

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY
24 September The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

HYMNS: 426 324 346 79 839 379

INTROIT: Psalm 27:1-9

The LORD is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the Fortress of my life. Of whom should I be afraid?

When evildoers came against me to devour my flesh, my oppressors and my enemies stumbled and fell.

If an army were to pitch camp against me, my heart would not be afraid.

If a war were to break out against me, in this I would be confident.

One thing I have asked of the LORD. That I shall seek, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to reflect in His Temple.

For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of His tent. He will set me high on a rock.

Now my head will be high above my enemies all around me. Therefore, I shall offer sacrifices in His tent with shouts of joy. I shall sing and make music to praise the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud! Be gracious to me and answer me!

When You said, "Be intent on My face!" my heart said to You, "I shall be intent on Your face, O LORD."

Do not hide Your face from me! Do not turn Your servant away in anger! You have been my Help. Do not cast me off or abandon me, O God of my salvation!

COLLECT: Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaelc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

READINGS: Isaiah 55:6-9 Seek the Lord

Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30 To live is Christ; and striving and suffering for Christ.

Matthew 20:1-16 The parable about the workers in the vineyard.

Isaiah 55:6-9

⁶ Search for the LORD while He may be found! Call on Him while He is near!

⁷ Let the wicked person forsake his way, and the sinful man his thoughts! Let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him! Let him return to our God! For He will abundantly pardon.

⁸ “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts.

Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

¹² I want you to know, my fellow-Christians, that what has happened to me has really turned out to advance the Good News. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear to the whole palace-guard and to all the rest that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ So, my chains have given most of the brothers in the Lord the confidence to speak the Word more boldly and fearlessly...

¹⁹ For I know that this will **result in my deliverance**, through your prayer and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ as I eagerly expect and hope that I shall in no way be ashamed but that, by speaking very boldly, I shall now, as always, glorify Christ in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I live on in my body, that will mean results from my labour. Yet I do not know which I should choose. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. ²⁴ However, it is more necessary for you that I should remain in my body. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, that you may progress and be joyful in the faith, ²⁶ that my coming to you again may cause you to rejoice more over me in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ Only let your conduct be worthy of the Good News of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am away, I may hear how you are, that you are standing firmly in one spirit and striving together with one mind for the faith of the Good News! ²⁸ Do not let those who oppose you frighten you in any way! This is a sign for them that they will be destroyed and a sign that you will be saved, and this is from God. ²⁹ For it is God’s gift to you concerning Christ, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ since you have the same struggle as you have seen me have and as you now hear that I still have.

Matthew 20:1-16

¹ “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed with the workers to pay them a denarius a day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go into the vineyard! I shall pay you whatever is right.’

⁵ So, they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found some others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why are you standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷ “They answered him, ‘Because nobody has hired us.’

“He told them, ‘You also go into the vineyard!’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his manager, ‘Call the workmen and give them their pay! Begin with the last and go on to the first!’

⁹ “Those who began working about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ When the first ones came, they expected that they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ Although they took it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² They said, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have endured the burden and the heat of the day.’

¹³ “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. You agreed with me on a denarius, did you not? ¹⁴ Take what is yours and go! I want to give this last man as much as I have given you. ¹⁵ Or do I not have the right to do what I please with what is mine? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “In this way the last will be first, and the first last.

WORKING IN OUR MASTER’S VINEYARD
Sermon for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost 2023
Matthew 20:1-16

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel read before, Matthew 20:1-16:

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On the surface of today's Gospel, the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, the story is simple enough: a vineyard owner hires hands at various times throughout the day. Then, when the day's work is done, he pays them all the same, regardless of how many hours they've worked. Simple. But it doesn't seem right. A business owner would not get away with that today. Besides, to work only an hour and get paid a full day's wage would surely only encourage people to be lazy and unproductive! By treating everyone equally, the owner seems to have *mistreated everyone*. So what's going on here? What is Jesus telling us in this parable that seems contrary to human expectations?

It will be helpful to consider *the context* in which Jesus tells this unusual story. What's happened is that a rich young man has come up to Jesus and asked what he must do to earn eternal life. Jesus tells him that all he has to do is "*keep the commandments*" (Matt. 19:17). "Which commandments?" the man asks. "*You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother, and You shall love your neighbour as yourself,*" Jesus replies (v. 8-19). "But surely there's *something more,*" says the man, because "*All these I have kept. What do I still lack?*" (v. 20).

This man didn't seem to have any consciousness of his own sin. He figured that since he hadn't physically choked or beaten anyone to death, stolen camels or goats, and so on, he must have been obeying God's commandments because he generally got along with people. Yet, it is interesting that he still realised that he was somehow falling short of the mark. Jesus wanted to show the man that he wasn't as perfect as he thought he was, so he said, "*If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*" (v. 21). Well, the man was very rich. And he thought to himself, "Give it all up? All this property and money I've inherited? For whom? A bunch of undeserving poor people? No way! I could never give any of my things to them ..." And then it hit him: that he didn't love his neighbour as himself. And if he hadn't kept that commandment, maybe there were others he'd also broken. We're told how he went away sorrowful because he was unwilling to part with his great wealth. And that's good, in a way, because it means that at least he had begun the kind of self-examination that can lead to repentance - and hopefully, to the recognition that what he needed to inherit eternal life was not something else to do, *but a Saviour from sin*.

The disciples had been listening to this exchange, and their ears had perked up when Jesus said something about treasures in heaven. With cold calculation, their minds fixed on the thought of personal reward. Peter says, "*We have left everything and followed You. What then will we have?*" (v. 27). Behind the question is the desire to do a cost-benefit analysis. Will the final reward be enough to compensate for the cost and effort now?

Jesus had told them that when He returned in glory, there would be great honour and reward for those who followed him. If you're wondering about your investment, there's

no better deal in all of Creation. You can't begin to imagine what wonders await you in the next life. But, at the same time, Jesus warned them, especially in the here and now, that things are not what you expect. And the rules by which you would make a simple cost-benefit analysis do not apply.

It is at this point that Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. What seems at first to be a great injustice is intended to demonstrate the error in how the disciples think. They expect that there should be a direct correlation between the amount of work done now in this life and the reward that comes at the end. They think that the more they give up now for the kingdom of God, the longer, harder, and more diligently they work, the greater should be the payoff. That only makes sense. But as it turns out, those who come in last, who follow Christ for only ten minutes (or ten seconds!), will be given the full reward. Obviously, they didn't earn it but receive it only because the owner is very gracious and generous. What they receive, they receive *by grace alone*.

The mistake made by those who are hired first is assuming that they are entitled to more because they've done more. After all, they think they "**have endured the burden and the heat of the day**." It's precisely the same mistake made by the rich man who wanted to know how he could earn eternal life. The answer is: *You can't*. The only way you'll get it is to receive it as a gift. If the amount of work you have done had anything to do with receiving the reward, *no one would ever get it*. Those hired first receive what they get, just like those hired last: *by grace alone*.

The whole thing becomes clear when we look again at the parable and listen to what the landowner tells the second group of hired workers. When he sends them into the vineyard, he tells them, "**I shall pay you whatever is right**." The word translated as "right" can mean "just" or "fair," but it is the same word we also translate as "**righteous**." That's the key. We hear the word and automatically think, "He's going to pay them what's fair: an appropriate fraction of the wage he promised to the first group." But that's not what the landowner is thinking. He is going to give them not what's fair but what's "righteous." Our eternal Father is the Landowner, and the only thing that is truly righteous that He gives this fallen world is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there's a heavenly treasure!

Some of us have been Christians all our lives and have supported the kingdom's work through our prayers, gifts, time, and special abilities God has given us. The danger our Lord Jesus warns us against in this parable is the sin of thinking that the sacrifices we've made for the kingdom are in any way related to the great reward he gives us. Every day, He gives to each of us the same thing: the forgiveness of sin, the righteousness of Christ, and everlasting life. And when we start thinking, "It's not fair that God should give to that fellow who's done so little the same thing He's giving me," we only show that we don't recognize our own sinfulness and do not understand or appreciate the grace of God. Trust me on this one: *you don't want God to give you what's fair. Instead, thank Him that He doesn't!*

But we who understand this part of the parable are exposed to another danger. What if those hired at first had known what was going to happen at quitting time? Why show up early in the marketplace first thing in the morning to be hired when you could sleep in and go to the market and get hired at nine? Or noon? Or lounge around all day, slip in at the last hour, and still receive the same reward as everyone else? Sadly, many people who really should know better try to play this game of spiritual “chicken” - trying to show their reckless independence from the Lord by waiting until the last possible moment to repent. Sadly, many of them “win” the game and never repent at all. But when the sun sets on their life, they won’t be remembered for how brave and daring they were, but rather for what a foolish waste they made of their lives.

But if you’re here today, *you’re already in the vineyard*. And whether you were brought in by the Owner at dawn, when you were an infant, or at the eleventh hour of your life, there are many grapes for you to pick. You can detect a real sense of urgency in how the Owner keeps looking for more workers. And if you know anything about harvesting grapes, you know that when they come on and are ripe and ready, every day - every hour - counts. But knowing, as we do, that everyone receives the same “wages,” another danger we face is the sin of thinking, “Why knock myself out? Why should I break my back doing the work of the kingdom when so many others are doing so much less - or nothing at all?”

This sort of evil thinking manifests itself in many different ways. Take, for example, the “fair share” mentality, which says, “Forget about what I could be doing or what gifts and talents God has given me; I’ll do only what I think is my part, and not a bit more.” The “retirement” mentality is closely related, which says, “I’ve already done my fair share; now it’s time for someone younger to take the burden.” We have to wonder how many productive years of work have been wasted by these self-determined limits and retirements. What do you suppose would have happened if the landowner of the vineyard had come across a few of those hands who had been hired first, who had taken it upon themselves to knock off in the mid-afternoon because “*they’d already done more than their share*”? Don’t get me wrong, I’m not suggesting that we need to burn ourselves out by volunteering to do everything that needs to be done single-handedly. I am saying that we should never set our own work quota based on *what we perceive to be the equitable standard*. God hasn’t called us to judge anyone else’s performance or measure our own work against what others are doing. He’s called us to work in His vineyard: to see the work that needs to be done and to put forth our best efforts.

Another subtle way people sometimes rationalise killing time in the vineyard is by the “special gift” alibi. That’s the one that says, “*Here’s my talent. It’s what I do best. Take it or leave it. But if I can’t use it, then forget it. There’s no work for me here.*” And so all kinds of jobs go undone, and all sorts of opportunities are lost because able hands are unwilling.

The common denominator in these ways of thinking is, once again, a failure to understand and appreciate the grace of God and the great gift He has given us in Jesus Christ. Because if we had only a vague comprehension of the infinite value of the gifts God freely gives us in Christ every day, not to mention what glories He will one day shower upon us, thankfulness alone would compel us to devote every moment to His service. But the truth is that we have more than thankfulness to motivate us. When He invited us into His vineyard, He filled us with His own Holy Spirit to work in us the desire to do His will. Our Lord is so gracious that He reaches into the lost world to save sinners and makes us His partners in helping to serve and save others.

Paul understood that. In today's Second Reading from Philippians chapter 1, we hear him *anticipating martyrdom*. He's soon to go to trial and believes this may be the end. Paul has worked hard in the vineyard of the Lord. He's done "his share" a hundred times over. He's done plenty of jobs he'd rather not have had. And for his trouble, he's been whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, starved, and humiliated.¹ He's an old man now and very weary. On one hand, he longs to have it over with: "*to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far*," to receive his final reward. But then he thinks about it and writes to the believers at Philippi, "*However, it is more necessary for you that I should remain in my body*" (v. 23). He still believed he had lots of work to do to help them and many others - and because of that, he was certain he would remain for a while, and be glad. For Paul, doing the Lord's work was itself a great reward.

And now, today, dear friends, our Master calls us to work in His vineyard. And He calls us to repent of our sinful ways of thinking about His service: of thinking that somehow we've earned His grace, of begrudging it to others we judge to be undeserving, of holding back effort, and of failing to make the most of the opportunities he gives us. For His Son's sake, He forgives us and sets us to work once again.

May He give us Paul's passion for His work as He continues to give us what is righteous: that is, His own Son - His perfect life and His sacrificial death for our sin - so that we may be pure and blameless from now until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your wisdom, power, and holiness. But, above all, we worship You for Your goodness and forgiving love to all who call on You. You have changed us from enemies into friends through the sufferings and death of Your Son, who became a human being for our sakes. We are Your children, and come to You confidently in His name with our prayers and requests.

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:25-27

Give us an awareness of Your majesty and power, and that holy fear of You that is the basis of all true wisdom. Continue to supply our daily needs, giving us life and breath, health and contentment, and protection from every kind of danger to body and soul.

Especially look with mercy on our moral and spiritual weakness. By Your Holy Spirit free us from the evil from which we cannot free ourselves, and give us new life through faith in Jesus Christ. May Jesus speak His word of forgiveness to us, and become the ruler of our consciences, the focus of our wills, the centre of our motives, and the Lord of our lives. Let Christ's love for us fill Your Church. Enable all Your people to know more of the vastness of that love, although it can never be fully known. In its power may they love one another in the family of faith, show loving sympathy to all in need, and offer forgiveness to all their enemies. Fill us with such love for each other that we may avoid placing any obstacle that would cause a brother to sin against his over-scrupulous conscience.

Show the nations of the earth the fullness of Your goodness and grace, that they may turn to You, the only true God, and find salvation in Your Son Jesus Christ. Lord, You have been gracious to our land. Continue to bless us, that more and more may turn from evil, come to faith, and be made rich by Your gifts.

We pray also for a special measure of Your blessing on those who sorrow or mourn, those who suffer pain or sickness, and those who face temptation or danger. Because we ourselves deserve Your chastening and discipline, help us to receive in patience and humility whatever You send in our lives, knowing that You are lovingly preparing us for eternal fellowship with You.

O Lord, You are able to do so much more than we can ever ask for or even think of. Hear these prayers, and provide all our other needs, in the name of our blessed Redeemer and Lord Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Article: When You Cry Out, Christ Is Your Advocate

Have you ever noticed that when calamity strikes, after the initial shock wears off, our first thought is often, "Why me?" Somehow, we've gotten it into our heads that God's job is to make us happy and keep us happy. After all, He's God, isn't He? And doesn't God know everything? Doesn't He know that our present predicament isn't very pleasant?

Yes, He does. But what gave you the idea that the almighty Maker of heaven and earth is supposed to keep everything on an even keel? If you've read your Bible, you know that in the beginning, God created a good world; sin entered that world through one man, and death was the consequence. Now, like a deadly contagion, death has spread through all humankind, because all people sin (Romans 5:12).

God's pristine creation - with no suffering, death, and destruction - is now long gone. This earth is still a delightful place to live. But everywhere we look, our beautiful world is filled with misery, hardship, sickness, calamity, and death.

Though, by God's merciful grace, He works everything (even sorrow and pain) for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), the awful truth is that all misery comes from His gracious hand. God Himself says so: "There is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

That sounds pretty harsh. I don't like it any more than you do. I reckon anyone who lives with chronic pain or health conditions would do anything, even briefly, to relieve their suffering for just an instant! But I can't. And neither can you. That's our frustration: humanly speaking, some things in this broken world can't be fixed. It will do no good for us to whine about it. But there's something else I can recommend. Instead of whining, try lamenting.

When You Cry Out, Christ Is Your Advocate.

Have you noticed that in the Bible's hymn-book, the Psalms, roughly a third are songs of lament? You may know some of them by heart: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Psalm 22). "Oh God, why do you cast us off forever?" (Psalm 74). "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" (Psalm 42). "Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people" (Psalm 43).

These psalms of lament teach us how to file a complaint with God. And complaining isn't whining; if you've ever read your medical records, you'll know that medical complaints are simply the physical symptoms of your distress. When you go to your doctor, you're not whining; you're just explaining where you hurt. You list your complaints because you know your condition should receive attention. It may not go away; some of the symptoms may remain. But you've gone to someone who can do something about it.

Likewise, lamenting is calling God's attention to what He already knows: you're hurting, and it's no fun. That miserable situation forces you to acknowledge that you aren't self-made. You depend on God for your very life, but sometimes it takes a fearsome calamity to impress that dependence upon you and bring you to the point of lament. That lament is a cry of faith.

And so God, in His grace invites you to complain - to bring your hurts and your miseries to Him. It's okay that these things feel too big for you; there's no real way to cope with disaster and tragedy on your own. It's important not to

keep these troubles bottled up inside ourselves, Like any loving father, God, in His mercy, invites us to come to Him and talk. So, like little children, we crawl into His lap by means of our lament, telling Him exactly where it hurts and asking him for help: “Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of Your steadfast love” (Psalm 6:4).

That’s the hard part, isn’t it: believing our God is gracious, even when tragedy strikes. We reason that if God is almighty, we shouldn’t be in this predicament in the first place. By all appearances, He either is unable to help or doesn’t care. That’s why it’s essential at all times - but especially in the midst of tragedy - that we rely not on our own speculations but rather on God’s sure Word. If we only draw on our calamity experience, the Lord’s steadfast love will remain invisible. Looking at our pain and misery alone, we’re tempted to conclude that God is angry with us.

But God’s true perspective on human suffering is revealed not in our experience but in that of Jesus on the cross. There, God’s own beloved Son suffered in great agony of body, mind, and spirit as the sinless victim of our sin, in order that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). Crucifixion was a bloody, gory, anguishing mess. In the midst of His deep physical and spiritual agony, Jesus, too, felt that God was against Him. From the cross, He cried out: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46).

In times of calamity, we have hope: Christ Himself is with us in our misery, and His suffering sanctifies our pain. Because He was abandoned, we shall never be. Because of Jesus, our Father in heaven wraps us in His embrace. Before it was finished on that dark Friday, before Jesus breathed His last, He committed His spirit into the hands of His loving Father in fervent faith (Luke 23:46).

Because of Jesus, you can be certain that you have a loving Father to whom you can turn to list your complaints and misery - just as He did on His cross. Even though you see no available remedy, you are not shouting into an empty void when you pray. Though you are in distress, you can place yourself - your body, soul, and all things - into His care, believing that for Jesus’ sake, your Father in heaven fervently loves you and will see you through your present suffering.

Lamenting your hurt but trusting His cross-shaped love, you can confidently ask Him to sustain you through all your days in faith-filled hope.

Children's Message:

It's wonderful to be in church! It's so wonderful to be free in our country to come to church today to thank God for His great love and forgiveness!

Today, our Second Reading came from The Apostle Paul's Letter to the Philippians. When St. Paul wrote the Book of Philippians, he wasn't free. St. Paul was in prison - not because he'd done anything bad, but because some people were mad that he was telling people about Jesus. That was terribly unfair.

Look at the picture. Can you see what it is? It's some superhero figurines still in their package. Perhaps you have something similar at home. But unless you take the figurines out of the package, you can't play with them. You have to free them from the plastic prison! Then, and only then, do they become fun for us to use.



St. Paul was confident that God would get him out of prison, because then Paul could be useful to God, telling more people about Jesus.

God has done something like that for us too. He's freed us from a prison we were in, a prison we call sin. Sin is a kind of prison because it keeps us from truly praising, worshipping, and serving God. God has freed us from our prison by sending Jesus to open the door of the prison. He has taken away our sin by dying on the cross, and now He gives us purpose in this life. We're free to be what God wants us to be, His people, who love Him and who will do those things He calls upon us to do - to share the love of Jesus with others.

Dear Jesus, thank You for Your love and forgiveness. Thank You for taking us out of the prison of our sin so that we may serve and praise you. Help us to tell others about You and all You've done to give us peace and joy. Keep us safe in Your love today and every day. Amen.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

1 October 18 Pentecost	8 October 19 Pentecost	15 October 20 Pentecost
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC	8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG
Sunday, 1 October		
READINGS: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Philippians 2:1-18; Matthew 21:23-27		
HYMNS: 358 197 357 113		
Sunday, 8 October		
READINGS: Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46		
HYMNS: 181 791 62 (159 291) 75		

Wednesday, October 4, 10am. Women’s Guild at Bethlehem Toowoomba.
 Opening devotion: Carolyn. Choose a Bible verse from Numbers Chapters 5-8.
 Item of Interest: A brooch.

Pastor will be away from 25 September - 1 October. If there are any emergencies during this time, please contact an elder.