

**Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,**  
**ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY**  
12 November The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

**HYMNS:** 16 452 487 510

**INTROIT:** Psalm 70

O God, come quickly to deliver me! O LORD, come quickly to help me!  
Let those who are trying to take my life be put to shame and confounded!  
Let those who desire to harm me be turned back and disgraced!  
Let those who say, "Aha! Aha!" turn back because of their shame!  
Let all who are intent on You rejoice and be glad in You! Let those who  
love Your salvation also constantly say, "Let God be great!"  
However, I am afflicted and needy, O God. Come to me quickly! You are  
my Help and my Deliverer. O LORD, do not delay!

**COLLECT:** Lord God, heavenly Father, send forth Your Son to lead  
home His bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed  
we may finally enter into His eternal wedding feast; through the same  
Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**READINGS:** Amos 5:18-24 The day of the Lord.  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 The Lord himself will come.  
Matthew 25:1-13 The bridegroom is here!

*Welcome to all worshipping with us!*

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

**Amos 5:18-24**

<sup>18</sup> How horrible it will be for you who are longing for the day of the LORD!  
Why would you have the day of the LORD? It will be darkness and not light.  
<sup>19</sup> It will be like a man who runs away from a lion, only to have a bear confront  
him. It will be like a man who goes home and rests his hand against a wall, only  
to have a snake bite him. <sup>20</sup> Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, rather  
than light? Will it not be very dark, with nothing bright in it?

<sup>21</sup> “I hate your feasts and despise them. I cannot stand the stench of your festive assemblies. <sup>22</sup> Although you offer burnt offerings and your grain-offerings to Me, I shall not accept them. I shall not accept favourably the peace-offerings of your fattened steers. <sup>23</sup> Take away from Me the noise of your songs! I shall not listen to the music of your harps! <sup>24</sup> Rather, let justice flow like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

<sup>13</sup> Fellow-Christians, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, that you may not grieve like the others, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For, since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we believe that even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we tell you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are still alive, who are left until the Lord comes, shall certainly not arrive ahead of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead who are in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, comfort one another with these Words!

### **Matthew 25:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For, when those who were foolish brought their lamps, they did not bring any olive-oil with them. <sup>4</sup> Those who were wise, however, brought olive-oil in their jars with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> When the bridegroom took a long time, they all became drowsy and began to sleep. <sup>6</sup> At midnight there was a shout: ‘The bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him!’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> Those who were foolish asked those who were wise, ‘Give us some of your olive-oil! For our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> However, those who were wise answered, ‘No, otherwise there will certainly not be enough for us and for you. Rather, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves!’ <sup>10</sup> While they were going away to buy it, the bridegroom came. The ones who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Later the other virgins also came and said, ‘Lord, lord, open the door for us!’ <sup>12</sup> However, he answered them, ‘Truly, I tell you, I do not know you.’

<sup>13</sup> “Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know the day or the hour.”

**THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF THE RAPTURE**  
**Sermon for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 2023**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

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

Today’s text for our sermon is our Second Reading from before, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Have you heard people speak of “the Rapture” and wonder what they are talking about? Perhaps you have watched one of the countless movies Hollywood has made on the subject. The Rapture is taught and believed by Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Assembly of God churches, and some Baptists, and was basically invented, in its modern form, by a man named John Nelson Darby back in the 1830s. Then later, in the early 1900s, it was popularised through a study Bible called the *Scofield Reference Bible*.

The Rapture, as popularly conceived, is a theory that goes something like this: Jesus is coming again, and when He comes - which we can kind of figure out by reading the headlines and matching them up with some mysterious prophecies in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation - when Jesus comes again, all the Christians will suddenly be raptured up and out of their daily life. They will suddenly disappear. All the people left behind, the unbelievers, will not know what happened to the people standing next to them a moment ago who have now disappeared. Then will follow a seven-year great tribulation, when all sorts of bad things happen, and the Antichrist appears on earth. We Christians will miss all that bad stuff because we will have already been raptured. We shall escape the tribulation.

Then, at some point in the chronology - it varies according to which version you hear - there will be a mass conversion of all the Jews, and the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Then, after the seven-year tribulation, Jesus Himself will come back, for what is now His third coming, I suppose, and He will take up His throne in Jerusalem and rule there for a literal 1,000-year reign. After that, I guess we head into eternity. I’m not sure if there’s a fourth Second Coming.

This teaching of the Rapture is a devilish scheme and is not biblical, so do not be misled. This false Rapture leads people away from the true hope that they have in Christ. However, this is not to say that the Bible does not teach about a true Rapture. It does, and this is what we find today in Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians.

The Bible verse that mentions a Rapture is as follows: **“For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead who are in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...”**

Now did you hear the word “rapture” in there? No, you say? Well, actually, you did. Just not in English. It's this little phrase, “*caught up.*” Paul writes that we shall be “**caught up**” to meet the Lord in the air. The word “rapture” is simply the Latin-based word for “caught up.” In other words, we Christians shall be “raptured,” “caught up,” to meet Jesus in the air when He comes again. This is true. But it's what the Rapture teachers tack onto and how they misunderstand it - that's where they go wrong.

Paul talks about it here in 1 Thessalonians. Here's the set-up. The Christians in Thessalonica have heard that Jesus is coming again, and this is true. Jesus will come again, as the New Testament teaches very clearly, and as we have it in all of our creeds: *“From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.”* *“And He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.”* No problem so far. So the Thessalonians know and have been taught that Jesus will come again and that they should be ready for His return because it could happen at any time.

But now, the years have started to pass, and Jesus has not yet come back. And during this time, what seems like a delay, some of the Christians there in Thessalonica have died. So, some of them are starting to wonder what will happen to their dear departed loved ones who have died before Jesus comes back. Will they be left out of all the good things that will happen at Christ's return? So Paul writes to them pastorally to let them know that, no, those Christians who have already died will not be left out on the day when Christ returns. They will indeed be included in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

This is what Paul writes: **“Fellow-Christians, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, that you may not grieve like the others,**

**who have no hope.** <sup>14</sup> **For, since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we believe that even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.**” When Paul here uses the phrase, “**those who have fallen asleep,**” he’s talking about Christians who have died, and he doesn’t want the Christians who are living to grieve as though those dead Christians are going to miss out. No, we have a hope, a sure hope, to hold onto. Just as Jesus died and rose again, so will all those who have trusted in Him for their salvation. The dead in Christ will rise.

Paul continues: “**For this we tell you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are still alive, who are left until the Lord comes, shall certainly not arrive ahead of those who have fallen asleep.** <sup>16</sup> **For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead who are in Christ will rise first.** <sup>17</sup> **After that, we who are still alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord.**”

You see, this is talking about the *Second Coming of Christ at the Last Day*. There will not be a “Third Coming” or a “Fourth Coming” at some “other Day.” No, all that stuff about a literal seven-year great tribulation after the Rapture, followed by a literal thousand-year reign of Christ in the city of Jerusalem in Israel - all that stuff is a misreading and a piling together of little snippets of verses, pulled out of context and misapplied. The truth is, there will be one Second Coming on one Last Day - Judgment Day, the day when Christ returns for good. *That’s what we’re looking forward to.*

And with good reason! This is the biblical hope! This is what we Christians long for, with eager anticipation: the day of Christ’s return. This will be the return of our Saviour. The good news is our Judge is also our Saviour: our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, at His first coming, came as our brother to fulfil the Law for us and to bear our sins on the cross. This is the basis for the hope we have: the forgiveness and the righteousness and the redemption won for us by Christ. Jesus took the weight of our sins - your sins and mine, all of them - and He shed His holy blood for us, the once-and-for-all sacrifice that cleanses us and makes us righteous before God, justified to stand before His throne on the Day of Judgment. Then Jesus rose from the dead, showing forth the victory He has won over the grave and the devil and death itself. Some weeks later, Jesus ascended into heaven, with the promise that He will come again, in

glory. And when He does, He will raise from the dead all those who have died with their faith in Him. We who may still be alive and walking around when He comes again - for He could come any day now, next week, or next year, or a hundred years from now, no man knows the day or hour - we all shall be caught up together in the true Rapture, a joyous rapture, *to meet our Saviour and be with Him forever*.

Do you see how this is such great good news? There is no need to make up any concocted stuff to add on. What the Bible teaches simply and plainly is true and more than good enough! Jesus is coming again! Lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near!<sup>1</sup> Be watchful and wakeful, and be ready! You have a sure hope. Your loved ones who have died - there is hope for them too. Jesus is coming again! Our bodies will be raised from the dead, and we shall be transformed. You will still be you, except your bad knees will no longer be bad. Your bad eyes will see clearly. No more disease. No more sorrows. No more sin. A restored creation. Paradise regained, and then some. God will wipe away every tear from your eyes.<sup>2</sup> A joyous reunion with all the saints. Everlasting fellowship. We shall see the Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, and delight in His presence forever. This, indeed, will be a true rapture! **“And so we shall always be with the Lord.”** No wonder Paul concludes by saying: **“Therefore, comfort one another with these Words!”** Amen.

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

#### PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and most merciful heavenly Father, You have created all things by Your powerful word. You decide the history of every nation, and direct the life of every human being. We acknowledge Your rule over all things, but we come confidently before You with our prayer and praise, because You are our loving Father in Jesus Christ.

We thank You for the plenteous daily blessings that You graciously give us. You send rain; the fields are filled with flocks; and the ground produces a rich harvest of food. You make the earth rich and fertile, and bless our labour.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 21:28

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 21:4

We praise You that You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of Your whole creation.

But we thank You above all for the wonderful gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. We thank You that His obedience has covered our failure to obey Your commandments to love You and our neighbour perfectly. Through His death we have been set free from the slavery of sin and death, and through His resurrection we have been made citizens of heaven. You have given us the sure hope of the resurrection of our bodies. You have promised that when our Lord returns He will change our weak, mortal bodies and make them glorious like His own. Grant that, as we live out our earthly lives, we may wait eagerly for His coming, to liberate us from this imperfect world and to give us the perfection of heaven. Give us power through this hope to purify our lives and to set our hearts on things above.

Send forth Your Word into all the world. Help Christian people everywhere to rejoice in Your truth and to sing of Your love, so that Your ways may be known by all people and Your salvation received everywhere with joy.

Pour out Your blessing on our country. Grant that all who make and administer our laws may honour and fear You. Guide them by Your wisdom, so that justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace may flourish, and all evil and violence be suppressed. Give all citizens of this country an obedient spirit; lead them to respect their leaders.

Keep Your Church alive through the power of the Gospel. Fill it with Your Spirit so that it may serve You with a cheerful and sacrificial love. Grant that all Your people may follow the example of those who are leaders in the new life of the Spirit. Teach the youth of the Church to consider everything else inferior compared with knowing Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Help all our baptised children to love and follow Jesus Christ with joy and gladness.

Give a quiet confidence to all who are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them a strong faith in Your compassion, and ardent hope.

In this world without God and without hope, grant that we may be watchful for the return of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Grant that we may see with our own eyes His glory on Your throne as Da-vid's lord and King of kings. This we ask in the name and for the sake of Him who is our Saviour, Lord, and King for ever. Amen.

**Article: When You Are Sad, Christ Is Your Joy**

Tragedy happens. We may as well face it. We shall encounter dark valleys in our lives. Not continually, thank God. But along with the days of sunshine will come long stretches of darkness. Unfortunately, some people seem to have more dark days than others; maybe you're among them. So, what is joy? Where can it be found - especially in the middle of sadness when there's no happiness in sight?

To find a path through sadness and adversity, you'll need to quit relying on your own inner resources to find it. Instead, you'll need to look to God's Word to guide you.

The word of God always does what it says. His word is active and powerful - God creates things by simply speaking them into existence. He merely spoke, "Let there be light," and immediately, light shone into the black emptiness of the initial creation (Genesis 1:2). You and I describe things with our words, but God's word makes things. That's what sets God's word apart from human language. I can tell you, "Don't worry," but that doesn't mean a lot. When Jesus says, "*Come to Me, all who labour and are heavily laden, and I shall give you rest*" He actually lifts our burdens, calms our weary souls, and soothes our frazzled hearts (Matthew 11:28). The difference, of course, lies in who is speaking. I'm just another person like you, but Jesus is actually God in human flesh. And that makes all the difference in the world.

God's Word does what it says. It transforms sinners into saints by the forgiveness of their sins. It changed meaningless chaos into order at creation, and His Word can do the same for you. When you wrestle through personal tragedy and turmoil, it creates inner peace by prayerful meditation on what God tells you instead of what you tell yourself. Instead of obsessing over your fears, listen to Jesus instead: "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*" (John 14:27).

If you want to make headway through stormy seas, fix your troubled heart on God's Word instead of on your inner feelings. Read His Word out loud, silencing your relentless mental rehearsal of your inmost fears. Then pray out loud as well, relieving your pent-up private pain while giving voice to your complaints as you pour out your heart before Him. Please note: this inner peace I'm talking about is not just putting on your game face. Prayerful meditation

isn't about pretending everything's fine when it's not. It's not about developing resilience by getting through tough spots using your inner resolve and determination. You can get through for a while by pretending. But you'll wear yourself out first emotionally, then physically. Ultimately, you'll be a spiritual wreck as well. Masks are fine for preventing respiratory infection, but life is no masquerade; honesty is always your best policy.

Tragically, we often carry bravely on trying to mask our true feelings. Like Anna in the classic American musical *The King and I*, we whistle a happy tune outwardly while inwardly there's no happiness to be found. "Whenever I feel afraid" she sang, "*I whistle a happy tune and every single time the happiness in that tune convinces me that I'm not afraid.*" That charade comes with a high price tag, though. It takes a lot of emotional energy to fake happiness when all you've got inside is fear and sadness.

Life is too short to keep faking it. Christians don't need to pretend that tragedies never happen or suffering isn't miserable or pain doesn't hurt. We can afford to be honest with God, because He knows the depth of human suffering. We can confidently cry out to Him from the bottom of our anxious hearts, knowing we have a Father in heaven who shows compassion to His children (Psalm 103:13). We have a Saviour who wept at the grave of His dear friend Lazarus (John 11:35). When we're at a loss for words, the Holy Spirit takes over, interceding for us Himself (Romans 8:26).

God tenderly invites our prayers, promising His attentive ear: "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall deliver you, and you will glorify Me*" (Psalm 50:15). There's no need to pretend that we're happy when we're not. Happiness is often in short supply in this world; it comes and goes depending on the circumstances. But joy? That's a whole different matter. Joy abounds in every circumstance if we just have eyes to see it.

We'll need to sort out the difference between joy and happiness. Happiness depends largely on our experiences. It fluctuates with our emotional state - a sort of barometer for our emotions, you may say. In contrast, joy is firmly rooted in God and His promises. That's why it remains steady despite the ups and downs of life. Happiness is great while it lasts. But that's just it - happiness doesn't last. It's here today and gone tomorrow. It's momentary and fleeting. Just when you think total happiness is finally within your reach, it slips out of your grip. Happiness ebbs and flows with the seasons of life.

Yet joy remains even when happiness fades. No matter the circumstance, Christians who plant their hope in God can harvest genuine joy in the rocky soil of adversity or in the deepest, darkest valley of pain. Joy and faith are linked, writes the apostle James: *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:2-4).

See what James did there? “Count it all joy” he advises. James is no fool. The life of the disciples was no walk in the park. If we are to believe tradition, only one of them – John - died in bed, while all the rest met violent deaths at the hands of persecutors. From their own canonical writings as well as the testimonies of their contemporaries, they faced opposition at every turn, hounded by the enemies of the Gospel inside and outside the church. So for James, joy was an exercise in faith. “Count it all joy” he says. All those trials of various kinds he chalked up under the “joy” column in his life, even though those trials robbed him of happiness.

That’s quite a trick. Isn’t that merely playing mind games? Another version of pretending? James wouldn’t say so. He goes on to say that these trials are actually God’s testing program. When you test positive for faith, it’s a very good thing. Faith was first planted in you by the Holy Spirit, and it grows steadfast under fire, strengthening your grip on Jesus and His cross. In the end such growing steadfastness will bring to fruition what God first began in you by His grace.

Never be afraid to give voice to your deepest distress when in the darkest valleys of your life. God is actively at work even there, producing in you what is well-pleasing in His sight. Sadly, calamity is bound to come your way in this broken world. When tragedy happens, it’s easy to lose your way. We’re walking here by faith, after all, and the sadness all around you obstructs your view of the Lord, who bought you with His blood. Peter helps us see the whole picture clearly: *“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory”* (1 Peter 1:8).

So Christ and calamity are bound together within the grace of God. Trusting His sure word, He will see you through your present sadness into everlasting joy on the day of His coming.

**Children's Message:**

Have you ever been to a party where there are balloons and party hats and streamers like in our picture? Why do we have balloons or gifts or party hats? Balloons, gifts, party hats, streamers - all of these things help us make some event or occasion more



special. To celebrate someone's birthday, we may put on our nice clothes, clean the house, put up party decorations, and make a special cake. The person we're celebrating is called the guest of honour. When the guest of honour arrives at the party - wow! He or she feels special and loved - all that time and effort that was put into making the party fun! The guest of honour senses how much the people care.

In our Gospel today, we read about some women who were waiting and waiting for a big celebration, a wedding. They didn't know exactly when the party was going to start, but some of them spent lots of time and thought getting ready. They had to sit outside and wait at night, so they made sure they had lamps and plenty of oil to light their lamps. They wanted to be ready for the guest of honour to arrive.

Jesus' work on earth, living and dying for us, was for thirty-three years. He's still with us now, but not in the same way as when He was speaking, eating, spending time with His disciples. However, soon, very soon, Jesus will return. When He returns, we want to be ready. Just like when we're preparing for a big party, we have to take time to get everything ready.

We get ready for Jesus' coming by staying close to Him. We come to church and hear about the wonderful things He's done for us, especially dying on the cross. We read God's Word, which assures us we've been forgiven and we're dearly loved. We talk to other people about Jesus and tell them how He loves them too. We pray to stay close to the Lord.

The next time you have a big celebration or party, remember that a huge party is coming when Jesus will return for us. We don't have to be afraid of Jesus' coming. He will come for us in love and mercy. So, let's look for Him and look forward to His return! *Dear Jesus, thank You for all the ways You show Your love toward us. We pray that You would make us prepare for Your coming by staying close to You. In your name we pray. Amen.*

**WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

<b>19 November 25 Pentecost</b>	<b>26 November Last Sunday of the Church Year</b>	<b>3 December 1 Advent</b>
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC Harvest	8.30am OAK HC Harvest 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC Harvest 9.00am LOWOOD LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC Harvest 9.00am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC Harvest 9.00am LOWOOD LR
<b>Sunday, 19 November</b>		
READINGS: Zephaniah 1:7-16;      1 Thessalonians 5:1-11;      Matthew 25:14-30 HARVEST: Deuteronomy 26:1-11;      2 Corinthians 9:6-15;      Luke 12:13-21		
HYMNS: 463 485 372 339      LOWOOD: 562 (tune 282) 437 563 333 842 890		
<b>Sunday, 26 November</b>		
READINGS: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28;      Matthew 25:31-46 HARVEST: Deuteronomy 26:1-11;      2 Corinthians 9:6-15;      Luke 12:13-21		
HYMNS: 169 152 184 297 HARVEST: 562 (tune 282) 437 563 169 842 890		

18 November, 10.00am. CoC/Sem Committee meeting at Marburg. Could the Seminary Committee reps please meet for a quick meeting at 9.30am?

Wednesday, November 22, 10.00am. Women’s Guild & Breakup at Lowood. Opening devotion: *Margaret*. Choose a Bible verse from Numbers Chapters 9-12. Item of Interest: *A pretty dress hanger*. Bring a Christmas gift to the value of \$10 to exchange. Afterwards our breakup lunch will be at the Club Hotel Lowood. All welcome.

Sunday, 3 December, 6.30pm. Advent Tea at Trinity Oakey. Could each family please provide a plate and something for dessert? After tea we shall hold an Advent program in the church.

November Bible Studies:

Greenwood – Thursday, 23 November, 7.30pm.

Oakey/Aubigny – Friday, 24 November, 7.30pm at Oakey.

Toowoomba, Lowood/Marburg – no Bible Study in November.

Pastor will be away in Victoria from 9-15 November. If there is an emergency during this time, please contact one of the elders.