's last convulsive attempts at ruling and see the Kingdom of God blooming in full glory.

Prayer:

Lord, fill my whole life with Your Holy Spirit.

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On the way to Calvary

Luke 23: 26-32

The day is grey. The rain is pouring down miserably and a grey blanket of clouds hangs low over our house. Such weather makes one feel very depressed and it definitely adds to the mood I am in as I write about the march to Golgotha. It was also a very grey day, but in a very different way. The grey blanket on that day was not clouds, but the sins of the world that hung heavy over all the events.

After Jesus' gruelling trial, where he was literally sent from pillar to post, and then in addition to being flogged, they led Him away to the place of the skull to be crucified. By this time Jesus was already so weak and exhausted from all the physical as well as mental abuse, that He simply could no longer carry that heavy wooden beam to which He had to be nailed. One of the spectators was

commanded by the soldiers to carry it for Him. It was tradition that the convict himself had to carry the crossbar of his cross.

There has been a lot of speculation over the years and even stories have been written around this Simon of Sirene who had to carry Jesus' cross. Siren was a city in Libya in North Africa, so we can safely assume that this Simon was probably innocently travelling through Jerusalem. Coincidentally (?!) he ends up in the procession where Jesus is taken to Calvary, and a soldier grabs him. What must have been going on in the poor man's head? Put yourself in his place - how would you have reacted? Simon had no choice - he simply had to become part of all these events, even though he was probably not even a Jew. One would think that he would immediately pack his things and return to Sirene as soon as possible, but apparently this did not happen. In Mark 15 he is referred to as the father of Alexander and Rufes. It gives us the presumption that he later became a famous person in the

congregation, and that this participation he had in Jesus' crucifixion had such a great influence on his life that he became a believer.

Luke describes to us that there was a large crowd of people who came to see what was going on. Jesus' execution was definitely very big news! Many thousands of people have dealt with Him and may have come to know Him firsthand. Now they want to come and see what happens. It is so ironic that the people who a few days before still clung to Jesus' lips and drank in every word of His, are now only curious, or perhaps worse, part of the great crowd that threw insults at Him and shouted along: " Crucify Him, crucify Him! "

However, there were also the women who sympathized with Jesus and walked and mourned and wept. Were they women who came to other insights? Or were they perhaps from the women who had long ago realized who Jesus really was? Luke does

not say. What we do see in his story is that Jesus felt very sorry for these women. Even while He was in the most terrible pain and distress and was on His way to the most touching death, Jesus still made time to talk to these women.

A few days before, Jesus had triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem, but then He foretold the terrible judgment on the beautiful city. Now He is on His way out of the city, and once again He confirms that judgment. In His conversation with the women, He emphasizes the horror of that day of judgment. From history we learn that it took place 40 years later, and that only ruins remain of Jerusalem and the beautiful temple!

Yes, the grey cloud blanket still hangs over us and heavy rain wets the earth. Very sad! But then I realize that this rain, cold and gloom is penetrating deep into the ground this morning and giving nitrogen and life to the plants in my garden. It is absolutely

necessary because without it everything will die.

In the same way, those horrific depressing events that day brought life to the skull scene. The wonderful rain of God's grace not only brought life to the weeping women who followed Jesus, but it also brought life to Simon of Sirene and the criminal who was crucified next to Jesus. It also brought life to the brand new church that was born shortly thereafter and it still gives life to you and me today.

We can rejoice because Jesus has overcome! He transformed all the terrible attacks of the devil into the greatest triumph of all time. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, but in Revelation we read of the new, wonderful Jerusalem that is to come, and you and I will share in this city of gold and precious stones!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the wonderful comfort

You give us through Your Word. Thank you that we can look forward to a wonderful eternal life, the life that Your Son Jesus bought for us very dearly.

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Jesus Crucified

Luke 23: 33-38

It's a heartbreaking scene that unfolds before us, as the masses of people followed Jesus up the hill, the place of the skull, Golgotha while shouting and cursing Him all the way. The smell of death hangs heavily over this horrible place which means only one thing to the visitor: a horrible, painful, protracted death torture. Someone who spends his last time on earth can only hope that the torture will not last too long, because it can sometimes take days before the poor victim dies of thirst, exhaustion or infection in his wounds.

That fate is facing Jesus! However, it is not only the physical torment that awaits Him, but even more so the terrible spiritual struggle that He faces. You and I will never be able to fully comprehend it, for it is far too great for our simple human minds.

When the movie "Passion of the Christ" came out, I had to force myself to go and see it, because I did not want to behold the torture that Jesus underwent. When the rough iron nails pierced my Saviour's palms, and the soldier with the hammer kept hammering and hammering and hammering, I wanted to shout out: "Stop! That's enough!" But it just kept on and I cried unashamedly. I experienced that terrible pain with Him. How awful it must have been, when they lifted Him up there, and hung His full weight on the nails! It tore through his flesh!

Between two criminals, they hanged Jesus, the Son of the Holy God. How terribly humiliating to be counted among sinful people who were abhorred by society. But this was foretold in a prophecy spoken hundreds of years before by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53:12. Jesus' response was to pray for the people who had abused him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!" What these people did to Jesus was absolutely unforgivable in

human language. Yet Jesus plead with the Father for them. It goes beyond one's mind!

Then the soldiers came and robbed Him of His last bit of human dignity. They stripped Him of His garments and drew lots over who would get it. All these things happened while the Jews were standing there mocking and laughing at Him. It was a huge victory for the Jewish Councillors! A victory over what?

From Jesus this people received nothing but love. Day by day, He worked hard to heal many sick, cast out demons, and feed people. He taught them and the love that radiated from Him was overwhelming. Yet they rejected Him! In the most disgusting way possible! Of the soldiers you might understand it, but the Jewish people for whom He did so much and cared - it is incomprehensible. While the people there stood in contempt and watched, their spiritual leaders yelled at Him and made a mockery of Him by referring to Him as "the Christ chosen by God." If they only knew how absolutely

true to reality their mockery was!

Rubbing salt into Jesus' wounds, the soldiers mocked: "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" How terribly painful it must have been, for Jesus knew that only a single word from Him would be enough to save Him from this unbearable situation, but if He did, everything would be in vain. Then God's plan of salvation would have been totally wasted! He simply had to push through and pay the full price, even if it would cost Him His precious life. Just to strike one last nail, a hasty "official" notice was placed on His cross: "This is the King of the Jews." The Jews were not happy about this with their "allies", because they wanted to distance themselves from Him at all costs!

Something that makes one's hair stand on end is the fact that the Jewish religious leaders and the idolatrous Roman authorities worked together to get rid of Jesus. They did not hesitate for one moment to call on the help of the godless and thus work with the

devil against the holy Anointed One of God.

We must never, ever for a single moment forget how much Jesus sacrificed for our sins. We dare not simply accept Jesus' sacrifice as something that just happened. The price He paid was much, much greater than our human minds would ever comprehend. We were bought dearly! For that reason we cannot help but live a life of gratitude to Him who has done so much for us. I dare not let sin pollute my life! The greatest, however, is that I must fully live out Jesus' love. He has done the greatest act of love ever and the least you and I can do is plough some of that love back into our relationship with God and our fellow-man.

Prayer:

Lord, Your love for me was so great - how will I ever be able to give something back for it?

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Two Criminals - One Promise

Luke 23: 39-43

On Wednesday the last devotional for the year will be sent out and then resume on January 3rd.

Throughout Jesus' ministry we see that the learned men with a thorough knowledge of the Word, rejected Jesus. It was not because of their knowledge that they rejected Him, but because their expectation of Christ was something completely different from what they received. They were looking for a great, strong leader in the Messiah, but the Messiah they saw here was a Servant and a Friend of sinners! They could not process it! Their expectations were way too high! Often it was the simple people who recognized and believed in Jesus as the Messiah in a truly innocent way.

While Jesus was hanging on the cross, all

the learned men were standing there, mocking him. I think they said to each other "Yes, I told you so! Now this so-called Messiah is showing His true colours! All His miracles were just make-believe!"

On either side of Jesus hung convicted criminals. In his last hour of death, one of them joked with the learned men: "So, You are the Christ - save Yourself and then You can also save the two of us!"

However, one is dumbfounded when one sees the tremendous insight of the other criminal, a man who had sinned severely and was penalized for his deeds. However, he realized that what he had done was wrong: "Are you not afraid of God?" he rebuked his fellow-condemned. He realized his lostness and knew that he was on his way to eternal damnation. He truthfully admitted, there where he hung that he was wrong and that he deserved his punishment. But then we see his astonishing insight into Jesus: "This Man has done nothing wrong!" I do not think

he really fully realized the full extent of this remark, for Jesus was the only Man who could ever manage to live a totally sinless life. Even the holiest among us sin daily!

And then comes his request - one that probably shook the learned men down there in their foundations: "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

This man saw his life-juices slowly draining and death beckoning to him with a sneer. Jesus hung next to him and also for Him the gates of hell were already wide open. Yet this robber did not see death, or at least Jesus' death, as the end, but rather as the gate to a life of glory and dominion. Jesus was on His way to His Kingdom! As simple as that!

But that's not all: in his simplicity he reasoned that if (no, when!) Jesus would then come into His Kingdom, then it would still not be too late for him, the criminal, because Jesus could after all, still save him from perdition! "Jesus, think of me ..." was his sigh, his only hope.

You will of course remember that Paul later said, "This hope does not disappoint us!" (Rom. 5: 5). And here, too, the poor man's hope did not disappoint, for Jesus' answer to him was that he could be assured that he would be with Jesus in paradise the same day. It was a message of life - PARADISE life - that Jesus gave to the man in the face of death!

We live in a time when many people have lost all hope. Death is the end of the road. The Sadducees, the church leaders who stood there at the cross and mocked Jesus, already believed that death is the end of the road and that there is no life after death. Today, there are still many sceptical people who believe so. What does one live for then if there is no future? What is the purpose of everything? That is why these wonderful words of comfort from Jesus to the condemned on the cross are also for me and you today like the most delicious incense oil!

And note: Jesus did not tell him that he would

go there one day (in the future), but "today", here and now. In John 3:36 it is very clear: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life". A believer ALREADY has eternal life! He will not get it one day in the future only, but already gets it on the day of his rebirth. Yes, it is still imperfect here, but the moment we walk through the gates of death, it becomes a perfect life - instantly transformed. How exactly this happens and what we look like when it happens, we do not know. But Jesus' description of a "paradise" already paints for us a picture of absolute perfection, like the paradise where Adam and Eve lived. The difference is that the devil has stolen into their paradise, but the new paradise is without the presence of the seducer. Oh, I cannot wait for that day!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the wonderful promises You give us, and that even on the cross You did not stop sharing love and grace and promises!

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Jesus Dies

Luke 23: 44-49

Two dramatic things happened shortly before Jesus' death. The first was when darkness suddenly descended upon the land. "An ordinary solar eclipse!" we might be able to say. Maybe, but the timing of this "solar eclipse" was absolutely perfect. It affected the whole land, and symbolically it told the people that God had extinguished His light over the People of God. How awful! For a full three hours this darkness continued and the sun stopped shining over the land.

We can read a lot in this event. Perhaps God meant this symbolically by saying that He thereby withdrew the light of His presence from His people because they rejected His Son? Perhaps we can read in this the terrible darkness of sin, and the symbolic absence of God. What a terrible thought! That one can reach a time when God is completely

absent? It's too horrible to even think about it, because that's where the Evil One dominates. Why do you think Satanists love the colour black so much? This, of course, symbolizes God's absence.

Whatever the symbolism of this darkness, it touched the hearts of the people. I think it brought many people back to reality and that they realized that what they had just done was very wrong.

At the same time, however, a second miracle happens: the veil is torn. In the temple there was a heavy curtain or veil that hung permanently between the Holy and the Most Holy. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter behind this veil, and then only once a year. Symbolically, the veil meant that it was the separation between man and God, because behind this veil was His "dwelling place". To the people of Israel, this Most Holy was very precious, because it meant that God was with them.

So when that veil was torn, it was a terrible

disaster for this people, because suddenly God was no longer behind the veil in their midst. Matthew writes that the veil tore from top to bottom. It further emphasized the fact that it was an "act from Above", and that God personally came to tear this veil.

However, what was seen as a disaster to the Jewish people, believers today see in a totally different light. It was not a negative act of God, but rather a positive act. In the first place, we see in it that God was in full control of the situation. It is He who took the initiative to tear the veil. Secondly, we see in this that He was no longer exclusively a God for the people of Israel only, but that access to Him was now open (torn open) to all who wanted to worship Him. The third wonderful symbolism we see in this is that there is no longer a separation between God and man, because He took the initiative to tear away this heavy veil of separation forever. Now everyone has free access to God.

After these things happened, Jesus cried out,

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Then He died. Until the last moment, Jesus was fully obedient to God, and He was carrying out the will of God.

Even the hardened Roman officer, who must have seen thousands of people die, was moved by the events, so much so that he praised God and declared that Jesus was truly innocent (righteous). How could it be otherwise, for all the signs from heaven showed it then!

The people who had gathered there were devastated. In Greek it literally says that they beat on the chest, a sign of bitter remorse for what they had allowed to happen. "What have we done!" Many a Jew must have asked himself this question that sad afternoon! It was a pitch dark day for all of Israel! The people rejected God, and now God has shown by His miracles that He also rejected the people!

But Jesus' friends - Peter and the others were also somewhere close by. From a

distance, they watched all the horrific events. They saw everything happen. They were eye-witnesses of God's actions and of Jesus' crucifixion and His death. At that moment however, they did not know what to do with it - they were totally devastated!

But when the full reality finally hit them, they became powerful witnesses and proclaimed and trumpeted the good news of Jesus' atonement and redemption worldwide. You and I are also witnesses to these events, and we have a responsibility not to remain silent about them. A believers' job is to trumpet forth the good news of the Gospel!

Prayer:

Lord, I dare not keep quiet about these things! Give me the courage, willingness and zeal to tell.

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Jesus is Buried

Luke 23: 50-56

A sad end to a long, traumatic and dramatic day - Jesus' funeral. Sad, because not even his friends were there to come and bury Him. As a "criminal", Jesus' body would have ended up in a mass grave, and the disciples probably did not want to identify with it. They were powerless, shepherdless, discouraged, and I think they disappeared helplessly to their homes, knowing that all was lost. This dream of theirs came to an abrupt end in the most horrible nightmare.

But once again, God Himself provided - this time from surely the most unexpected and unlikely resort - the very same Jewish Council that had Jesus executed. In a certain Jewish village called Arimathea lived one of the members of the Jewish council - his name: Joseph. He did not agree with the rest of his councillors about Jesus' execution.

Luke writes to us that he was a good and sincere man who expected the coming of the Kingdom of God.

As one vote in the masses, it was completely impossible for him to convince the rest of the Council to other insights and then he only used his influence as Councillor to ensure after the crucifixion that Jesus would at least have an honorable burial. Surely Joseph risked his own life by going to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. If his colleagues were to find out about this, it was all over for him! In John 19:38 we see that Joseph had to be very careful that the other councillors did not find out that he was a follower of Jesus.

According to Matthew 27:57, Joseph was a wealthy man. He owned a brand new rock tomb - something that not many people were endowed with. The custom in those years was to leave someone who died in such a grave until all the flesh had perished. The tomb was then reopened and the bones stored in a jug.

Joseph had to hurry because it was already late Friday afternoon. By sunset the Sabbath had dawned and then he could do absolutely nothing more. So he only had an hour or so to get Jesus off the cross, take care of the body and get him in the grave. There was no time for the usual balm and scented oils that go with such a funeral. The women who stood and watched the events all day, gratefully went with Joseph, grateful that their Master had finally received a little honour after this terrible day. They were present when Joseph laid Jesus' body in the tomb, and when it was sealed by the large stone that was rolled in front of the opening. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, stood in front of the tomb and mourned.

Then they had to go home in a hurry, because sunset had arrived and with it the Sabbath. Now they had to wait patiently until Sunday morning before they could do anything further. They would only go and prepare the necessary fragrance oils and balm at home on Saturday night as soon as

the Sabbath was over and when the sun rose on Sunday morning, they would take care of the Master's body.

It was probably the longest Sabbath ever in those women's lives! To have to sit there waiting all day, hands cut off, because you dare to do absolutely nothing! And meanwhile, disturbing rumors began to circulate that the abominable chief priests had decided to have their Master's tomb guarded by Roman soldiers so that no one could reach Jesus' body. The terrible concern gnawed at the women: "What are we going to do? Who is going to help us roll the stone away? Where are Jesus' disciples? Will the guards ever allow us to take care of the body?" Questions, questions, questions! Anxieties consumed them.

God miraculously provided by sending Joseph of Arimathea at just the right moment. But the biggest surprise of all was still waiting for these women that Sunday morning, because what was happening at that grave

was totally beyond anyone's mind. Neither the women, nor the hardened soldiers, nor even Jesus' intimate friends to whom He foretold these things, were prepared for the events of Easter Sunday.

Often it is precisely when things seem to us the darkest and it feels as if our world has come to an end, when the light on the other side shines at its brightest. Then we get the surprise of our lives! Personally, I have experienced this many times, and then I can only fall into worship and once again acknowledge that God is far greater than the glory I give to Him. To Him then comes all the praise and the honour and the worship, for He is much, much greater than our minds can ever comprehend!

This is our last devotional for 2021. We resume again on Monday 3rd January. We would like to take this opportunity to wish you a very blessed Christmas!

Prayer:

Lord, as we stand before Jesus' tomb this morning, we can only rejoice that that tomb is empty and that He is alive!

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He Has Truly Risen

Luke 24: 1-12

What a wonderful idea to start a brand new year with - He Truly has risen!

We often get caught up in Jesus' crucifixion, and just like the disciples, we think it's the end of the road. For some modern theologians, this is where Jesus' life ends, because the resurrection story is a myth for them. It only happened in the hearts of the disciples! How far is it from the truth!

However, the resurrection story is also not the end of Luke's Gospel, but rather the beginning of his Acts story, because here lies the church's origin!

It was still early that Sunday morning when the three women, Mary Magdalene, Johanna and Mary (James' mother), were already on their way to the grave to do what there was no time for on Friday afternoon. They had to

take proper care of Jesus' body. It's so ironic that they heard that He said He would rise on the third day, but they just did not want to believe it. Such a great miracle was far too great for them to comprehend!

With enough fragrance oils and myrrh, they walked weeping to the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had so kindly offered to Jesus.

Then came the terrible shock! The stone that sealed the tomb was rolled away! They hurried to the grave. All their fears were justified when they saw that the tomb was indeed empty! "Someone stole our beloved Master's body!" So great was their shock, that they did not even notice the two celestial beings in glittering clothes standing at the tomb!

Suddenly the women spotted the two angels and almost fainted with fright. The angels calmed the women and then explained to them in great detail what Jesus had meant when He told them that He would die and then rise again. Slowly they begin to

understand. They remembered what Jesus said, and suddenly it all started to make sense and fit together like the blocks of a puzzle.

In great haste they ran back to go and tell this wonderful news to the disciples. I can imagine how the three women chattered simultaneously, and the poor disciples who had to try to make sense of their incredible story. They were very excited, but the other disciples simply could not understand or believe it. What was supposed to be a sad day suddenly turned into a jubilant feast for these three "confused" women!

Eventually the women's chattering did make sense to the men, but they still could not believe that these things were really true. The three women probably imagined it and they dismissed it as nonsense. It was all one big dream that played out in the women's heads! Jesus was dead! After all, they saw it for themselves with their own eyes! He was buried. It was over! Everything was a big

nightmare!

For one man, these things had now become far too much. Peter so wished things could be different, especially his terrible betrayal of his beloved Master that nightmare-Thursday night. He would literally grab at any chance to be able to change things. This news from the women - however outrageous it may sound - was a glimmer of hope for Peter. Hastily he jumped up and ran to the grave. What would he find there? The women must have come to the wrong grave! A jumble of thoughts swirled through his head - if only it could be true! Say now The consequences of a resurrection - if it could ever be possible - were too great for his confused mind to process!

Peter was still far from the grave when his heart gave a wild leap. "It's true after all!" he suddenly realized with a shock. With trembling knees he stumbled the last steps to the open grave. His whole body trembled as he leaned forward to peek at the grave

opening. Inside he saw the cloths lying - the cloths that Joseph had specially bought to wrap Jesus in. Furthermore, there was nothing - no body. Nobody would be so crazy to steal a corpse, and the cloths in which it was wrapped were just left behind!

Out of breath, Peter ran back to share the news with the others. He still did not quite know what to do with this - it was far too big for his confused mind to comprehend! He did not know where his Master was, but what he did know was that Jesus was not dead! He was alive! He had truly risen!

Are you still excited about Jesus' resurrection? Is Easter Sunday still a day of rejoicing and bubbling joy for you? Many people today are skeptical about these events, but the fact is that no one - not even the gentiles - speaks of "the deceased" Jesus. This forces even the most skeptical person to acknowledge that Jesus is alive, and that He has truly risen. To us as believers it means so much more, because it

means that Jesus, as He promised, is today, here and now still with us!

May 2022 be a year of bubbling joy for you, because Jesus lives! He has truly risen!

Prayer:

Thank you, thank you, thank you Jesus, that You did as You promised, and that You not only live but have a living relationship with us.

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The Road to Emmaus

Luke 24: 13-35

What lies ahead for us in the new year? The last two years have been sad with the terrible pandemic that hit us. And there does not seem to be an end to it! Every time when it seems to be coming to an end, a new wave hits us with brand new, terrifying mutations! That's how it must have felt like for the two poor guys travelling to Emmaus.

Our story begins this morning with two sad men on their way. It's Sunday afternoon and their hearts are very heavy as they walk and talk about the horrible and extremely incomprehensible things that have happened over the past few days. First, Jesus, the wonderful Master who they had been following lately, was captured and executed by the Jewish leaders! And this morning they get the terrible disturbing news that His body has now also inexplicably disappeared! They

simply do not understand these things at all. Nothing makes sense any more!

Cleopas and his friend had such high aspirations! This Messiah was the One – at least, so they thought - who would deliver them from Roman domination. That day when they marched into Jerusalem triumphantly – was that not wonderful! But then things started to go awry and the church leaders started reacting more and more violently against the Messiah.

A few days later, all their dreams crumbled when He was captured and died on the cursed-cross like a criminal. And now, this morning's disturbing events! Some women said that they had seen angels who would apparently tell them that Jesus had risen. Imagine! They must have been so upset about the empty tomb that they started imagining things! Peter and John also went to look at the tomb, and the inexplicable thing was that they found the cloths in which Jesus was wrapped. Why would anyone take the

body without the cloths? They just could not understand it!

These things upset the two men so much that they decided to rather leave Jerusalem. Their destination was the town of Emmaus, about a three-hour walk from Jerusalem. They had lost all hope and now they were withdrawing from the group of believers who were still stubbornly persevering.

And then Jesus comes!

They do not recognize Him at all because the Lord closes the eyes of the two men to Him so that He is a stranger to them. Then He begins to question them about the worry on their faces. They are surprised that He knows nothing about the events. Is He then the only stranger in Jerusalem? Everyone knows about last weekend's events - it was front page news in all the newspapers!

However, they soon realize that this "Stranger" knows much more than He professes to be, because He explains to

them from prehistory exactly how this Messianic thing works, and where their Master fits into the picture. Open-mouthed they walk and listen as He explains of all the prophets' prophecies and how it pointed to Jesus. Indeed, He is truly the Messiah, the Christ! The next thing, it's already dusk, and then they're already at Emmaus.

Then Jesus tests them and He pretends to want to go further. They pass the test, and the "Stranger" is invited to come and eat with them and spend the night with them as well.

What was their motive? Was it mere hospitality that compelled them to invite Him? Or was it perhaps because they wanted to know even more - to hear even more of these wonderful things this strange Man had told them? Whatever the case, this Man caused their hearts to warm - glow, because suddenly they began to understand about Jesus.

And then another incomprehensible thing happens: Jesus is their guest for the evening,

but at the table He acts as the Host! He is the One who breaks and serves the bread. And suddenly they recognize Jesus when their eyes literally open. And then all of a sudden He just disappears. But Jesus' divine presence with them - even though they can no longer see Him - strengthens their faith to such an extent that they just jump up there and then and hurry back to Jerusalem in the dark of night to share the news with the other disciples.

They are bubbling with excitement - such news has to be spread straight away. When they later return to Jerusalem out of breath, they are greeted with an equally excited circle of disciples: "The Lord has truly risen!" Even before they can tell their own wonderful story, they get the news that Jesus appeared to Peter!

It's already 2000 years later, and I'm still excited about Jesus' resurrection. That "fresh" news is still excitedly recounted by a crowd of believers. It should be an obsession

with each of us to tell it over and over to everyone who comes our way.

Prayer:

Lord, I am excited with the Emmaus pilgrims this morning about Your resurrection. Jesus is truly alive! I want to shout it out to the whole world!

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Jesus Is Here!

Luke 24: 36-49

Cleopas and his companion must have covered the stretch of road between Emmaus and Jerusalem in record time, because the news they had to convey to the other believers simply could not wait! Everyone needed to know about it right away. When they arrive at the house where the other disciples were gathered that Sunday evening, they excitedly recount their encounter with Jesus. Their bubbly message is: "He is alive! Jesus has truly risen!" Every little detail of their experience there on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus is told over and over and discussed in detail. It was the greatest experience ever in these two men's lives.

While they were still talking about these things, they heard the familiar, friendly voice of Jesus among them, "Peace be with you!"

And there He stands! Life-size Jesus stands between them. Can you imagine the shock of these people? Peter had already seen Jesus, and Cleopas and his family had spent an afternoon with Him, but it was still so terribly unreal. Just three days before, they had seen Him themselves hanging there on the cross. They saw with their own eyes how He died. And now He is standing here with them! Is it a Spirit? The men trembled with anxiety!

Jesus understood all too well how they must feel, because here they suddenly entered the world of the totally unknown. And for any human it would be scary. Therefore, He reassures them, and He assures them that He is still exactly the same Jesus they remember. He still has a body they can touch. He even eats a piece of baked fish before their eyes. No ghost is capable of such things!

Then Jesus begins to explain to them the full meaning of everything they have experienced over the past few days. He

explains why He had to die to pay for their sins in this way and why He had to rise from the dead again. Not only does Jesus give a brief explanation, but He shows them from the Scriptures where all these things were carefully foretold by the various prophets. The story of Jesus runs like a golden thread throughout the Old Testament, from the first chapter in Genesis with the creation story to the very last book. If we read the Old Testament with open eyes, we will clearly recognize Jesus in it! Rev. Danie Haasbroek has written a book entitled: "The Miracle of Jesus in the Old Testament," where he lifts the veil over Jesus. Not only does He appear in prophecy, but He sometimes also appeared Personally to people in the Old Testament. Some examples of this are Jesus' appearance to Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Gideon etc.

In the three years that the disciples were with Jesus, they still could not understand what it was all about. If they had known, they might have approached things very differently, and

that would have put Jesus' work of atonement in jeopardy. But now that His work is finished, He opens their minds so that they can understand. Suddenly it is as if a bright light is shining on them, and they understand the forgiveness of sins and Jesus' atonement and all that Jesus has been saying to them all along.

But then Jesus also explains that everything has not yet been completely finished, and that a wonderful surprise awaits them. He is going to give them a "Gift", but for that they have to wait patiently here in Jerusalem. I do not think the disciples could ever have imagined in their wildest dreams what the great extent of this "Gift" would be. We read later in Acts that Luke describes how that promised "Gift" was distributed to the disciples on the day of Pentecost. That day, the Holy Spirit came in full glory to fill the hearts and lives of all present, equipping them with unprecedented power and wisdom. He totally changed lives and lifted them to great heights.

The miracle is that that same Holy Spirit is still with our believers today, and that He still equips and fills us today with exactly the same power and wisdom that the believers experienced at that time.

The small handful of people who had gathered that night were about to run in all directions. Cleopas and his family were already on their way, and we also know that Thomas was no longer there that night. However, Jesus came to make a difference, and suddenly they found new hope. Finally, a month or so later, there were no less than three thousand of them together on the day of Pentecost when the promised "Gift" was given. The enthusiasm of the small handful of people was contagious.

This is the kind of reaction that you and I should also provoke - that our enthusiasm for Jesus will be so contagious that everyone will want to participate.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that Jesus came into my life and made a difference. Help me live it out enthusiastically.

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The Ascension

Luke 24: 50-53

Six full months you and I walked this path that Luke described with so much compassion. The story is of course well known to me, and certainly to you too, because we have read this book numerous times already. Yet, once again, every pericope was fresh and new to me, and I thoroughly enjoyed every step through the book. I hope it was the same for you. Yes, there have been bitterly painful days and times when you wanted to shout, "How unfair!" But if you have allowed the Holy Spirit to speak to you through Luke for the past six months, then you would have been enriched with every pericope we have walked through.

At the beginning of Luke's book he writes to the esteemed Theophilus: "I thought it best to examine everything from scratch and to write

the story carefully in the correct order. This way you can know that the things you have been taught about are completely reliable.”

Luke did a lot of research before he recorded this story, and throughout the book one is amazed at the detail in which he often describes the incidents, even though he did not experience things himself. Of course, he had to write while eyewitnesses told him everything. Most important, however, is the tremendous role that the Holy Spirit played in writing this story. Luke knew what to write because he was willing to listen to the inaudible voice of the Holy Spirit.

At the end of Luke's story, he tells how Jesus led the disciples out of the city to the nearby town of Bethany, where he blessed them and then left them when he was taken up into heaven. Parting is usually a very sad thing, but in this case Luke does not describe a sad picture, but one filled with joy. He tells us that the disciples worshipped Jesus. When we read Luke's book, we see that this word

"worship" is used only when someone worships God. Why are they now suddenly worshipping Jesus?

You will recall that in the previous episode, Jesus opened the eyes of these disciples so that they could understand what it was all about. Here they must surely have come to the conclusion that Jesus was not only the "Prophet" that many people thought He was and certainly not just a Miracle Worker. Jesus is the Son of the Living God, the second Person of the Divine Trinity. Jesus was not Someone who just happened 33 years ago, but He was there from the very beginning. Genesis 1:26 states that God said, "Let us make man our representative." The "We" spoken of here is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus was therefore a co-Creator. He is God, and therefore they worship Him!

Another thing we notice in this pericope is that these men returned to Jerusalem "with great joy." They were not grieved, for although they could no longer see their

Master physically, the wonderful knowledge was there that He was still with them. In Matthew 28:20 we read that Jesus said to them on this occasion: "Remember: I am with you always, to the end of the age." The disciples are full of joy, because Jesus lives!

Luke's story began at the temple when the elderly old Zechariah heard from God that John would be born. Now the story ends once again at the temple, where the disciples meet regularly to worship and praise God. Throughout, Jerusalem and the temple as the centre of worship play a very important role in Luke's story.

Luke now comes to the end of his story of Jesus. But that's not where it ends, because he's already working on a brand new story - Acts. The end is definitely not it! This is really just the beginning, because here at the temple, where the disciples are patiently waiting for the promise Jesus gave, the church is in its infancy. A tension builds up for huge things that will happen soon.

The ascension is incomprehensible to the world and therefore unacceptable. This is a myth that lives in the minds of Christians! For the believer, however, there is another reality: Jesus lives! Not only does He live, but He ascended to heaven where He reigns! When the anxieties, sadness, and pain that life often gives us are getting us down, this wonderful thought should give us comfort, hope, and strength. When we think back to the things we have learned from Jesus over the past six months, we see that suffering is often part of God's plan, and that even if we do not then understand what the reason is, we can happily realize that He is in control and that He still rules and that He will intervene at the right time and moment to accomplish His wonderful, often incomprehensible will. And then the incredible knowledge, that even though He is in heaven, He is still here and now with us!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord Jesus, that You are not

gone, but that You are also here with me today.

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