



40 DAYS

a Lenten devotion and prayer guide



LUTHERAN
CHURCH
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INTERNATIONAL MISSION



Years ago, a friend of mine moved to Los Angeles to study at the Guitar Institute of Technology alongside students and teachers from around the world. In typical Aussie fashion, as he got to know people, he started modifying their names. The more he liked someone, the more likely he was to call them by a variant of their actual name. John became Jonno and so on.

One day an Italian student whom he considered a close friend, became very upset with him. He explained that according to his culture, if someone messes around with your name it is a sign of disrespect. My friend quickly explained that in Australian culture it was the opposite – the more you like someone, the more likely you are to call them by all sorts of names other than their actual name!

Names are powerful. They identify us. They describe us. And perhaps most importantly, they give others access to us so that we can be in relationship with them. If you don't know my name, you can't approach me with the same level of confidence and intimacy that someone who does know my name might have.

And so what a joy it is that God has revealed his name to us. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What's more he has placed that name on each of us in holy baptism so that we may have access to his loving and forgiving presence as his dearly loved children.

As the Scriptures seek to open our eyes to the amazing reality of all that Jesus is for us, and all he has done for us, the Son of God is also identified by a myriad of other names – each packed with meaning and eternal significance. These are not nicknames like my friend used to his peril. Instead, they are names that transcend cultures and point to the divine reality of all that Jesus has accomplished for us in his life, death and resurrection.

It is our prayer that these devotions, each based on a different name or title given to Jesus, would deepen your joy in knowing all that he has done for you.

Again this year, the authors come from a variety of people who are connected with LCA International Mission. Some are LCA members who support our work in different ways, and others are from our partner churches throughout the region.

In every instance their reflections on the names of Jesus reveal the amazing reality of who he is FOR US, and what he has done FOR US.

A blessed Lenten season to you all.

Rev Matt Anker, Nevin Nitschke and Erin Kerber
- LCA International Mission staff

DAY ONE

*Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:14-14*

As we meditate upon the journey of Jesus toward the cross from Galatians 3:13-14, let us prepare ourselves to perceive the redemptive story - that the suffering of Christ on the cross has brought redemption and, consequently, blessings to all humanity.

As he once was a Pharisee, Paul had a high regard for the law and took pains to defend the law. After his conversion, his perception of the law was changed and he came to know that Christ is the end of the law. Still, the trouble with the Galatians was that they thought that keeping the law would save them from the wrath of God. Rather, all that the law could do was to expose their sins so that they would admit their need of a redeemer.

To show Christ as our redeemer, Paul employed the intense Greek term 'redeemed' (exēgorasen—past tense) to refer to 'buying someone out of the slave market never to be put up for sale again'. It denotes the high cost to the Redeemer. Having said "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ..." Paul modified Deuteronomy 21:23 to underscore that Jesus took the curse upon himself as a substitute for sinners. None of us can follow the law without breaking it. All of us are cursed by it. We are worthy of death and eternal damnation. However, Christ has redeemed us from such a curse of the law by being crucified on behalf of us on the cross as a despised criminal.

Jesus suffered as a curse not of his sin, but to be a redeemer, "for us" said Martin Luther. All we need to do to be saved is to believe that Christ died 'for us.' Paul proved that salvation is by grace, through faith, apart from the works of the law.

The blessed consequence of faith in Christ is that the blessing originally intended by God to come through Abraham to the redeemed people, is made effective. This blessing was impeded by the curse of the law, but Christ has removed it. The Abrahamic blessing is also identical with the receiving of the Spirit through faith.

As you observe this Lenten season, pray the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to perceive the suffering of God's Son Jesus Christ on the cross on our behalf. Pray also that he will help you for a renewal of your gratitude, leading to a renewal of your faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

- Rev Pa Hmo, Academic Dean, Lorrain Theological College in Myanmar

Prayer: Mara Evangelical Church, as they teach their community about the love of Jesus and that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

DAY TWO

*Looking to Jesus, the **founder and perfecter of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2*

A name will reflect the character, qualities, and significance of someone or something. How interesting then, that we discover Jesus has a multitude of names and even when combined altogether, they still do not adequately describe Jesus. During Lent when we turn our eyes and focus more closely on what Jesus did for us, will the names of Jesus give us a clearer picture of His great sacrifice?

The names 'founder' and 'perfecter' of our faith are not common names we know for Jesus, but they add a new dimension. Alternative bible translations and dictionaries help give us a clearer picture. Founder—author, pioneer, source, leader, originator, began. Perfecter—makes it perfect, finisher, finished, perfect ender.

Jesus is the author and source, the very foundation that our faith is based on. To get to the Perfecter of our faith, Christ had to endure the journey of suffering, shame, and death on the cross, to grant us the goal of forgiveness, righteousness, and perfection before God. He has finished/perfected what he set out to do as the founder and perfecter of our faith. You cannot have one without the other when we look at God's plan for humankind.

This verse uses the personal term of 'our' faith. Jesus suffered this humiliation and death for us personally. He created each of us in his image. His great unconditional love wants to restore/perfect each one of us to him.

These two names cover the Bible – God's story from beginning - creation to the end - heaven. Jesus was with God when He founded/ established/ created/ designed all of creation as seen in Genesis 1 and 2.

God was with Jesus during his torment, anguish and shame as he prepared to willingly give his life in our place. Jesus was able to endure the cross because he knew the 'good' that would result from it. The moment of his death, led to his victory over death and Satan, as the risen redeemer, who made all things right (perfect) before God. Jesus now sits at the right hand of God. This act of 'perfect love' now gives us eternal perfection before God – as shown in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. Jesus is the perfecter of our faith. It is not something we can do.

This Lenten season as we kneel before the cross and focus our eyes solely on Jesus, may we give overwhelming thanks, praise, glory, and honour to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith.

- Rosalie Hoklas, member, Golden Grove Lutheran Church in South Australia

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

DAY THREE

*Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful **high priest** in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Hebrews 2:17*

Many people wish to live forever on earth and try to find many ways to escape death. Traditional healers, scientists, experts, witchdoctors, spend their time and do their best to help people avoid death.

But no one can flee from the penalty of death - neither male or female, rich or poor, child or youth or old, educated or uneducated, and so on. Death is the reward of sin. As a result of the fall, the wrath of God has come upon all the human race. All people are crushed, born and inherit sin, so all must suffer death.

No human being can save him/herself or his/her friends. God in His love, of His own free will, decided to save the humankind that He created. Humans, those lower than the angels, are very special in front of God Creator. 'What is mankind that you are mindful for them, a son of man that you care for him?' (Psalm 8:4)

God never changes in that He cannot bear if people continue to live in sin. The high priests in the Old Testament were the ones chosen to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people to atone for their sins. They had to repeat these sacrifices, as they provided consolation for God's wrath against sin, only a while.

Jesus Christ was made like us. He was conceived in a woman's womb (the virgin Mary). He was also born like us and he faced human temptation, sorrow, pain, and death. Jesus was made like us, becoming lower than angels for a while, to save us.

Jesus Christ, the merciful and faithful high priest.

What God has done in Jesus Christ is special and precious - He became flesh so that He could do the high priestly work. Jesus Christ, our intercessor and reconciliator before God, destroyed the enemies of humankind, the work of the devil and death. The penalty of death is over through Jesus Christ, our merciful and faithful high priest.

Pray you will be kept with the Holy Spirit so that you can trust this salvation that he has done for you, until you reach eternal happiness. Amen

- Rakotondramiadana Holiharifetra, Coordinator of Gender Justice Project, Malagasy Lutheran Church in Madagascar

Prayer: Madagascar Lutheran Church, as they send missionaries to share Jesus with those living in Thailand.

DAY FOUR

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a **ruler** who will shepherd my people Israel.” Matthew 2:6

In the film *Talladega Nights*, car-racing superstar Ricky Bobby prays to “Dear Lord Baby Jesus” on the night before a big race. Ricky’s wife, Carley, takes issue with Ricky praying to a baby since, as she points out, “Jesus did grow up.” She wants Ricky “to do this grace (prayer) good” and by implication, to pray respectfully. However, Ricky insists that he likes praying to “the Christmas Jesus best.”

It is a loose analogy but sometimes Christians can be like Ricky Bobby. We like to relate to ‘the Jesus’ that makes us feel comfortable but in the process, we can neglect other important aspects of Jesus’ identity. For example, many Christians feel comfortable relating to Jesus as a caring parent or friend but struggle to relate to him as the mighty ruler that he is also. However, the journey of discipleship involves continually knowing Christ better for ALL that he is.

Today’s text reminds us that Christ is simultaneously and continually both ‘ruler’ and ‘shepherd.’ The image of ruler alludes to his great power and justice. The image of shepherd points to his great care and responsibility for his people.

Likewise, in both these ways, Aslan, the kingly lion from the ‘Chronicles of Narnia’ provides a helpful image for understanding Christ. Literary historian, Walter Hooper, described Aslan as both ‘intolerably severe’ and ‘irresistibly tender’, whilst the character Mr Beaver says of Aslan, “Safe...who said anything about safe? Of course, he isn’t safe. But he’s good! He’s the king I tell you.” On the one hand, Aslan is like a good shepherd, caring for the kingdom of Narnia and even laying down his life at the Stone Table for a “lost sheep” (Edmund). Similarly, Christ, the good shepherd, cares deeply for our world and laid down his life to redeem us ‘lost sheep.’ On the other hand, Aslan is a mighty ruler who overthrew the powers of the White Witch and showed his sovereignty even over death, by rising again. Similarly, Christ the mighty ruler came to ‘destroy the works of the devil, and set the captives free’. He rose victoriously over death.

May we come to continually know Christ better in all of his fullness, and on this day of celebrating Jesus as Ruler, may we rejoice and take heart that we know and are whole-heartedly loved by ‘...Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.’
- *Kris Forman, Senior Chaplain, Grace Lutheran College in Rothwell and Caboolture, Queensland*

Prayer: Grace Lutheran College, SPL Kindergarten, Living Faith and St Paul’s Lutheran congregations, as they continue to share their faith and grow into global citizens through their partnership with SMK HKBP Sidikalang and SMA HKBP Lawe Sigalagala TanahAlas in Indonesia.

DAY FIVE

*God, having raised up his **servant**, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” Acts 3:26*

Today’s reading tells us of a special servant whom God sent to bless the world. This verse is the conclusion of Peter’s second sermon in Acts (3:12-26). From the sermon we learn that this servant is Jesus himself, whom God sent in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham: ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed’ (Acts 3:25). Jesus is the servant who God raised to bless us by turning every one of us from our wickedness, that is, our sinful thoughts, words and deeds.

In this sermon, God confronted the Jews, and indeed all of us, with the horror of our sin, “But you denied the Holy and Righteous One... and you killed the Author of life” (vs 14-15). But God also comforted them and all who hear and believe, with the promise of God’s grace, “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” (vs 19). In the servant, Jesus, the ‘Author of life whom God raised from the dead’, God blesses every one of us by His gift of repentance and refreshing (vs 19-20) in the forgiveness of sins and the gift of new life.

In our sinful nature, we may often feel that Jesus brings more burden than blessing, especially during the more sombre and reflective season of Lent. We sometimes feel that his purpose is to straitjacket us with his impossible standards, as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). His word leaves no wriggle room for anyone to exploit. Can’t I even have a fleeting lustful thought about this or that person, without getting accused of adultery in my heart? I’m never going to act it out anyway! And what about those unreasonable demands to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile? Then he escalates the unreasonable to the practically impossible – “love your enemy”! Jesus, it may seem, is just out to get us.

Indeed, he does place the weight of our sins upon us and how heavy is the burden! With no relief to be found from our own strengths, we cry out to God in repentance. Then he who gave his own body and blood for us, lifts the burden from us in his forgiveness and creates in us a fresh new heart that desires to walk in his way. All this is made manifest in the refreshing water and word of baptism, and the faith-nourishing gift of his body and blood given with bread and wine.

The penitent mood of Lent need not be full of gloom, but a season where the baptismal blessing of repentance and refreshing is received anew. With this blessing we can start afresh to love our neighbours and even our enemies; pray for them and do good to them, for Jesus, the servant of God, has come to bless. Amen.

- Rev Soh Guan Kheng, former LCA International Mission scholarship holder, Lutheran Church in Singapore

Prayer: Former and current LCA International Mission scholarship holders, as they are equipped to bless their church body through their studies.

DAY SIX

*But for you who fear my name, the **sun of righteousness** shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. Malachi 4:2*

Many names are attributed to Jesus in the Bible. One of them is found in our text, 'the sun of righteousness'. Some may think that there has been an error in translation and that the word 'sun' should be 'Son', referring to Jesus as the Son of righteousness, meaning the one who is morally right and justifiable. It is clear though that there has been no error.

The reference to Jesus as the sun of righteousness conjures up a picture of healing and warmth. The sun through its rays, which can be likened to the wings of a bird spread out like a fan, provides warmth and light and promotes growth. In the same way, Jesus promises to bring light into the lives of those who follow him and believe that he is the Saviour of humankind. Just as the warmth of the sun gives growth to pastures and trees, through His Word, we can grow in the knowledge of God and His plan of salvation through Jesus, His Son.

Jesus came as the light of the world just over two thousand years ago. He came to bring light and life to a lost and dying world. He is the source of light for all who trust in him. For those who reject him though, that same sun of righteousness will bring blistering heat and scorching pain. How blessed are those who are part of his Kingdom and who enjoy his redeeming love and grace.

The writer of our text goes on to say that the results of healing by the sun of righteousness will have us going out like calves from a stall. I grew up on a dairy farm and can relate to this word-picture. Watching calves being released from their pens is something to behold. They head out to pasture bursting with energy and exuberance and an evident feeling of release. Such can be our joy as we experience the love of Jesus and the freedom from sin that he gives us.

Thank God for the healing touch of His Son Jesus, who brings warmth and healing to our souls. Pray that God will look down in pity on all who do not know His grace and have rejected the light of His truth. Ask that He draw many from the kingdom of darkness into the light of the gospel, so that they too can experience the joy of being healed and 'go out leaping like calves from the stall'.

- Keith Kowald, member, Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Morley, Western Australia

Prayer: The LCA International Mission congregation representatives, as they share the exciting stories, information and prayer requests from our partner churches with the members of their congregation.

DAY SEVEN

*Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the **Holy One** of God." John 6:68-69*

God is holy (set apart, without sin) (1 Peter 1:14-15) and we are separated from Him because we turned our backs on Him. We try to rescue ourselves from sin so that we are reunited with God but instead, we grope in the dark. All attempts we make on our own are in vain. By our own doing, we cannot find light or be reunited with God.

As a good Father, God wills His children to return to Him. He loves us and knows that, because we fall into sin, we are not able to live with Him forever. As a holy God who does not sin, He sent His Son in His likeness, born as an innocent human being while remaining fully God.

Jesus bore the punishment on behalf of sinful humans (Genesis 3:15). He was willing to take risks by giving his life in exchange for our life, enduring punishment for our sin (Philippians 2:7-8) 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 6:23). It is through Jesus that we are now able to come to the Father, as Jesus said "...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6). Through Jesus we have light. In John 8:12, Jesus declared, "...I am the light of the world..."

With great joy, Jesus once said to his disciples, "Don't let your heart be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home... I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am..." (John 14:1-3). Jesus told them, "I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me" (John 7:33). Jesus was born, lived, suffered and died and on the third day, he rose again, before ascending into heaven. Jesus not only ascended to be with his Father, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with us and guide us. "No, I will not abandon you as orphans - I will come to you." (John 14:18). What great news! The Holy Spirit leads us to live holy lives and walk with him along the holy path until it is time for us to live in the house of the Father in heaven.

What should we do in light of this wonderful news? Respond to God's love by accepting Him. Repent of sin! Accept His forgiveness. Live faithfully and ask the Holy Spirit to equip us to maintain God's holiness in our lives. Share the good news about Jesus with others. There is no filth of sin that cannot be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Amen!

- Rev Helen Nasron, Treasurer, The Protestant Church in Sabah

Prayer: The Protestant Church in Sabah, as they take up the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel and witnessing to Christ.

DAY EIGHT

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a **horn of salvation** for us in the house of his servant David.*

Luke 1:68-69

Many Christians do not realise that the birth of John the Baptist is integral to the full Christmas story. If we think of the Christmas nativity as being just about Joseph and Mary with child, shepherds, barn animals, and perhaps some wise men and camels thrown in (despite being a later part of the narrative), we miss a significant part of the message. John the Baptist is the glue that joins the Old and New Testamental periods together; his nativity and that of Jesus' are to be read as one. John, being the last of the Old Testament style prophets, welcomes and validates a new way (gospel) of perceiving and understanding God. God in human form. God like us. God as a code of compassion, not as a purity code. God that breaks out beyond the confines of the religion and into the homes and lives of everyday people anywhere and everywhere.

John the Baptist was a pastor's kid, the child of a priest named Zechariah. Zechariah, like many pastors/priests, had his mind filled with sacred stories from scripture and his heart filled with yearning for answers and concerns for the future. The story in Luke's Gospel reveals how Zechariah saw a vision of an angel and became mute, a recognised biological response when people are overwhelmed by an experience. Zechariah is to speak again only when he accepts what the angel has told him, and steps forward into an unknown future with faith. Zechariah must accept God's way over his known tradition. And he does. When Zechariah's mouth is opened, in faith he speaks not only of God being able to free troubled and burdened people, but God as a 'Horn of salvation', a person who will lead this emancipation of human beings.

The term 'Horn of salvation' refers to a culturally well-known musical instrument of the ancient world, the Shofar, a ram's horn, which on the battle field was used to signal victory to the soldiers. The Christ figure in the, as yet unborn, human form of Jesus was, for Zechariah, synonymous with that sound. Jesus was to be a 'game changer', a new way through old problems, a circuit breaker that brings a previously unknown answer into the realm of the known.

Is there a piece of music or sound that, on hearing it, your mind and emotions are taken into a different world or different state of consciousness? Have you ever become speechless? What happened to cause you to be without words? Think of a 'circuit breaker' event/moment in your own life that changed a situation from impossible to possible.

- Rev Jon Goessling, College Pastor, Tatachilla Lutheran College in McLaren Vale, South Australia

Prayer: Tatachilla Lutheran College, as they get to know and grow in understanding of their partners – the Lutheran Church in Cambodia, and through their learnings, make God-honouring choices in their own lives.

DAY NINE

*Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our **Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed. – 1 Corinthians 5:7*

Much of the time we wander through life with a sense of desiring to return “home”. In Welsh, the word for this is ‘hiraeth’. ‘Hiraeth’ is a profound longing for something that we sometimes suspect may never have actually existed. Experiencing ‘hiraeth’ is to feel an incompleteness and at the same time to understand it as familiar.

‘Hiraeth’ can be likened to the state of tension that we, as Christians, experience of the “already” and the “not yet” of our promise through Christ. It is the soul-knowledge that we are meant for something eternal, but for now can only grasp at. We can never capture it. Our glimpses of God can be fleeting and ephemeral, however, when we experience them, we are profoundly changed.

Lent is a time in the liturgical year emphasising our deepest longing for intimacy and union with Christ. We are given the story of the Passover lamb to help navigate the way to our true home. In the Old Testament, the Passover lamb was the animal that the Israelites sacrificed in Egypt on the night God struck down the firstborn sons of every household. God would “pass over” those who followed God’s commands and eventually they would be led out of slavery.

The New Testament brings deeper understanding and shows us the relationship between the Passover lamb of the Old Testament and the true Passover Lamb in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Old Testament Passover lamb, although a reality in that time, was just the beginning of the God story which ultimately leads us to Christ. And that story continues to unfold. In his death, Jesus gave people a way to escape death and to have hope for eternal life.

This is the life of faith – to live in the tension of “already” and “not yet.” Through our faith, all of these spiritual blessings are ours already, but the full understanding of these blessings are not yet ours. We live out ‘the assurance of things hoped for’ in the future, and ‘the conviction of things not seen’ in the present (Hebrews 11:1).

During Lent we are invited to notice when that longing rises up. Pay attention to it and sit with it. It is a holy longing bringing us into closer communion with God. In Corinthians we are told, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Through our walk with Christ we become more whole, as we deepen our relationship with him. Through the ultimate Passover lamb who willingly gave his life for us, we will ultimately know our eternal home. Amen.

- Rev Jessica Derise, Regional Representative for the Asia Pacific, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Prayer: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Global Mission department, as they walk with companion churches in other countries to participate in God’s reconciling mission through proclamation and service.

DAY TEN

*And he is the **head of the body, the church**. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. Colossians 1:18*

Several times throughout his letters, Paul refers to the church as a body, with Jesus as the head. I would guess that anyone who has been a Christian for more than a few months, would be familiar with this metaphor. If you are anything like me, when you hear something multiple times, the words start to lose meaning or weight.

It becomes easy to gloss over verses like this. But if you pause for a minute, what meaning do you hear when you read this verse? Do you hear what the rest of this verse says: that he has overcome all, that he has supremacy? Does that sound good to you? It sounds marvellous to me because I know that by grace through faith I have been saved.

But what do other people hear? They hear that Jesus is the head of the church, and that we, the body of the church, represent him. This can be good; when others see us being kind and compassionate, they see that Jesus is kind and compassionate. But what happens when they see someone with a fish bumper sticker cut them off in traffic? Or what about the times our actions may be judgemental or self-righteous? Suddenly we represent Christ in this way, whether we intend it or not. When we say "I am a Christian and therefore I'm against..." we imply that all Christians, and indeed Jesus himself has a particular view.

Nothing that we do is independent of the rest of the body. If I pinch my sister, I can't say to her, "It was my hand that did that, it's not my fault." She would tell me that is ridiculous. Our actions are the same. What we do directly reflects on the whole of the body. For better or for worse, when people know that we are Christian, our words and actions represent other Christians and Christ himself.

It is so easy to believe that there is only one right 'kind' of Christian. Each of us tend to believe that we have it right, and therefore we need to prove others have it wrong. We can get so caught up in moral and political debates, declaring, "I am a Christian, and therefore I am against..."

In these moments we forget what, or rather who, we stand for. We can forget to show kindness, compassion and understanding. We can forget that no debate or argument is worth blocking someone's access to Jesus. If we are the body of Christ, we need to remember that our actions are not independent of our head, and that representing his love – revealed to us in his word – is our purpose.

- Lauren Mead, Executive Ministry Assistant, Ipswich Lutheran Church in Queensland

Prayer: The Ipswich Lutheran community and their partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar, as they encourage one another to act intentionally, representing Jesus and bringing his love and hope to others.

DAY ELEVEN

*For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be **Lord** both of the dead and of the living. Romans 14:8-9*

Along with the term 'Messiah' or 'Christ', 'Lord' is the most common title given to Jesus in the New Testament. In the letters, Jesus is repeatedly referred to as 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. In fact, the confession that 'Jesus is Lord' was seen by Paul as the distinctive mark of Christian faith and of a true Christian, along with the belief in Jesus' resurrection.

In this Romans text, Paul was trying to help his readers understand that their different views over minor issues should not hinder their relationship to one another and to their Lord. Whatever view one held about food or observance of days, should be brought under the Lordship of Christ. No-one should think that their views are more important than others.

We are called to live for our Lord and for the people he gave his life for. He wants to be the Lord of our lives, not just the Saviour. Many are saved but few make Jesus Lord of their lives and many claim to be Christians but very few involve the Lord in their daily activities.

Paul goes on to say that it was for this very reason that Christ died and returned to life. For Christians who make Jesus Lord of their lives, this is a powerful statement. We do not live for nothing and we do not die wondering. Christ is both the Lord of the dead and the living. This is the very heart of the gospel of hope. The life of the believer is a transformed life of service, sharing with other Christians, duty to the government, and respect for others' convictions.

Satan claimed that he is the lord of the world but Jesus is a stronger Lord who is able to command sickness, demons and even death itself and they obey him. The distinctive meal of the church is known as 'the Lord's supper' which clearly connects Jesus' Lordship with his broken body and blood. When Jesus met his disciples after the resurrection, they recognised him as the one who has power to banish sin and death and bring new life. What does it mean for us that Jesus is a 'stronger Lord' who can set us free? How should this understanding affect the way we live?

Our lives should be living proof that there is a true Lord of the world who governs and directs it in righteousness and justice. Pray to Jesus the Lord now, thanking him that he has used his Lordship to bring grace and peace. Ask for strength to live a life worthy of him now, and pray for his return with the ancient words of the church, 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

- Rev Peter Gigmai, Lecturer, Ogelbeng Seminary in Papua New Guinea

Prayer: Staff at Ogelbeng Seminary, as they train local pastors and their wives in the gospel, to serve their communities.

DAY TWELVE

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and **Overseer** of your souls.*

1 Peter 2:24-25

The word overseer (in Greek, 'episkopos') is also translated as bishop or guardian. Historically, it was a term used for a high ranking military official who inspected the troops to make sure they were ready for battle. Both Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2 charge overseers with shepherding the flock in their care, but their responsibility as overseers goes beyond just taking care of the flock. A Biblical overseer is one who ensures that Christians are fully equipped to live a godly life and to fight spiritual battles.

A long list of qualifications for human overseers are spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1: 5 and 7. Jesus meets all these requirements. He is qualified as an overseer by virtue of who he is- the perfect man (Hebrews 7:26), his faithfulness to Him who appointed him (Hebrews 3:2), his indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16).

He is the archetypical overseer, just as he is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

As our overseer, Jesus ministers to us:

- to protect and keep us (2 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Peter 2:9, 1 Corinthians 1:8)
- to discipline us (Hebrews 12:10)
- to sanctify us (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)
- to perfect and strengthen us (1 Peter 5:10)

God works in us to do His will through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:21). As our overseer, Jesus teaches and trains through his appointed human overseers (2 Timothy 4:2) and through the Spirit who glorifies him (John 16:14).

So our human overseers are charged with

- being an example (1 Peter 5:3, Hebrews 13:7)
- encouraging and exhorting in doctrine (Colossians 1:28, James 2:4)
- reminding of the truth (2 Peter 1:12 and 3:1)
- preaching the word, convincing and rebuking (2 Timothy 4:2).

The Holy Spirit helps us

- to pray (Romans 8:28, Ephesians 6:18)
- to understand (John 16:13) and use God's word effectively (Ephesians 6:17)
- to overcome (1 John 4:4, 5:4).

Just as our leaders experience joy in our obedience, so Jesus experiences joy as we demonstrate that we love him (John 14:21) and bring him glory (John 15:8).

- Lee Cook, Volunteer, online English program with STT Abdi Sabda in Indonesia

Prayer: Volunteers, as they give their time, resources and finances to support LCA International Mission program and projects.

DAY THIRTEEN

*May the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13*

It seems that anxiety and fear are increasingly dominating people's lives recently and Christians are no exception.

During the past few years, the impact of the pandemic in Malaysia has resulted in many difficulties: people have lost their jobs, retirement savings have dwindled, and family and friends have died. Now that borders have reopened and travel has started again, there has not been convincing economic growth and the country's political situation is unstable due to power struggles among politicians. Climate disasters have also occurred, resulting in the destruction of properties and houses.

No doubt the pandemic and natural disasters have also brought anxiety and fear for many living in Australia and New Zealand.

Christ's words are spoken to us amidst the chaos of life.

Reflecting on the experience of the disciples with Jesus in his ministry, they also experienced chaos and anxiety during the storm on the lake (Luke 8:22-25). The situation caused fear among the disciples and they shouted, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" (vs 24). They saw death in front of their eyes.

Our default mode is to be afraid when danger comes to us. Life's challenges will always come to us. It is just a reality of life. But Christ is our hope. Through his life, suffering, death, and resurrection, we are now in Christ (Colossians 3:3).

Being in Christ means he is always with us. When the disciples were in the storm, there was both danger present and Christ's presence with them. His words spoken are operative and effective in turning a chaotic situation into calm.

When we are in dark times, remember, Christ is with us. He is our hope. When his words are spoken to us and into the chaos of our life, they are authoritative to calm us and transform things around us.

I believe this truth will always comfort and strengthen us until the end of our journey.

- Rev Joeferick Ating, Program Coordinator, Lutheran Study Centre in Malaysia

Prayer: The students, as they enhance their Lutheran confessional identity through studying at the Lutheran Study Centre, based in the Sabah Theological Seminary.

DAY FOURTEEN

*Jesus answered him, "I am the **vine**; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."
Hebrews 12:2*

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven 'I am' statements. His final statement includes the words, "I am the vine ..." In John 15:1, he also said "I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener."

The symbols revealed in these verses include the gardener (who could also be referred to as a vinedresser or a pruner) and represents the Father, who cultivates His plants. The true vine represents Jesus, the vital life source of the branches. Branches represent the disciples, including us, and we produce the fruit.

Jesus makes an explicit distinction between himself and everyone else because there can only be one true vine. We, his disciples, are its branches.

The vine is what gives life to the branches, making them capable of producing fruit. This is enhanced by the expertise of the gardener, as he regularly prunes the vines. When the gardener prunes us, the branches, he is cutting back the 'deadwood' of the sinful self in us that gets in between us and him. This is what St Paul refers to as 'the works of the flesh' and includes immorality, impurity, envy, idolatry, fighting, arguing, jealousy, anger, selfishness, divisions and all such things. These things are rife in our unbelief and the world round us and need to be lopped off. This is what Jesus died for, and we died too, in our baptism.

Connected to Jesus the true vine, we flow from a life that we trust and we cling to his word. Rooted in him by faith, he bears much fruit in us, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness and the like. This is how we live fruitful lives. This is how we show ourselves to be his disciples (vs 8).

When serving on three occasions at the Rainbow Hostel for tertiary students in Cambodia, my wife Ruth and I were able to observe a vine coming into full production. Up to fifty young people from rural Cambodia were staying at the hostel. Only a few had been in contact with the Christian Church but the resident Lutheran pastor, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was able to give witness to Jesus' love and saving grace. A great many students received the gospel and by trusting in Jesus and clinging to his word are now branches in him, 'the true vine'.

Just as he did for his disciples by referring to himself as 'the true vine' Jesus reminds us of our special connection with him enabling us to be abundantly fruitful.
- *David Craig, member, St. John's Lutheran Church in Dernancourt in South Australia*

Prayer: The St. John's Lutheran congregation, as they partner and pray for the Lutheran Church in Cambodia.

DAY FIFTEEN

*"I am the **door**. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." John 10:9*

A door is very important. It protects and keeps unwanted people out of your home. A door puts a home and family in safety from bad people and from danger. A door gives access to the coming in and going out of a building.

In John 10:9, Christ calls himself the door. What does this mean? This means that Christ Jesus alone provides access to eternal life. After the fall of man into sin, heaven's door was closed to humanity. Only the door to damnation was open. In fact, "there seems to be a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 14:12). In our hopeless condition, when heaven's door was closed, God poured out His love for us. He sent His only Son Jesus to save us lost and condemned sinners.

Through Christ Jesus' suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection, he defeated death, sin and Satan, who is the door to hell. Jesus' resurrection on the third day opened the door to heaven for us – the entrance to the presence of God. Eternal life is ours right now through faith in Jesus who is our only door to that life. Jesus is the only Way/Door... no one can come to the Father except through him.

On Good Friday, when Jesus committed his Spirit into the hands of the Father, the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Luke 23:45, 46). The curtain was torn from top to bottom and not from bottom to the top. Hence, it was God's action that opened the door to heaven for us. So, any effort of man to reach out to God by doing good works is futile and cannot gain entry through the only door to heaven. For it is only through faith in Jesus, who is the Door, that we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life and thus entry to heaven. Through faith in Jesus our Door, we now also have access to the Father as we call on Him in prayer and as He answers us through His Word.

The 40 days of the Lenten season are a call to repentance and remembrance; remembrance of the love of God that is poured out for us through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross to pay for our sins. His resurrection which brings eternal life to us, proved that his perfect sacrifice was accepted by the Father. This season also helps us remember to be repentant, reminding us of our sin, our mortality and our appreciation for what Jesus, our door, has done and is still doing for us through the Word and the Sacraments.

May God the Holy Spirit help us celebrate the Lenten season in the proper and meaningful way. In Jesus' name!

- Rev Antonio Reyes, President, Lutheran Church in the Philippines

Prayer: The Lutheran Church in the Philippines, as they commit themselves to strengthening and equipping God's people in the area of witness, worship, fellowship, nurture and service.

DAY SIXTEEN

*God our Saviour... "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one **mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:4-5*

Paul wrote this instructional letter for Timothy to give to the church at Ephesus. He wanted to stress the great importance of pure doctrine in the faith and life of the church. He linked the truth of God's word to salvation, emphasising that there is only one God and that, in Him, they have their only mediator. This God is also the man Jesus Christ, the only man who is able to negotiate with God on their behalf so that they can be found justified. This was counter to some ideas circulating at the time.

Paul was keen to preserve the true proclamation of the church there in the face of pre-Gnosticism. This idea denied Christ as the sole mediator between God and humans. It proposed that through mystical searching, personal revelation of God could occur that added to, or opposed, the faithful teaching of the church. This sort of teaching was not only evident then, but is also popular today.

Have you ever believed that God spoke to you in a dream or know God through nature? This happens from time to time for some, and while we may feel close to God through these experiences, they must be tested with Scripture and be subservient to it. It is only through Christ in the objective word and sacrament ministry of the church that the Father has promised to reveal Himself and His great love for us, not through mystical experiences. Timothy provides certainty for us, reminding us that there is only one mediator, one person, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who negotiates on our behalf.

We experience God through the Son, assurance of the forgiveness of sins through his perfect death, and salvation because of Christ's advocacy. We are justified because it is Jesus Christ who speaks for us and died and rose again for us. Even though we have sinned against God by neglecting this word or believing ideas that deny its truths, we are forgiven because of what he has done for us.

- Cathryn Zarnke, English lecturer, Martin Luther Seminary in Papua New Guinea

Prayer: Cathryn Zarnke, as she teaches English to the students at the Martin Luther Seminary so they will be equipped for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

DAY SEVENTEEN

*They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and **King of kings**, and those with him are called chosen and faithful.*

Revelation 17:14

Being the Son of God who was born in Bethlehem, Jesus lived out his life in humble, faithful, and fruitful ways. During his earthly ministry, Jesus performed wonderful works according to God's will because he came into this world to carry out the mission of God.

Jesus defeated the power of sin and the power of evil through his death and resurrection. This means that those who believe in Jesus Christ do not need to be scared of death any longer. This is clearly indicated by the exclamation of believers, "Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Jesus came into this world with the purpose that the believers and the faithful will have eternal life.

Since the beginning, Satan has tempted human beings who are entrapped into suffering and death. In this biblical verse, Satan works through many agents such as kings, beasts and so on, in persecuting Jesus' faithful followers.

Admittedly, these evil agents make war on Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Lamb who has redeemed sinners on the cross. But they are conquered by Jesus since he is Lord of lords and King of kings.

There is no power on this earth that does not submit to Jesus. This verse is John's pictorial (not historical) affirmation that evil, however it is imagined, will finally be defeated by the power of God; the power which is already manifest in the victory of the Lamb, who by his cross has conquered all (Revelation 5:1-14). Evil is doomed because it is already defeated by God's act in Christ.

Through his faithful witness and the shedding of his blood, Jesus is victorious as King. He is conqueror over the kings of earth (Revelation 1:5) and we, as his faithful followers, share in his victory. We did not choose to be his followers, but he called us and chose us (John 15:16). As called and chosen ones, we are also conquerors by the blood of the Lamb. As long as we are faithful witnesses in joining Christ, we are heirs of the kingdom of God.

In spite of the fact that evil has been defeated, it still works to object to the proclamation of the good news and to persecute the faithful. What should we do?

Our King is Jesus Christ. Let us faithfully follow him and witness his precious grace because he is the victor and the giver of life. Amen

- Rev Dr Batara Sihombing, lecturer, Abdi Sabda Theological College in Medan, Indonesia

Prayer: Those studying at Abdi Sabda Theological College, as they are prepared and nurtured to carry out the ministries of the church and the community.

DAY EIGHTEEN

*My dear children, I am writing these things to you so that you do not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

1 John 2:1

Sin and rebellion always continue to fester in our everyday lives and only get worse when pride and ego try to justify them against a guilty conscience. Sin is ugly and cannot be tolerated by a holy God. The price we must pay is eternal separation from Him.

This is the reality for all humanity. However, the text for today's meditation reminds us that there is a God-given solution to what seems to be an impossible chasm between us and our holy God: Jesus Christ is our advocate and has already taken on our guilt and shame.

The opening words of this verse, 'My dear children', suggest a strong personal relationship between the writer and those in his spiritual care. In addition to this human love, the next words in the verse remind us of the love relationship between the Father and His perfect Son, Jesus.

This perfect love is the very essence of God's sovereignty and power as He reaches out to all of His creation. In Jesus we have a totally effective defender and advocate, whose own righteousness was expressed through his perfect life, death and triumphant resurrection.

As a result, the unbelievable has now happened: God's love, grace and forgiveness are freely available to each one of us. Jesus is our own personal ADVOCATE, OUR DEFENCE, OUR PRIEST and OUR FRIEND. He turns our lives around. He has swapped places with each of us and paid the price for our sin. This incredibly good news gives us hope for the present and the assurance of an eternal future.

During this Lenten season, may the Holy Spirit continue to guide our understanding and acceptance of God's incredible grace and may he bless and strengthen us as we face the joys and sorrows of each new day.

Stuart Townend's final verse of 'How Deep the Father's Love for Us', sums up Jesus' place in our lives with these words:

I will not boast in anything - No gifts, no power, no wisdom

But I will boast in Jesus Christ - His death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer

But this I know with all my heart - His wounds have paid my ransom. *

- Ian and Kaye Pfeiffer, volunteers, Wantok Place

Prayer: The Wantok Place museum, as it reflects people who belong together and who are friends and compatriots in the Kingdom of God.

DAY NINETEEN

*"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and **sacrifice** to God."*

Ephesians 5:1-2

Loving someone and giving of oneself to that someone is a mark of genuine love. We cannot claim to love someone and remain passive. That love is merely an idea or intention. It is conceived but not born. Unless love is birthed, it has no reality. At best, it is just a 'feel good' experience within us.

To love someone necessitates giving part of ourselves to the beloved, otherwise our giving is just a set of actions, fulfilment of a duty, completion of an event.

As a parent, I can give time, effort and financial resources to my daughter without loving her. I wake up at 6am, get her ready for school, spend 20 minutes on the road, and drop her off. Then I fetch her home, feed her and put her to bed. I have fulfilled my duty as a parent and I can do so without 'heart'. Yes, it involves sacrifice of time and resources, but without adding my 'self' to the task it is not love, just duty. When I give of my 'self' to the task it becomes life-giving, life-changing and life-affirming.

I wake up at 6am and urgently get her up because I do not want her to be late and suffer the consequences. While she is still half-asleep brushing her teeth, I am rushing to get her breakfast ready because I do not want her to spend the morning in school feeling hungry. I get anxious when the traffic is slow to school. She gets out of the car and waves goodbye with a smile, assured that I will be there again when school is done. When I collect her from school she will talk non stop about her day - about friends, teachers, what she has learnt, how she has been good or bad followed by streams of questions. She will make fun of me, and I her. There will be laughter, shared joys and sometimes, tears and anger.

I live a busy life with so many people and things requiring my attention but I can make sure that in those moments, however brief and routine, I can always give of my 'self' to her and she returns the same. Such sacrifices become life-giving, life-changing and life-affirming.

Our Lord Jesus' love for us involves him giving himself totally to us, even to the point of death. His love is one of self-giving that begat in us a life of forgiveness, joy and hope. Let us be mindful of all our relationships that God has gifted us with.

Life is precious and fragile. Handle with care. Let us love by giving of our 'self' just as Jesus did and just as Jesus, make a difference in all our relationships.

- Rt Rev Thomas Low, Bishop, Lutheran Church in Malaysia

Prayer: Those serving the Lutheran Church in Malaysia, as they nurture, equip, care for and help their members grow spiritually and draw closer to God.

DAY TWENTY

*He (Jesus) commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as **judge** of the living and the dead. Acts 10:42*

In considering the names given to Jesus, 'judge of the living and the dead' is perhaps one of the most difficult. Whenever people, with or without faith, hear those words, we think of the fear of punishment if we step out of line or do wrong.

We look to the One born among us who comes to bring peace and justice to the earth through his death and resurrection. Yet many silently ask, 'is this Jesus our Emmanuel the God-with-us to punish-destroy, or the God-with-us to rescue-save?'

Our verse today which names Jesus as 'judge of the living and the dead' can be so easily misunderstood when taken out of context of the whole story of Acts 10:1 – 11:18. A hungry Peter was invited to 'get up and eat' that which in cultural-religious tradition, and in Peter's practice and theory, was profane and unclean. All too easily our judgement and understanding of cultural and religious traditions and conceptions of God can hide what God has spoken to us through God's Son. Thus Peter, and even we ourselves, can so easily be out of step with God.

Yet, in closeness with God, through private prayer and public experiences, Peter, and others with him came to realise God's Spirit was permitting and helping them to get and to keep 'in step with God'. In this case, Peter and the people with him, were called to be about what God was doing and wants to do in the world, namely, to move in the direction of what God foreshadowed in the mission and ministry of Jesus. In Jesus, 'as judge of the living and the dead', God intends to love everyone – all people – Jews and Gentiles, for 'everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (Acts 10:42-43).

I have come to appreciate ever more deeply the song 'There's a Wideness in God's Mercy', especially the third verse:

For the love of God is broader than the measures of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
But we make this love too narrow by false limits of our own;
and we magnify its strictness with a zeal God will not own. *

In this season of Lent, and in every season of our lives, may we, by God's Spirit and in closeness to God, let Jesus be 'judge of the living and the dead', and know that we are among 'everyone who believes' and thus 'receives forgiveness and new life in Jesus' name,' living and serving in step with God.

- Rev John Ridenour, Pastor, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Hahndorf, South Australia

Prayer: St. Paul's Lutheran Church partnership with the Heldsbach kindergarten project in Finschhafen, Papua New Guinea, as they are drawn close to God by His Son and through His Spirit, so that they may joyfully know Jesus as judge of the living and the dead.

DAY TWENTY ONE

*When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the **Prophet** who is to come into the world!" John 6:14*

Based on the Biblical reference, what comes to your mind when you hear the word 'prophet'?

Prophets are persons who convey a message from God or teach the Word of God. In addition, sometimes in the Bible, God gave them a prophecy of the future to convey to the people of their time. In some cases, God used them in a miracle (e.g., Moses and Elijah the prophet).

In this text, the people saw his sign, but they did not perceive its meaning. They wanted to seize him and make him a king. This verse is the sequel to the events of verses 1-13. Christ manifested divine power.

Although Jesus showed his glory, the crowds did not grasp the meaning behind the miracle. They wanted to make Jesus a human king (John 6:15) for their own purpose. They wanted their physical needs met, whereas Jesus wanted to minister to their souls.

Many people of our day also want to make Jesus a prophet of their own making—a great moral teacher. Throughout this message, we learn that most of the time, we humans focus more on flesh problems and needs but not on spiritual truth.

Also in this text, the people believed in Jesus as a miracle worker and not for the true reason that he came into the world as the bread of life. Jesus is the bread of life, the bread of eternal life, and whoever comes to him will never be hungry again. Whoever comes and trusts in him will have everlasting life.

In addition, Jesus Christ knows each one of us and he loves us so much that he sacrificed himself to save us from sin. Therefore, we have freedom from the chain of sin. He came to us to reconcile and have a good relationship with him.

How can we help ourselves to choose the way of the Lord and spiritual truth?
- *Ruos Sinuon, Secretary, Lutheran Church in Cambodia*

Prayer: Lutheran Church in Cambodia, as they are a channel of Christ's hope, love and life to Cambodian people.

DAY TWENTY TWO

*But that you may know that the **Son of Man** has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralytic "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." Mark 2:10-11*

Who is your favourite Jesus? Do you like the baby Jesus ... the cute, little one lying in straw? Do you like the shepherd Jesus ... the one carrying a sheep on his shoulders? You could go to an art gallery or look in a book and find lots of paintings of Jesus.

In this story, different people had various ideas about Jesus because of what had happened the last time he was in Capernaum – Jesus was seen as a teacher, a healer and someone who could drive out demons.

Jesus was interrupted when he was sharing the word of God. When the paralysed man was in front of him, Jesus did not fit in with people's expectations. Instead of healing the man, Jesus spoke about something else. We can imagine the fellows up on the roof shouting down to Jesus, "Hoi! Not that! You healed other people before. Fix his legs, for crying out loud!"

The teachers of the law heard what Jesus said. They listened carefully and tried to make sense of what he was saying. They had a correct theological idea – only God can forgive sins. However, they made an assumption that it was impossible for God to be human. So, they accused Jesus of blasphemy – of claiming to be God.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. Perhaps he said to himself, 'At last! They are putting two and two together. I'll make it really easy for them. I'll show them I am God in the flesh and I have the authority to forgive sin.' Jesus called himself "Son of Man". This term is taken from the Old Testament. 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.' (Daniel 7:13-14)

By using the term 'Son of Man', Jesus pointed them to the verses in Daniel which mention authority and kingdom. Jesus had started his public ministry talking about the good news of the kingdom of God and the need for repentance (Mark 1:15). At the end of his ministry, when the Jewish high priest asked him questions, Jesus again called himself "Son of Man" and referred to his authority (Mark 14:61-64).

So, who is Jesus for you? Do you have a 'safe' Jesus – one that doesn't threaten your perspectives of the world or about yourself? So what if Jesus called himself "Son of Man"? It means that he alone is the one in whom you can hope for the joy of forgiveness of sins, because he alone has the authority to forgive sins.

- Dr Philip Townsend, previous Director, Australia Timor-Leste Group SIL International

Prayer: Hanna Schulz and Audrey, as they serve with Wycliffe Bible Translators.

DAY TWENTY THREE

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man **receives sinners** and eats with them." Luke 15:1-2*

At the beginning of the Bible, we read the story of how Adam and Eve 'wanted to be like God', but then experienced something they had not known: being afraid of God. They tried to hide from Him, but God looked for them – calling out for the creation of His own image. After He found them, He talked to them but something had changed. The community between God and humankind was destroyed. As a sign of this brokenness, Adam and Eve had to leave paradise. But God is love, so He begins His great search for His loved ones.

In answer to our hiding, the climax of God's loving search is when He becomes human in Jesus - one of us. Jesus lived among us as one who seeks the lost and opened a new path into community with his Father. A wonderful offer from God to us.

In this verse, Luke tells of when Jesus taught, healed and sat at the table of a noble Pharisee. Later he turned to the outcasts of society but according to the Pharisees and scribes this was not correct! They asked, "where does Jesus really belong?"

First and foremost, Jesus belongs to God his Father! That is how he understood himself. Secondly, he belongs to us lost people; sinners who live separated from God and yet also have a deep longing to live in community with their creator but are not able to find the way back. That is why Jesus was born.

He lived and spoke of the love and grace of God. He invites us to accept the offer of forgiveness and to return to communion with the holy God. As a sign that this is possible through him, he sat at the table with sinners, ate and drank with them and told them the good news. They saw, experienced and tasted a loving community! This is a reason to be joyful and an invitation for more such meals in our lives.

Why do the pious ones still complain, even though 'there is joy in heaven over every sinner who repents' (Luke 15:7)? There may be different personal reasons, but they are certainly not valid - at least not before God!

I rejoice in this good news of Jesus, which is still valid today. I want to share it with others, to sit and eat with those who are 'on the margins', and to see me and them through the eyes of Jesus. We are all invited into communion with God.

- Rev Hanns Hoerschelmann, Director of Mission OneWorld, Centre for Partnership, Development and Mission of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany

Prayer: Mission OneWorld, as they live and foster Christianity all over the world and, together with their partners, strive for justice, peace and the preservation of the creation in this One World.

DAY TWENTY FOUR

*The next day he (John) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the **Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29*

John the Baptist recognised Jesus as the One whom God sent into the world to be the Lamb. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was pure, clean and unspotted.

The sacrificial lamb was carefully chosen, it could have no blemish, it was offered as a sacrifice, as a sin offering. When Jesus came into the world as a human, he was pure, clean and unspotted. Only a perfect Lamb could bear the sins of the world. God chose His Son to be that sacrificial Lamb.

We have much to repent of: the sin we do, the acts we omit, the thoughts that are impure, when we wrongly follow others' ideas, when we boast of our own achievements, the times we let another be hurt without raising a finger, the times we don't really listen to the plight of others, or when we spread a tale that may or may not have been true.

Please, read through this last paragraph again, slowly, and acknowledge our faults.

The Lamb of God was led out of the city to die a cruel death. Those sins, we recall, were placed onto him. Jesus shed his own precious blood that our sins may be washed away.

What do you think of when you think about a lamb? Maybe if you are from a farming background, you can remember feeding baby lambs every few hours because they had no mother or were a rejected twin. They know when you are approaching with the bottle of milk, running helter-skelter to the fence and then they push hard against the teat to get as much as they can as fast as they can. Do we as Jesus' little lambs run helter-skelter to feast on God's milk and are we keen to get as much as we possibly can?

The wounded lamb symbol is of a lamb holding a cross; the blood flowing from the wound in his chest into a chalice. The chalice is offered to us in the sacrament and is the blood that was shed for us on the cross. The blood shed for us washes us cleaner than clean, whiter than snow, and we are his forgiven saints.

The amazing Son of God, Lamb of God, has walked the path we walk.

So, Lord God, please help us to lean on you, the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sin of the world, and grant us your peace.

- Beryl M Smith, Treasurer, Lutheran Women of Australia

Prayer: The Lutheran Women of Australia, as they faithfully support various LCA International Mission programs and projects.

DAY TWENTY FIVE

*Jesus said to them, "I am the **bread of life**; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35*

In the ministry and teaching of the Lord Jesus, there were many things that made people follow him, especially the miracles that he performed. Wherever Jesus went, many people followed him.

In John 6, we see how the crowd followed Jesus and what motivated them to follow him. That is when Jesus introduced himself to the crowd. In the text we find that the crowds followed Jesus because of the miraculous signs that he did. In this miracle, Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish.

Jesus reminded them to look for food that endures to eternal life, 'which the Son of Man will give you'; he is the one the Father has authorised - believe in him who was sent by God. What Jesus said still made them wonder, as they compared this to the time their ancestors ate manna (bread from heaven). Jesus answered that the bread was not from Moses but from the Father; this bread comes from heaven and gives life to the world. So they asked for that bread. Jesus answered: "I am the Bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger again, and whoever believes in me will no longer thirst."

Jesus identified himself as the Bread of Life. When we talk about bread, our minds are on food because it is the main food ingredient to sustain life. Without bread, life cannot continue.

But what is the real meaning of life? Life is not just about this body but is much deeper, namely living in God. The bread offered by Jesus is not just for satisfying the body; it is more than that. He is the Bread of Life, food for those who believe in him. He is the real life. He is the one who brings us to a full life. The bread that Jesus offers is bread that satisfies; there is no more hunger. It is not that the bread we eat does not matter, but the real bread that brings us to eternity is Jesus.

Why do we care more about things that will perish than things that are eternal? Believers eat the Bread of Life by feasting on his word and receiving his sacraments. Filled with the Bread of Life, we will always give thanks and will always be satisfied (not lacking). In addition, when Jesus dwells in us, our lives radiate who is in us, namely him. Therefore, the life that we show to the world is the life that God wills. That is what brings us to eternal life. The reflection for us today, as believers, is 'who is Jesus to you?'

- Rev Ana Tondang, Staff Officer, KN-LWF Education Desk in Indonesia

Prayer: The staff serving the National Committee for Lutheran World Federation (KN-LWF), as they support the 13 member churches to deepen their knowledge of Lutheran theology.

DAY TWENTY SIX

*And let the peace of **Christ** rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Colossians 3: 15*

This verse is part of a delightful text enveloping the consummate persona of Christian standard, but is commonly misinterpreted as an encouragement to simply be at peace with others.

What is the alternative to the peace of Christ? My peace? Worldly peace?

A quick internet search instantly comes up with an abundance of suggestions that would help us to develop this much sought after nirvana or blissful tranquility. One site even offered three methods, including meditation. These at first glance seem to be beneficial. But looking further soon reveals that the focus, intent, and responsibility is me, me and me. There is instruction to: be happy, content, have pride, fall in love and avoid negative people, or in other words; isolate yourself!

Being at peace with others, or at least showing tolerance toward others, may well seem to be a suitable expectation. But if we dig down into our own hearts with truth and sincerity, isn't this simply a façade that denies and hides the current worldly deception that avoidance (of truth) is the answer to solving conflict? Worldly peace is itself a deception. A world filled with hearts turned away from God and set upon their own ideals and desires as their own personal truth, simply cannot uphold peace and unity with others.

To carry the load of peace toward others is a massively heavy load. It means not simply compromising, but giving up your own ideals and desires. It is against the flow of our hearts, which are always inclined toward evil, so peace is not something that flows out of us naturally.

During Lent we focus on the Passion of Jesus, the Christ. Jesus knew that the only way for peace to be truly present among us, was for him to give himself as the price for the selfish and sinful demands and desires of humanity. By Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, the debt of mankind's sin was paid. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit has called, enlightened and sanctified us together with the whole Christian Church, as the one body of Christ, in whom we are baptismally raised by the gift of faith, and given life and forgiveness.

Being at peace with God frees us from living for self, because if we are reconciled to him, we will receive from him all the things that are for our good. Therefore, the truth of his peace frees us to live with thanksgiving in love and harmony toward others.

- Rev Murray Smith, lecturer, Senior Flierl Seminary in Papua New Guinea

Prayer: Rev Murray Smith and his wife Tracy, as Murray lectures at Senior Flierl Seminary and teaches his students about Christ our Lord and Cornerstone.

DAY TWENTY SEVEN

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. Isaiah 9:6*

When we listen to the reading of Isaiah 9:1–6, our ears tend to skip over the middle section of the prophecy. But they are critical to Isaiah's message. In between the promise of the great light and the promise of the Prince of Peace, the prophet was unvarnished in his description of the world – burdened by the yoke, hampered by the bar, and threatened by the rod of the oppressor.

Throughout history, many rulers and leaders have justified violence to maintain order or, to bring back peace and stability. The Roman emperors claimed that the period of 'Pax Romana' was a period of peace and prosperity. But historians will counter that the tyrannical leaders decimated communities, as Rome brutally suppressed revolts in places like Judea. It was peace with a price tag. A peace held together by injustice. In more recent times, we witnessed authoritarian governments silencing opposing voices through hateful rhetoric, violence, and bloodshed, to restore 'peace' and in the process consolidate their position.

It is against this backdrop of tyranny and violence that Isaiah reminded the readers of Gideon's famous victory over the Midianites. In that 'battle', peace was re-established without violence and injustice. Our faith always takes a knock when we see injustices take hold in a country or in a school across the street. But we must never allow ourselves to doubt or be indifferent to God's promise of peace through his Son. God promised us victory without violence, a triumph without acts of injustice, peace without tyranny.

Until the final establishment of God's kingdom, we are entrusted with a mission to be peacemakers. Not just to be the typical peace activists but to be little 'princes of peace'. In practical terms, this means more than joining some peace marches or posting some peace messages on social media. From Isaiah's perspective peace, or shalom, is about restoring wholeness to something that is broken. The Bible repeatedly reminds us that Christ came to restore our broken relationship with God. As one favourite Christmas hymn goes, 'God and sinners reconciled'.

Followers of the Prince of Peace are called to be peacemakers. Christians are called to bring shalom between people, without violence or tyranny. Equally importantly, we are to bring the message of reconciliation between God and humanity. In today's world, God knows we need more of these peacemakers.

- Rev Dr Philip Lok Oi Peng, Regional Secretary for Asia Office of the General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation

Prayer: The Lutheran World Federation, as they strive to put their faith into action within and beyond the communion, and seek God's Word and Spirit to give them guidance as they do so.

DAY TWENTY EIGHT

Jesus said to him, "I am **the way**, and **the truth**, and **the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6.

Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room celebrating the Passover. He had washed their feet, an evening meal had been served, and the Lord's Supper (as it is now known) celebrated. Then Jesus tells his disciples that he will be betrayed by one of them and that he is going to die. The disciples become distressed and to comfort them Jesus says these amazing words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6. Jesus' words are striking and memorable. He doesn't say "I am a way, and a truth, and a life."

Very directly he says that he is "the one and only way" to salvation; for all people to get to the Father. This means everyone who has lived, is living and will live on this earth because we all fall into rebellion and sin. Jesus had to die on the cross at Calvary where his shed blood and selfless sacrifice broke the barrier between sinful us and the holy God.

Jesus Christ is 'the Truth' who opens up our understanding of God and gives us knowledge of God - a truth that has parts that seem silly to our so-called "wisdom". Jesus not only teaches the truth, but He is the truth, as he is both God and man when he took on human form over 2000 years ago.

Jesus Christ is 'the Life' who breathes his own resurrected life into our fallenness, through faith. Every person is born spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, incapable of saving themselves or of communicating with a holy God. But Christ is the source of all spiritual life and in him is eternal life for all who trust in his redemptive work. As we are reborn in holy baptism and granted the gift of faith in him, we are made a new creation in Christ. It is by faith in him that the Spirit of God lives within us now and throughout eternity.

Jesus said "No one comes to the Father except through me." There is no other way to God; no other truth about God; and no other life apart from God. Christ's claim is exclusive. It is a non-negotiable fact!

So, how can we know "the way, and the truth, and the life"?

1. Be in daily prayer with God.
2. Daily read His Word and make it a part of our lives.
3. Take time to be still and listen to what God is saying and possibly challenging us for action.
4. Seek out Christian fellowship.

The above is like taking medicine- do it daily and your spiritual life will be nourished.
- Gillian Heintze, member, LCA International Mission committee

Prayer: LCA International Mission committee, as they promote awareness of, interest in, and support for, the work of LCA International Mission.

DAY TWENTY NINE

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:2

When we think about the term 'strength', we might consider a wall that is made from steel or something that protects our life from danger. In the same way, when the term is presented in the spiritual area, we want something to protect our hearts and spirit. Some people claim that wealth, health and duty are able to give strength enough. Are they true?

The writer of Psalm 18 mentioned that 'The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer...' The Lord protected them from danger because they knew that the Lord is the refuge, shield, salvation and stronghold; these are qualities of God. They have these experiences when they work with God every time, every day and in every part of life. They also have seen how God acts through difficult times in life and they always know that God is with them during those times.

During the time of the pandemic from 2019 until the middle of 2022, Thailand was a part of the difficult time. There was fear, and death was approaching people more closely. I have seen people die in a house and on the street because of COVID-19, especially the people who live in the poor areas where I serve. I have only asked God that 'the Lord have mercy on us.'

But when the difficult time passed, I learned that God is not leaving the world, people and creation alone; God reveals Himself in the difficult time and shows His mercy, love and grace to us, as Jesus said, "For God so Loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

We are able to say that "God is my strength" when we trust His promises proclaimed in the Bible, when we look to Jesus for forgiveness, and when we face the storms in our life with confidence that God always is with us. Amen

- Rev Chanda Saiyotha, Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand

Prayer: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand pastors, seminary students, missionaries and congregations, as they bring the Gospel to their communities with the Holy Spirit's guidance.

DAY THIRTY

*For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God made publicly available as the **mercy seat** through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness, because of the passing over of previously committed sins, in the forbearance of God, for the demonstration of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just and the one who justifies the person by faith in Jesus. Romans 3:22b-26*

In his German translation of the New Testament, Martin Luther highlights his favourite verses with capital letters – sometimes even in EXTRA LARGE CAPITALS. Translating back into English, this is how Romans 3:24-25 appears:

WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE AS A GIFT, THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS, WHOM GOD HAS PUT FORWARD AS A MERCY SEAT BY HIS BLOOD, TO BE RECEIVED BY FAITH. THIS WAS TO SHOW GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, BECAUSE IN HIS DIVINE FORBEARANCE HE FORGIVES SIN.

The word for 'Mercy Seat' occurs only twice in the New Testament. It also appears in a list of the furnishings in Israel's tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1-5). But our English versions shy away from calling Jesus a piece of furniture! Instead, they use words like 'propitiation' (KJV) or 'a sacrifice of atonement' (NIV).

Now this is all okay, although it is not as colourful as 'mercy seat'. But how can we compare our dear Lord Jesus, whom Isaiah calls "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), to an item of furniture?

Anders Nygren explains: 'In Exodus 25:22 God said to Moses: "There I will meet with you, and I will commune with you above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony..." God manifests his glory at the mercy seat. When on the Day of Atonement the high priest enters the Holy of Holies, he must bear incense with him, "that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he may not die" (Leviticus 16:13); and he must sprinkle the blood of the victim seven times before the mercy seat, to make atonement for the people and turn away God's wrath at our sins.

These are the thoughts that Paul has in mind. He presents the same concepts – the manifestation of God, God's wrath, his glory, the blood, the mercy seat... But now God has manifested his righteousness to man, in that he presents Christ as a mercy seat. In Christ God reveals himself in his glory. Now he does not, as before, hide it behind a cloud of incense in the Holy of Holies. On the contrary, he has not put Christ forward before all the world as our hilastērion, our mercy seat. Whoever believes in him is no longer under the wrath of God, but, as Paul says in Romans 5:2, he can rejoice in the hope of sharing the glory of God.'

- Rev Dr Greg Lockwood, volunteer LCA International Mission lecturer

Prayer: LCA NZ volunteers, as they lecture at seminaries overseas and encourage students to have a deeper appreciation of their Lutheran heritage.

DAY THIRTY ONE

*the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my **beloved Son**; with you I am well pleased."* Luke 3:22

The baptism of our Lord Jesus is a beautiful picture of the Trinity working in harmony, and this verse from Luke is a glorious illustration of God meeting in unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unite when the eternal Son of Man is commissioned to begin his earthly ministry to a lost and dying world.

I remember meeting my son for the first time. With tears and in pain, I was lying on the bed in the chaos of having a caesarean. Doctors and nurses racing around, hearing my husband come in for prayer, the anesthesiologist team standing by – the cord being cut and the doctor saying "it's a boy". Tears of joy flowing as I first held him and realised, "this is my son'.

My husband and I slept so little in those first twelve weeks, but we also have many fond memories of that time. Since he was born, we watched as our son grew and learnt what it means to be a man. We taught him about using his masculine strength to help rather than hurt, his authority to serve rather than be served, and his words to encourage rather than abuse or insult others.

Good earthly fathers want to be a good example for their children. My husband has wanted our son to not only benefit from his strength, but also to become increasingly strong himself, growing into a young man.

With an even deeper love than parents love their own children, God loved us by giving His beloved Son for all of us. At Calvary He did not spare His beloved Son because He loves us. Romans 5:8 tells us that the greatest sign that God loves us, is that He sent His one and only Son to die for us. His love and grace for us is unconditional.

God declares us to be His children through baptism, marked with the name of the Triune God, the same God present at the Baptism of Jesus. Therefore, we belong to God and are adopted Sons (and Daughters) of God.

- *Milka Hauser, Martin Luther Seminary in Papua New Guinea*

Prayer: Rev Mick, Milka, Kelly and Malenne Hauser, as Mick lectures at the Martin Luther Seminary and reminds his students of God's Word of truth and all that Christ has done for them.

DAY THIRTY TWO

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the **cornerstone**. In Him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
Ephesians 2:19-21*

Years ago I sang in an all-male acapella chorus. One of the joys of singing four-part harmony is when all the parts lock in and harmonise to create a 'chordal ring'. Those are amazing moments that can 'raise the hairs on the back of your neck'! But these precious moments could not be achieved without a solid foundation built on hours of practice and a willingness to carefully listen to each other.

So, how does four-part acapella singing relate to this text In Ephesians 2?

Nothing at all can be successfully built without a solid and strong foundation, can it? Since buildings were first erected builders have known that. They soon learned that an out-of-square building was not going to last long and, besides, it looked 'weird'. The author of Psalm 118 picked up on this common knowledge and his thoughts have echoed down the ages, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.'

This is also true for a chorus or quartet. Without having everything perfectly squared away and in sync, harmony cannot be achieved. Besides, it just sounds weird! Jesus himself, St Paul and St Peter, the author of Hebrews, and John the evangelist, all call on this knowledge in their teachings and writings.

All believers that know Jesus is Lord have the strong and enduring foundation of God's Word to build their life, their faith, and their work on. We all have the comfort and assurance of having 'Jesus as the Cornerstone of our faith's foundation'.

And here's the thing: God's Word is for all peoples of all nations, for 'none are strangers and aliens, but [you] are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.'

Our faith also comes with Jesus' enduring foundational promise given to the disciples and to us in Matthew 16:18-19. Jesus' Church is built with the strength and surety of having him as the cornerstone of the *ecclesia* - the body of Christ - the Church, and with Him at the head, 'the gates of hell will not prevail against it'.

May I suggest that you might like to sing 'The Church's One Foundation' (LHS 191) especially the first two verses, or 'My Hope is built on nothing less' (LHS 331).

- Rev Geoff Schefe, pastor, Manawatu Parish in New Zealand

Prayer: The Manawatu Parish, as they partner and share love with the boys at Rumah Chrestus in Malaysia.

DAY THIRTY THREE

*Jesus said to her, "I am the **resurrection** and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. John 11: 25-26*

Jesus' resurrection is the most important event in human history! No other person in history has risen from the dead to live forever. Jesus' resurrection is therefore proof that he is God Almighty. Jesus' resurrection is also proof that God has accepted his sacrifice for our sins. In Lent we remember the love of God that is poured out through Jesus on the cross in his death and defeat of death, sin and Satan through his resurrection.

In today's verse, Jesus is declaring to Martha, whose brother had died, that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Martha believed that Jesus could have healed her brother who was sick because she had seen and heard about Jesus healing others. Even though he loved Lazarus, Jesus purposely delayed going to Martha's house after he heard of Lazarus was sick. While Jesus was still travelling, Lazarus died. Martha and Mary must have been disappointed. When he finally arrived, they said to him, "Lord, if you have been here Lazarus would not have died."

God's delays are not His denials. Jesus delayed his arrival at Martha and Mary's house so that he could reveal himself further to them. He wanted to show them that he is not only the healer of all ills, but also the Resurrection and the Life. He is the only one who has and can conquer death.

Jesus proved that He is the Resurrection and the Life when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had been dead for four days and had started to decompose, however that was not an obstacle for our Lord Jesus. He commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Lazarus was brought to life and came out of the tomb. Martha and Mary saw the power of our Lord Jesus over death and were comforted to have their brother alive again.

We who believe in Jesus by his grace, also experience a spiritual resurrection. In our baptism we were buried with Christ into his death and were raised to new life in him, just as Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus is our resurrection and life too! And when our Lord Jesus Christ will come again at the last day, then we will experience a bodily resurrection, for he is the Resurrection and the Life.

Jesus as the Resurrection is such a comfort for us because we all will experience death and have loved ones that will pass away. Because Jesus is the Resurrection, we are assured that we will live forever with God and one another in bliss and joy. What a blessing Jesus the Resurrection gives us! Amen.

- Rev Haraneath Singh, pastor, Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer in Singapore

Prayer: The Lutheran Church in Singapore, as they continue to work as one body to promote the development of the church ministries and in so doing, attract the younger generation to revitalise the church.

DAY THIRTY FOUR

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is **freedom**.
2 Corinthians 3:17*

Nowadays, we are living in the world that is full of sin. As Christians, we live in the way that is led by the Holy Spirit, but every day we do something – big or small - that is opposite to God's will. When we do, does God take His salvation away from us? Does God take His true love from us?

In the book of John, we are told, 'for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.' (John 3:16-17)

Traditionally, Cambodian people believe in the strength of a person's soul. They believe that, even if their parents have died, the soul of their parents is still in the world, staying to support those family members who are still living. Cambodian people will therefore pray to these souls for help.

If siblings quarrel with one another and say bad words to one another, Cambodian people traditionally believe that something bad may happen to the family, such as sickness or an accident. Because of the fear of what they believe can happen, non-Christians do many things to protect themselves. They live with a spirit of fear and have no freedom.

Christians have no reason to fear. Through the Holy Spirit's strength, we are free and need not be afraid. 'For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control' (2 Timothy 1:7). Our Lord of lords and King of kings knows our every step. Everything is from him and every moment is in his hands.

Trust him, give him your life and your soul. Allow him to lead you.

A father never gives a stone to his child when they ask for bread. If you do fear, pray to God; if you are unhappy, pray to God; if you feel alone, pray to God. He hears your voice, and he will always help. He is with us every moment, everywhere we go. Amen.

- Yin Dara, Treasurer, Lutheran Association of Cambodia

Prayer: Lutheran Church in Cambodia ministry through agricultural projects, as they build deeper relationships with people in the community and provide ways to financially support families.

DAY THIRTY FIVE

*...and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our **Saviour** Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:10*

A rescuer intervenes in life-threatening situations. They have only one aim in mind: to preserve life. In doing so, the rescuer enters risky situations to help, often not thinking of themselves.

There are several occupations whose task it is to help and save people in need: paramedics, mountain rescue service, lifeguards, accident rescue service, sea rescue (also called 'SOS' – Save Our Souls) and so on. There are many examples of rescuers who risk their own lives to save others, often suffering serious injuries themselves.

Even after more than twenty years, images and reports are still vivid of firefighters who saved many lives when the aeroplanes flew into the World Trade Centre in New York. Without their selfless efforts, many more people would have perished.

The first Christians had a secret symbol by which they communicated with each other and encouraged one another during the time of persecution in the Roman Empire: the fish. The word for this fish in Greek is 'Ichtys' which means 'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour'. Paul also used this term in the letter to his disciple Timothy to describe the meaning of Jesus, as we read in 2 Timothy 1:10.

What is the term 'Saviour' all about?

Jesus - the Saviour. So much resonates with this word that makes us grateful and happy.

The Son of God did not hesitate to put his own life on the line to enable us to live a full life, his own death taking away the power of death over us humans. Golgotha was the commitment of Jesus the Saviour. Easter morning showed the fruit of that commitment. It was worth it. Christ brought to light an incorruptible being. Christ's act of salvation was not in vain.

In the end, death can no longer harm us. The first Christians knew this during their persecution and we must always be aware of this in the daily challenges of today's world, no matter on which continent we live. Amen.

- Pfarrer Hans-Georg Tannhäuser, Acting Director of Secretary Asia Pacific Desk, Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionswerk Leipzig e. V. in Germany

Prayer: The Leipziger Missionswerk, as they manage the foreign partnerships of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony and the Evangelical Church in Central Germany with Tanzania, Tamil Nadu (India) and Papua New Guinea.

DAY THIRTY SIX

*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the **light of the world**. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12*

If you are reading this devotion right now, you are able to do so because you have light. Light from the sun (or from another source) is reflecting off the paper, sending signals to your eye which your brain is able to interpret and understand. It is an awesome process and it all starts with an illuminating source.

Light and life are inseparable. Sunlight, through another awesome process (photosynthesis), is the source of all life on earth. Light is a life-giving power. The word light can also be used metaphorically for learning, knowledge or understanding.

Right from the start of his Gospel, John asks us to think of Jesus as light, 'in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:4.5)

Luke records the old man, Simeon, recognizing the infant Jesus as 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel'. (Luke 2:32)

Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world.' What does that mean for you and me? Just as a prism reveals the myriad of colours contained in natural light, we may find many answers to the question. Here are a few of them:

'God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.' (John 1:5). When Jesus says he is 'the light of the world', he tells us that he is truly God and we can trust him.

Jesus' light enables us to see the world, other people and ourselves as Jesus sees them - as God's creation, loved and cared for by God.

Jesus' light helps us to see and choose to follow the path God wants us to follow, that of goodness, truth and life rather than sin, selfishness, and death.

We can reflect Jesus' light when we believe in him and follow his paths. Other people can see Jesus reflected in us.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts
Shine through the darkness
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today

With our own eyes, we see salvation
Within our hearts, we are set free
Your Word made flesh, hope of the nations
Light for the world to see! *

- Mary Jo Zwar, volunteer, LCA International Mission Missionaries Timeline

Prayer: Australian Lutherans, as they serve overseas to equip the local people for ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

DAY THIRTY SEVEN

*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the **faithful witness**, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. Revelation 1:4-5*

We live in a time when we experience many changes. We see people migrating from traditional practices to the digital environment. By internet we can get a lot of information, which may contain the truth, but may also contain news that is not true or a hoax.

This is not only happening in this vastly complex world, but also in the spiritual life of the church members. This reminds us to remain wise in receiving all input from various parties, so that we are not wrong in carrying out our duties.

In religious life, we can get information or testimony about Christian teachings from many resources. Someone can broadcast teachings and provide attractive performances through digital tools but when the teaching is false, those reading, watching or listening can lose direction in their lives.

That's why we are reminded to stay focused on what is written in the Bible, Sola Scriptura. The Bible has told us through the Gospel of John about Jesus as the true witness. It says, '...We speak what We know and testify what We have seen ...' (John 3:11). The Lord Jesus witnessed what he knew, what he received, what he heard and what he had seen. He is the true witness.

As a true witness, our Lord Jesus conveyed how his followers should act and behave. Jesus taught and told everyone about the way of salvation, and that teaching brings people life. When we believe and accept the Lord Jesus, we receive his testimony, and we receive life. Be assured that what our Lord Jesus said, is a certainty.

In some of our Indonesian societies, people still believe that those who have a higher social status must speak the truth. Unfortunately, this can result in those who are in positions of leadership becoming corrupt or abusing their power.

We thank God for sending His only beloved Son to lead us back to the right path. He directs and guides and leads us to live in truth. Jesus is God's witness to tell us at first-hand about God and salvation and tell us how to live as persons who received eternal life. Jesus is the witness on whom we can rely.

- Rev Dr Paul Ulrich Munthe, General Secretary, Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun in Indonesia

Prayer: Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun church, as they evangelise among the Simalungun tribe.

DAY THIRTY EIGHT

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel. Matthew 1:23

The Hebrew word 'Immanuel' means 'God is with us'. This name, which God revealed through the prophet Isaiah centuries before Matthew wrote his account of Jesus' birth, highlights God's incredible intimacy with humanity through the incarnation. This name makes the radical claim that the baby born in a stable in Bethlehem, is the God of the universe.

Jesus was not just with those he encountered in the 30 years between his human birth and his death on the cross. Three days after his disciples had seen him crucified on the cross, and had perhaps feared the worse, the resurrected Jesus 'came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, *I am with you always*, to the very end of the age"' (Matthew 28:18-20). The Gospel of Matthew is bookended by God's promise to be present with His people. Matthew assures his readers that God did not just come to visit - He came to stay.

Through His Word, Spirit, and Body and Blood, the resurrected Jesus is present with all of his disciples, in every time and place, including us. When Jesus asks us to partner in his mission to the world – the Great Co-mission to make disciples of all nations – we go in his name, with his authority, with *him*.

This truth struck me in a new way on the day of my Confirmation. After worship and a celebratory lunch, I arrived home alone. Feeling uncertain and somewhat overwhelmed by the thought of what to do with the remainder of the day, let alone the remainder of my life, I prayed, "God, what would you like me to do now?". I quickly corrected myself - "God, what would you like *us* to do now?".

There is nowhere we can go *without* Jesus. Psalm 139: 7-10 reminds us 'If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.'

So, where will *you* go with Jesus? Take some time to pray. You might like to focus on today, the period of Lent, this year, or beyond. What will you do together? Who will you meet together? How might you introduce other people to Jesus *Immanuel*, who is God with us, always?

- Eloise Quinn-Valentine, member, St John's Lutheran Church, Unley in South Australia

Prayer: St. John's Lutheran Church partnership with Bishop Steven Lawrence of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, as they seek to explore how they bring the good news of Jesus to their own communities.

DAY THIRTY NINE

*I am the good **shepherd**. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
John 10:11*

There is an interesting comparison between the way the shepherd, and then the sheep, are described in this verse.

The shepherd is characterised as 'good'. During Jesus' life on earth, one of the most common and yet least glamorous occupations, was that of a shepherd. A good shepherd would willingly sacrifice themselves to rescue and defend the sheep in their care from predators such as wolves, lions, and bears. Sheep could depend entirely on a good shepherd for their protection and wellbeing, even if it meant the shepherd's own life was at risk.

In contrast, the quality of sheep which the good shepherd lays his life down for, is not mentioned. At their most valuable, sheep are a vital source of food, clothing and shelter. But sheep are also helpless, defenceless, easily manipulated, straying and dirty animals that require constant oversight, leading, rescue and cleaning, or they will die.

Jesus, our good Shepherd's care and unfolding love is not dependent on us being the right kind of sheep. Jesus doesn't base his protection and concern for us on how we look, feel or behave or on what we achieve. He doesn't turn his back on us when we are distant and wander off, when we allow others to be our shepherd and let the wolves in, when we are rebellious, needy, proud and vain. Instead, he relentlessly loves, pursues and lays his life down for us.

And this true and Good Shepherd is calling your name, reminding you that you belong to him. He is carrying you on shoulders that once bore the heavy weight of the cross. He is gently leading you beside still waters. He is providing for you so that you lack nothing. He is with you on the days you dread, gifting you courage. He is filling your moments of sadness with hope. And he has been doing so since you drew your first breath. You know the voice. If you place your hand on your tender, broken, beautiful heart, the Holy Spirit will reveal his heartbeat of love for you. It has always been there, even when the cry of the wolves is overwhelming.

This is the Jesus we have been reminded of during Lent—God's Son who has and is always faithful in his love for us.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen

Hebrews 13:20-21

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Wantok Place

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



40 DAYS - a Lenten Devotion and Prayer guide

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