

Church in a Bag



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3 October



A Gathering

Mighty God, everything you do reveals your glory and majesty. Open our eyes to see what you are doing in our lives. Let us marvel at your good gifts and your wise provision. Your acts are amazing Lord. We cannot comprehend the number of blessings you pour out on us from day to day.

As we gather our thoughts with you now, transform us Lord, and make us more like you.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen

Preparation

God is committed to drawing disparate people into a community founded on his values. Throughout the Gospels is the plea to call out wrongfulness where we see it in the hope that individuals will turn and mend their ways. Jesus' teaching warns us about not putting stumbling blocks in the path of the weak or the young.

The readings today take aim at our adult way of drifting from the openness, wonder and joy so often expressed by the innocence of children. It is the objective social status of small children that is the background for Jesus' statement "I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it" (v15).

Reading

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Reflection

Here's a story: A prominent orator had been speaking to a club in a small town and was spending the night with a club member, a farmer, on the outskirts of the community. She had just relaxed on the front porch when a newsboy delivered the evening paper.

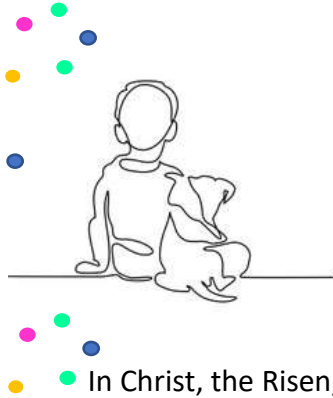
The boy noted the sign Puppies for Sale. The boy got off his bike and said to the farmer, "How much do you want for the pups, mister?" "Twenty-five dollars, son."

The boy's face dropped. "Well, sir, could I at least see them anyway?" The farmer whistled, and in a moment the mother dog came bounding around the corner of the house tagged by four of the cute puppies, wagging their tails and yipping happily.

At last, another pup came straggling around the house, dragging one hind leg. "What's the matter with that puppy, mister?" the boy asked. "Well son, that puppy is crippled. We took her to the vet and the doctor took an x ray. The pup doesn't have a hip joint and that leg will never be right." To the amazement of both men, the boy dropped the bike, reached for his collection bag and took out a dollar coin. "Please, mister," the boy pleaded, "I want to buy that pup. I'll pay you a dollar every week until the twenty-five dollars is paid. Honest I will, mister."

The farmer replied, "But son, you don't seem to understand that pup will never, never be able to run or jump. That pup is going to be a cripple forever. Why in the world would you want such a useless pup as that?"

The boy paused for a moment, then reached down and pulled up his pant leg, exposing that all too familiar iron brace and leather knee-strap holding a poor twisted leg. The boy answered, "Mister, that pup is going to need someone who understands him to help him in life!"



In Christ, the Risen, there is hope. He understands us—our faults, our worries and even our thoughts concerning our means in life. By His resurrection we have help in this life and hope for the life to come.

Reading

Mark 10: 2-16

*He was angry
and said to his disciples
"Let the Children come to me".*

Reflection

I just love this story of a five-year-old girl, whose father ran upstairs to see her one day because there was a thunderstorm. The thunder was roaring and the lightning

flashing. When he got to her room, his little girl was standing on the window sill, leaning spread-eagle against the glass, lightning and thunder roaring outside. He said, "Jennifer, what are you doing?".

She said, "I think God is trying to take my picture".

There's something exuberant and unrestrained about



children. They have an enthusiasm for life that we tend to lose as we grow older. They have a sense that anything is possible. As adults, we admire children's childish enthusiasm. But it seems that we also tend to encourage the kids to outgrow it.

Syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman, a few years ago, wrote these wise words: "We raise our children with ethical time bombs, built-in disillusionment alarms. We allow our children their ideals until they are perhaps 13 or 15 or 18 or 22. But if they don't let go of their ideals, we worry about whether they will be able to function in the

real world. After all, the real world is some place else. We have to be tough and even a little cynical."

Goodman goes on to give examples of what she means: "Adults know that clean air is all very nice, but it must be balanced against jobs. Adults know that helping others is neat, but it may well take away their motivation to find a job. Adults know that peace is swell, but we can't ever trust our

enemies to ever stop preparing for war." Goodman concludes that this so-called realism of adults may be the true "junk food" of our time, later quoting the words of Rev David Schreuder: "We instill ideals in our children, resent it when our children challenge us for not living up to them, and then feel reassured when our kids give up their ideals like sleds or cartoons".

Can this be what Jesus had in mind when he asked His disciples not to lose the child-like spirit; when he warned them about hindering little children on their way into the kingdom?

A Song This Is All Our Joy

Refrain

Something we have known
from the beginning
That we have seen
with our own eyes
The word of life
from whom all living takes its voice
and cries
This is all our joy in Christ!

God is light, in God there is no
darkness.
God is love and if we live in God,
Love will be our promise. **Refrain**

See the love of God we have been
given!
We are called God's children
and in love
That is who we are. **Refrain**

Let us love, for this is God's own
being.
God, in Christ
has shown us how to love
living for each other. **Refrain**

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Blessing

We are like children
in the arms of Jesus.
We want to trust Him
with our lives.
We want Him to be close to us
in joys and sorrows.
We ask Him for this
and ask it for all
who are in our circle of life.
Jesus wants closeness
to each of us
as we want a close friendship
with Him.
Let the child in each of us trust
and ask
and simply enjoy being loved
by Him.

Amen

With thanks to Dan Eaton
for preparing today's reflection





10 October



A Gathering

Lord, at this time I know that I am not alone. I live in your world. I believe in God your father, who has created and is creating, who has come to me in your presence, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, to teach me to open my eyes beyond what lies before me in service to you.

Lord I trust you. I have listened to your words of promise and mission. I seek your light in the darkness, I breathe in the life extraordinary brought through your spirit in me. Make me a witness for you Christ, in every moment. Show me the way to better serve you.

Amen

Preparation

A story is told of a young Buddhist monk who sat outside his temple two thousand years ago, hands clasped in prayer. He looked very pious and he chanted 'Amita Buddha' all day. Day after day he intoned these words, believing

that he was acquiring grace. One day the head priest of the temple sat next to him and began rubbing a piece of brick against a stone. Day after day he rubbed one against the other. This went on week after week, until the young monk could no longer contain his curiosity, and finally blurted out, "Father, what are you doing?". "I'm trying to make a mirror," said the head priest. "But that's impossible!" said the young monk. "You can't make a mirror from brick." "True," replied the head priest. "Just as it is impossible to acquire grace by a chant."

We would all like to be successful and fulfilled as people; it is one of the dreams with which our culture imbues us. But, as we will find out today, when we listen to Jesus, we may realise that success and fulfilment don't really come the way we might expect. Satisfaction with our lives does not come through the pursuit of wealth, power or status, but by outwardly participating in acts of caring and

sharing to all God's children.
You've heard all this before: the first shall be last into heaven and the last shall be first.

Christian satisfaction comes from a life focussed on serving others, over the collection of human-defined measures of success. "There're no pockets on shrouds", as a friend of mine said. Christian wealth is a gift from God and simply happens when we are doing the right things with our lives. In God's eyes it is a whole lot better to be a success who looks like failure than a failure who looks like success.

Reading

Mark 10:17-31

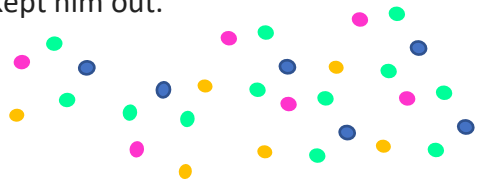
*Go, sell everything you have
and give it to the poor...
then come and follow me.*



Reflection

An expert in diamonds happened to be seated on an airplane beside a woman with a huge diamond on her finger. Finally, the man introduced himself and said, "I couldn't help but notice your beautiful diamond. I am an expert in precious stones. Please tell me about that stone." She replied, "That is the famous Klopman diamond, one of the largest in the world. But there is a strange curse that comes with it." Now the man was really interested. He asked, "What is the curse?" As he waited with bated breath, she replied, "It's *Mr Klopman*."

It is often spoken that the true curse of any kind of valuable possession is its capacity to steal our hearts and souls. The rich young ruler is one of those unique characters from the Bible that has come to represent greed. He wanted to be saved but not at the expense of losing his possessions. But in the end, the love of money kept him out.



Consider this: The Rev Will Campbell is a Baptist prophet from the hills of North Carolina. A few years ago, he was invited to preach at the prestigious Riverside Church in New York City. This was that church that has long been noted for its activist leaders and liberal, politically correct agenda. Rev Campbell was asked to preach on this subject: “What Riverside Church Can Do to Bring Betterment to Our Community?”

Rev Campbell used the text we are using today. So he began his talk with questions: “What can the Riverside Church do for the hungry?”



and “What can the Riverside Church do for the more needy, forgotten, abandoned, marginalized abused?” He paused. “Well,” he said, “Nothing...nothing unless you sell your big building

and give it to the poor. Let’s go out on the street and see what you can get for this big ol’ building!”

Needless to say, the host congregation was not amused. They wanted an answer that was reasonable, practical and fashionable, not some shocking, outrageous suggestion.

What is it that this challenge from Jesus asks of you? First, acknowledge this much: it isn’t just ‘give what you can’, or ‘what’s left over when you’ve used everything else the way in which you want’. It isn’t just a token gift to ease your conscience, or a little ‘thank you’ note

to God. It's not throwing what you happen to have on you in the offering plate like you're leaving a tip for Jesus for good service.

If instructed, as Jesus did to the young rich man, would you - could you - give it all up to God's service? Would you lay it all on the table asking, "God, what do you want me to do with all this"? Would you walk away?

A Song We Will Love

Refrain

We will walk with you at the edges
we will die with you at the
crossroads
we will live in your dangerous places
we will love.
We will risk with you taking chances
we will stand with you facing evil
we will live in your dangerous places
we will love.

Come Lord Jesus Christ hear our
prayer
Come now living friend please draw
near
Alone we feel unsure and so afraid
Calling us to live by your grace
Calling us to leave all that's safe
Our lives we choose to lose so you
may save

Refrain

Stepping out we call on your name
Knowing you have healed all our
shame
Our God, your precious love has
made us whole
Gifting us with power to set free
Holy Spirit use even me.
Renew all that I am so I may see.

Refrain

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A Prayer

Thank you, O God for taking care of us and for supplying our needs according to the abundance of your grace. Receive our gifts, our love, and our service, and use them for the sake of your glory and for the advancement of your kingdom both here and now and in the world to come.

Amen

With thanks to Dan Eaton
for preparing today's reflection



17 October

A Gathering

Were you there when the morning
stars sang together and all the
heavenly beings shouted for joy?

God
who cares for all creation
who shelters all creatures
who cares for all living things –
as we work through the challenges
and fears
enforced on us by regulation
accepted by us in our care
for our neighbours
we know that you
are always with us.
We know that you are not some
distant god
but you are our nearby God.

We live in a time of trial
seeking answers.
But perhaps part of the answer
is already with us.
We see so much
of the cult of the individual:
my life
my body
my rights
overtaken
by the upswelling of care for
and support of our community
rejoicing with you
in our expressions of love
of our neighbour.



Preparation

The two readings on which I reflect are about people asking for answers: Job from God; and James and John from Jesus.

QUESTION

None of them gets the answer they want. God does not work to an agenda set by humankind.

ANSWER

However, in God's response to Job there is a breaking open; a challenge to remember the world is not centred on human beings. It is not an entirely safe or predictable world, but it is beautiful and good nonetheless - and God invites Job to live in that wild and beautiful world.

For James and John, the challenge is can you do what I must do?

Reading

Job 38:1-7, (34-41)

Reflection

Job is in despair. He thought he had it made. He was the centre of his universe, sitting in judgment at

the city gate, surrounded by family and possessions and admired by one and all. Job thought that the world ran by a strict system of retributive justice: the righteous are always rewarded and the wicked are always punished. And Job was the most righteous person of all – yet he had lost everything. Why?

He called for so long yet God did not answer. When the answer did come, rather than answering Job's cry God threw the ball back to Job, asking 'who are you' and 'where were you' when the world was formed? God doesn't address justice, doesn't even acknowledge Job's suffering but takes Job on a whirlwind tour of the cosmos. God is the wild God; the maker of wild things; even primordial monsters. God's answer is beautiful, fascinating, even terrifying: this is a world much, much bigger than ourselves. God doesn't even put humankind in that picture.

So where does that leave Job? Remember how Job's friends claimed he was at fault and must therefore face retributive justice? Even though his world is in chaos he still hangs on grimly to his

integrity and calls on God for an explanation. God's answer breaks open Job's world and expands his vision; it speaks of freedom and grace rather than reward or retribution. God gives his creatures the freedom to be who they are, wild and beautiful – but sets limits on the forces that create chaos.

A Song Be Thou My Vision

Be thou my vision O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me save that thou art.
Thou my best thought by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom and thou my true word
I ever with thee and thou with me Lord
Thou my great Father and I thy true son
Thou in me dwelling and I with thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only first in my heart

High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Words and music in the Public Domain

Blessing

Pandemically Prayed
We give thanks for lessons learned
care shared
connections made
community grown.
We have pivoted, flexed, adapted
adjusted, evolved, changed
and in all this
we have persevered
and accomplished so much.
Be with us all and bless us.
Be with all and bless all.
Bless our communities and their
leaders
and keep us well.
In Christ, we pray.

Amen

Jon Humphries



With thanks to Shirley Colless
for preparing today's reflection

24 October

A Gathering

We come before you God
and we count our blessings.
We remember that
even on the darkest day
your light shines through the
cloud.

We come before you God
and we know we are not alone
for you are our constant friend.

We come before you God
in humble sincerity
in childlike awe and wonder
amazed at your awesome works.

We come before you God
grateful for
love you give
so freely.

May we
share that
love
amongst our
friends
our family
our
neighbours.

Amen



Preparation

In the Mark reading today the crowd that is following Jesus is stopped by a cry from Bartimaeus – a blind man seen as an outsider, and not considered worthy of Jesus' attention. But Jesus, friend to all, calls for him to come over and asks the question "What do you want me to do for you?". The answer from Bartimaeus "Rabbi, I want to see!".

Last week Jesus asked James and John the same question, and He received a very different answer to that of Bartimaeus.

Reading

Mark 10:46-52

Reflection

Today's reflection is taken from *Roots On The Web*.

"Early in this section of Mark's Gospel, there is a story of the healing of a blind man (Mark 8:22-26), immediately before Peter's confession in response to

Jesus' question: Who do you say I am? Now, as the section draws to a close, we have a second story about the healing of a blind man. But in this one, the man has a name. And Bartimaeus is able to name Jesus and identify him as 'the Son of David' (verse 47). Of course, at this point, Bartimaeus can't see who is passing. He knows because he is told, because he hears others – but he goes further. He sees something that the rest of the crowd doesn't notice. Note the crowd's response to Bartimaeus (verse 48). After all, he's only a beggar so he doesn't count! But Jesus does stop, and he does speak to Bartimaeus.

But what are we to make of his question to him (verse 51)? Is this question deeper than it might appear to be? Is it about what Bartimaeus really wants?

In verse 52, faith is what reaches out. It is confidence that Jesus holds the key and that he can and will act. It is about hope and expectations that are fulfilled. The section begins and ends with blindness, but it is all about discipleship too (Mark 8:31-38). We have repeatedly seen Jesus' disciples misunderstand or get

discipleship wrong. But Bartimaeus, the outsider, ends the section by getting it right, and he follows Jesus along the road to Jerusalem, to David's city.

Remember the question that Jesus asked? "What do you want me to do for you?" This week, even though we are still under some restrictions, perhaps you might have the opportunity to ask someone in Jesus' name "What do you want me to do for you?".



A Song Son of David

The blind won't gain their sight
by opening their eyes.

A king is coming to this city
and crowds surround
are following.

If I could see I would follow too.

He heals the sick with His hands
as He walks by
they reach for Him
If I could see I would reach out too.

The blind won't gain their sight
by opening their eyes.

Son of David, have mercy on me.
Son of David, have mercy on me.
Son of David, I want to see.
Son of David, have mercy!

I cannot leave this gate
since I cannot see my way
but I can stand and call his name.

No I could never leave this gate
but I will stand and shout His name
and I will count on His grace.

Son of David, have mercy on me.
Son of David, have mercy on me.
Son of David, I want to see.
Son of David, have mercy!

I was blind, now I see.
Jesus saved me!



I was blind, now I see.
Jesus saved me!

I was blind, now I see.
Jesus saved me!

*Words and music by Cam Huxford IV
and Shay Carlucci
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A Prayer

Spirit of Christ
we, who like to think
we are reasonable people
of scientific bent
thank you for the gift
of blind faith.

Where we can no longer see
but stand bemused and hopeless
you come to our side
and give us the courage
to leap
across a love-gulf so deep
that it separates
Dives from Lazarus
and despair from joy.

Spirit of Christ
stand by us today
that we may again leap
where reason fears to tread
and to love where ego stalls.

Bruce Prewer

**With thanks to Raelene Burn
for compiling today's reflection**

31 October

Opening Prayer

Lord you are the source of love. We give you thanks for our family and friends, and we especially thank you that we live in Australia in these restricted times. In this time of need may we be generous.

Your love knows no bounds. We are the object of your love. It is a bit like the manna in the desert that we have heard about - if it was greedily stored up, then it was spoiled.

You want us to be vessels of love, and not just store it up but generously share with anyone and everyone that we can. We thank you that you never change. We ask for your help to adapt and encourage each other with words, deeds and prayers.



Preparation

In Mark 12: 28-34 Jesus talks about the Greatest Commandment to love God and to love others. As we learn to love God and grow into that relationship, it will complete the circle of love. Any love we return to God is simply reflecting back what has first been put into our hearts through Jesus' sacrifice.

Reading

Mark 12:28-34

Reflection

(Quotes from The Living Bible)
I have seen, as we all have, I'm sure, beautiful pictures of reflections – not just ordinary pictures but real reflections too. These appear naturally in smooth, calm water. We will reflect on today's reading in Mark, in which we hear a scribe asking Jesus what he considered to be the most important commandment.

I think it is interesting the answer that Jesus gave. He starts as if something very, very important is to come out in the open: “Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only God”. Keep in mind that the Israelites were surrounded by nations who worshipped other gods. Jesus didn’t seem to answer any other questions as forcefully. After declaring this he went on to say “You must love Him with all

your heart and soul and mind and strength”. Various versions of the

Bible use slightly different words but in essence they all make it clear that the love of our God is paramount in importance. Jesus then added “You must love others as much as yourself. No other commandments are greater than these”. Love for the God of Israel was at the core of importance. Love for our neighbours from us is a natural progression, flowing from our love for God.

The scribes agreed with Jesus - in fact complimenting Him on his answer saying that He had answered wisely and that it was more important than offering all kinds of sacrifices on the altar of the Temple. Jesus’ reply seems somewhat puzzling when he says “You are not far from the Kingdom of God”. Mark then records “and after that no one dared ask him any more questions”.



Recently I read from “Things of the Sort” by Dave Lemore a few interesting points, namely:

- The scribes knew the Scriptures extremely well – great knowledge of God’s law only brings one near, not in, the kingdom.
- The scribe came to Jesus in need of a theological answer, not as a sinner in need of saving.
- The scribe wanted to know what Jesus thought not what he taught.
- Can we see Jesus for who he is and what he did or do we

merely admire him for what he taught?

I often think about what path I should trudge. What guide posts do I need? What values do I hold as I live my life? What do I teach my children and grandchildren? Jesus is quite unequivocal in telling us that our first calling is to love God – let that love soak into your bones and spirit. Any love we return to God is simply reflecting back what has first been put in our hearts by God.

A Song The Great love of God

The great love of God is revealed in the Son who came to this earth to redeem everyone.

That love, like a stream flowing clear to the sea makes clean every heart that from sin would be free.

It binds the whole world every barrier it breaks the hills it lays low and the mountains it shakes.



It's yours it is ours
oh how lavishly given
the pearl of great price
and the treasure of heaven.

*Words by Daniel Niles, Melody by Elisha Hoffman
Christian Conference of Asia
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Closing Prayer

How easy it is to take the focus off you Lord. So many thoughts, jobs and activities distract or compete for my attention. To have you central all the time is yet to be accomplished by me. Lord, what I know and what I do are often different from what you ask of me. I confess I am weak and often wander off. I don't always give you priority. I see and experience the benefits and yet easily drift. I ask forgiveness and strength to continue closeness with you; spreading your good news with love and understanding; and loving you with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.
Amen.

With thanks to David Pattinson for preparing today's reflection.





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