

**4<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

**Acts of love**

*In Stan's absence while he is on annual leave, this is a 'thought for the week'.*

**The following is a message from Dawn Penney, CEO of Korus Connect (formerly ACCESS ministries)**

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:9-10 (NIV)*

Does this Scripture resonate with you? Are you feeling like a deflated balloon? Has your enthusiasm and joy drained away?

What have you started or continued faithfully and joyfully, that you now feel less enthusiastic about? Are you tired of doing good? Is your service now more a chore than a joy? When this happens, we seem to need to apply a lot more effort to get whatever needs to be completed - the church lawns, the cleaning, visitation.

Don't grow weary of demonstrating your peace and joy in all kinds of acts of love to your neighbours, friends and family. In short, don't lose heart in giving of yourself through love, because when these things are dominant in our lives, doing good is the inevitable result.

What will make the difference? How do we regain our joy in serving? It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who is the source of our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Paul invites us to look beyond our current challenges and opportunities to serve; he reminds us that we will reap a harvest if we do not give up; that God will honour our obedient service to Him as we do good to all, especially to the 'household of believers'. Those who persevere will reap the rewards. Just as the sower of the seed must wait for the harvest, the Christian must wait patiently for the rewards that will inevitably come from the Giver of all good things.

We will not give up, because our Lord is faithful.

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**11<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

**Being blessed and being a blessing**

*In Stan's absence while he is on annual leave, this is a 'thought for the week'.*

What does it mean to receive God's blessings? That may sound like a silly question, but in the Bible the way blessing works is very different from how we tend to view it in our time. In our world, blessings are seen to be given to individuals for their own use and enjoyment, and we may even fall into the trap of thinking that health, wealth and happiness are signs of God's blessing, while poverty and suffering are signs of God's curse.

But, throughout the Bible we see a very different understanding of blessing that undermines this individualistic view. Biblically, those who are blessed are equipped to be channels of God's blessing to others. Blessings are given not to individuals, but through them to the community.

In worship today, you may have heard the story of God's promise to Abraham that he would have an heir that was his own flesh and blood. As the story of this promise unfolds in the Bible, it is clear that God's call and blessing in Abraham's life was in order that he would be a blessing to the nations.

Or, if the Gospel reading from Luke was your focus, you will have noticed that Jesus calls his followers to always be ready to give to those in need, and to be alert to the coming of Christ (and of God's Reign) at all times. These two elements of 'readiness' go together, because it is as we give and serve that we help to manifest God's Reign in our communities, and as we watch for the signs of God's Reign we will inevitably find ourselves participating in its work through giving and service. This week we explore what it means to be blessed and to be a blessing.

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**18<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

## **Strength and encouragement**

*In Stan's absence while he is on annual leave, this is a 'thought for the week'.*

The readings today invite reflection on the sources of strength and encouragement that God provides to restore and guide as we take up our role as disciples. There are both joys and trials in choosing a life of faithfulness, and we give thanks for the great cloud of people of faith who journey with us in God's realm.

**Isaiah 5:1-7** God expected a crop of justice and righteousness from the vineyard of the people. But the guidance and tending that God provides have not yielded good fruit because of the people's unfaithfulness.

**In Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19** the people cry to God for deliverance. Using the same imagery from Isaiah of the vineyard that has been exposed to destruction, they vow renewed faithfulness and pray for God's restoration.

**In Luke 12:49-56** Jesus describes the costs of faithful discipleship in terms of divisions it may cause. Even families may be divided by different understandings of what it means to be faithful. These conflicts can arise as believers reorder priorities, reshape behaviours, and rethink goals. The way of faith prepares us for the coming of God's dominion, but it also breaks well-worn moulds of expectations in our lives as we seek to become the people God calls us to be. Choosing faithfulness is neither easy nor passive. It can be demanding and often requires change and growth, as the metaphor of a race in the passage from the letter to the Hebrews implies.

**Hebrews 11:29-12:2** continues the roll call of those whose faith in God is a model and encouragement. It reminds us that "by faith" God's people did some amazing things. They escaped slavery in Egypt, and they entered the Promised Land. In today's passages, there are words that challenge us to lives of faithfulness, and also words that encourage and remind us that other people of God have gone before us, sustained by God's mercy and grace. What kind of race are you running and what kind of fruit are you bearing? As you reflect on those who have encouraged your faith, how do you imagine yourself being an encouragement to others? In what ways does God continue to tend and guide your faith journey?

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**25<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

## **Healing on the Sabbath**

*In Stan's absence while he is on annual leave, this is a 'thought for the week'.*

**Luke 13:10-17** Our modern ears tend to focus on the woman's symptom (she is bent over) and skip over the cause of her ailment – a spirit: "And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years." Anyone with a physical deformity would also be socially deformed, i.e. would be shunned and outcast, lose their family support and become poor.

Notice that Jesus sets the woman free. This is not 'healing' as we understand it to be. It is freeing her from the 'spirit' that had crippled her. The process of healing-freeing begins with Jesus speaking to the woman. In so doing, he initiates a relationship with her that everyone else would have carefully avoided. This may have been the first time in 18 years that anyone has ever directly, personally spoken to her in public.

Jesus addresses both her 'woman' and her reality, "you are set free from your ailment." And so he restores both her social and her physical well-being. Notice that the woman rightly praises God – not Jesus – for her freedom. Everyone in the room would have been awed by what had just happened. Since healing violates the Sabbath requirement for doing no labour, Jesus' action is a challenge that rightly provokes a response from the leader of the synagogue whose 'job' is to enforce Sabbath laws. Jesus meets this rebuke by first demonstrating his familiarity with Sabbath law – the permitted care of animals. And then asks an unanswerable question that silences his opponent.

Jesus' opponents are NOT ashamed because they have suddenly realised that, "Of course! How could we have been so stupid! Of course, it is ok to heal on the Sabbath!" No. They are ashamed because Jesus has out-debated them, because he has crafted a legitimate question for which they can give no honourable response that would also be acceptable to the watching crowd. Shaming authorities – those who control armies, police, and courts with force of arms – is dangerous today, and was more so at the time of Jesus.

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