

DARLING DOWNS PARISH OF THE AELC
TRINITY OAKY, ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA

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Bulletin for the 5th mid-week Lenten Service

HYMNS: 57 part 1 171 57 part 2 48 v.3

PSALM: LORD, You have been favourable to Your land. You have brought Jacob back from captivity.

You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people. You have covered all their sin. Selah
You have taken back all Your fury. You have turned away from Your fierce anger.

Restore us, O God, You who save us! Withhold Your indignation toward us!

Will You be angry with us for ever? Will You prolong Your anger through all generations?

Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?

Show us Your mercy, O LORD, and grant us Your salvation!

Let me hear what God, the LORD, will speak! For He will promise peace to His people,
to His devout people. However, let them not become foolish again!

Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth will sprout up from the earth, and righteousness will look down from heaven.

The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its produce.

Righteousness will go before Him, to prepare a way for His footsteps. Psalm 85

COLLECT: Lord God, through Your Son you have made the heavens and the earth.

Through Him You continue to rule over all things. Make us, Your chosen people,
witnesses of Your power and heralds of Your glory to the praise of Your unailing
love; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON: Psalm 41:6 Empty Words

“When one of them comes to visit me, he speaks what is worthless. His heart
gathers what is evil. Then he goes outside and talks about it.”

1st Reading: Hosea 14:1-9

Israel, return to the LORD, your God! For you have stumbled because of your sin.

² Take words with you and return to the LORD! Tell Him: “Forgive all our wrong!
Receive what is good, that we may use bulls to repay what our lips have promised!”

³ Assyria will not save us. We shall not ride on horses and no longer say, “Our gods,” to
what our own hands have made. For an orphan finds mercy in You.

⁴ “I shall heal their apostasy. I shall love them freely. For My anger has turned away
from them. ⁵ I shall be like the dew to Israel.”

He will blossom like the lily. He will strike his roots like the trees of Lebanon. ⁶ Their
shoots will spread out. They will be as splendid as an olive-tree. They will be as

fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon. ⁷ People will return and live under God's shadow. They will grow grain. They will shoot like a grapevine. He will be as famous as the wine of Lebanon.

⁸ "Ephraim, why should I be involved with idols any longer? I Myself have answered and shall look after him. I am like a leafy juniper tree. You find your fruit from Me."

⁹ Whoever is wise should also understand these things. Whoever is discerning should also know them. For the Ways of the LORD are right. Righteous people walk in them, but rebellious people stumble over them.

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ Drawn from All Four Gospels

Portions selected from Matthew 26:15-27:66, Mark 14:12-15:47, Luke 22:7-23:56, and John 13:1-19:42, arranged chronologically to tell the story of the arrest, trials, suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of our Lord Jesus.

Events occur on Thursday and Friday, 13-14 Nissan (April 2-3), 33AD, in and around Jerusalem.

Judas' Despair

MATTHEW 27:3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse and took the thirty silver coins back to the Chief Priests and elders. ⁴ He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

However, they said, "What is that to us? You should see to it!"

⁵ He threw down the pieces of silver into the Temple and departed. Then he went away and hanged himself. ⁶ The Chief Priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are the price of blood."

⁷ They made the decision to use them to buy the Potter's Field, as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸ Therefore, that field has been called "the Field of Blood" to this day.

⁹ Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, "I took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him who had been valued, whom those of the children of Israel had valued, ¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord had commanded me."

Jesus First Appearance Before Pilate

Jerusalem, Praetorium (Roman Headquarters, Northwest corner of the Temple Mount)

JOHN 18:28 They took Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's quarters. It was early in the morning. The Jews themselves did not go into the governor's quarters, to avoid becoming unclean and to enable them to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So, Pilate came outside to them and asked, "What accusation are you bringing against this Man?"

³⁰ They answered him, "If He were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you."

³¹ Pilate therefore told them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your Law!"

The Jews answered him, "We are not permitted to execute anyone."

³² This happened that the statement that Jesus had made might be fulfilled, when He indicated the kind of death He was going to die. ^{LUKE 23:2}They began to accuse Him: “We found that He makes our people disloyal, keeping them from paying taxes to Caesar. and saying that He is Christ, a King.” ^{JOHN 18:33}Then Pilate went into the governor’s quarters again and called for Jesus. He asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

³⁴ Jesus answered, “Are you saying this of yourself or have others told you about Me?”

³⁵ Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own people and the Chief Priests have handed You over to me. What have You done?”

³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If My kingdom belonged to this world, My attendants would fight, to prevent Me from being handed over to the Jews. However, now My kingdom is not from here.”

³⁷ Therefore, Pilate asked Him, “Then are You a king?”

Jesus answered, “You are correct in saying that I am a king. I have been born for this reason and have come into the world for this reason, that I may testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.” ^{MATTHEW 27:11B} “It is as you say.”

¹² While the Chief Priests and elders were accusing Him, He did not answer at all.

¹³ Then Pilate asked Him, “Do You not hear how much testimony they are bringing against You?”

¹⁴ However, Jesus made no reply to him, even about a single statement, so that the governor was very amazed. ^{LUKE 23:4}Pilate told the Chief Priests and the crowd, “I do not find this Man guilty at all.”

⁵ However, they kept insisting, “He stirs up the people by teaching all over Judea. He began in Galilee and has come here.”

Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod

Jerusalem, Herod’s Palace

^{LUKE 23:6}When Pilate heard that, he asked if the Man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he found out that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, because for a long time he had wanted to see Him. For he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some miracle done by Him. ⁹ Herod asked Him many questions, but Jesus did not answer him at all. ¹⁰ The Chief Priests and the scribes were standing there and accusing Him vehemently. ¹¹ Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked Him. They put a splendid garment on Him and sent Him back to Pilate. ¹² On that very day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other. For before this they had been enemies of each other.

Jesus' Second Appearance before Pilate

Jerusalem, Praetorium

LUKE 23:13 Then Pilate called the Chief Priests, the rulers and the people together. ¹⁴ He told them, "You have brought this Man to me as one who is inciting the people to rebellion. Now, look! I have examined this Man before you and found Him innocent of the charges that you are making against Him. ¹⁵ No, neither has Herod. For he has sent Him back to us, and, as you can see, He has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I shall chastise Him and release Him." MATTHEW 27:15 At every feast the governor used to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they chose. ¹⁶ At that time they were holding a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ Therefore, when the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas or Jesus, who is called 'Christ'?"

¹⁸ For he knew that they had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous.

¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent someone to tell him, "Do not have anything to do with that innocent Man! For I have suffered greatly today in a dream because of Him."

²⁰ However, the Chief Priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus put to death. ²¹ The governor asked them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" LUKE 23:18 ⁸ The whole crowd then began to shout aloud: "Away with this Man! Release Barabbas for us!"

¹⁹ Barabbas had been thrown into prison for a revolt that had taken place in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate spoke to them again, because he wanted to release Jesus.

²¹ However, they kept shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

²² Then Pilate spoke to them the third time, "No. What wrong has He done? I have found nothing in Him to make Him deserve to die. I shall therefore chastise Him and release Him."

²³ However, they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He should be crucified. and their voices began to prevail.

"Behold the Man!"

JOHN 19:1 Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. ² The soldiers twisted a crown out of thorns and placed it on His head. They clothed Him in a purple robe ³ and kept going up to Him, saying, "Welcome, King of the Jews," and slapped His face.

⁴ Pilate went outside again and told them, "Look! I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no cause for complaint in Him."

⁵ Jesus came outside, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate told them, "Look at the Man!"

⁶ Therefore, when the Chief Priests and the attendants saw Him, they shouted, "Crucify, crucify!"

Pilate told them, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him! For I do not find any basis for a charge against Him.”

⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a Law, and according to the Law He ought to die, because He has made Himself the Son of God.”

⁸ When Pilate heard them say that, he was more afraid. ⁹ He went into the governor’s quarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are You from?”

However, Jesus did not give him an answer. ¹⁰ Therefore, Pilate asked Him, “Are You refusing to speak to me? Do You not realise that I have authority to free You and authority to crucify You?”

¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would not have any authority at all over Me if it had not been given to you from above. That is why the man who has handed Me over to you has the greater sin.”

¹² From then on Pilate kept trying to release Jesus, but the Jews shouted out, “If you let this Man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king is speaking against Caesar.”

¹³ Therefore, when Pilate heard these words, he took Jesus outside and sat down in the judge’s seat at a place called “the Stone Pavement,” or “Gabbatha” in Aramaic. ¹⁴ It was the day of the Preparation of the Passover and about six in the morning. Pilate told the Jews, “Look at your King!”

¹⁵ Therefore, they shouted, “Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!”

Pilate asked them, “Am I to crucify your King?”

The Chief Priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

M: Here ends the reading.

The congregation stands

EMPTY WORDS

Sermon for the 5th mid-week Lenten Service 2024

Psalm 41:6

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon tonight is Psalm 41:6, “**When one of them comes to visit me, he speaks what is worthless. His heart gathers what is evil. Then he goes outside and talks about it.**”

Dear friends in Christ,

David said, “**He speaks what is worthless.**” When people say empty words to you, they are saying things to you that may seem appealing, important, and true - but ultimately are not. Empty words are not necessarily lies, although they can be. Empty words can be evasive in what they say. Empty words have little or nothing behind them: no concrete truth, no commitment, no endurance. We are comfortably accustomed to empty words.

Even our everyday language uses empty words as standard speech. We routinely include empty words in our conversations with friends and strangers alike: “How are you?” and “I’m fine,” “I hope you have a good day,” and sometimes even, “I shall pray for you.” Even if you sincerely mean it when you make such inquiries and pledges, *how long do you remember them?* Does anyone really remember their conversations, even thirty seconds after they were spoken? The lack of memory may indicate a certain emptiness to the words. It would be okay for us to admit (or to confess) that most of our conversational phrases generally mean little. That is why Solomon said, “*Let your words be few*” (Ecclesiastes 5:2), why James encouraged us to be “*slow to speak*” (James 1:19) and why he also compared some of our conversations to forest fires.¹

In addition to using empty words, we regularly hear empty words by virtue of the fact that we are constantly immersed in advertising. We see empty words on every flat surface at the footy field; we hear a stream of empty words every time we turn on the radio; we even wear empty words on our foreheads and chests because of the way we like to dress. We ourselves have even become walking billboards that tout empty words. Everyone participates in such emptiness. We are so accustomed to the puffery, the evasiveness, and the false urgency of advertising that we do not even notice empty words when we hear them: the pledges we hear from our politicians are now good only for the chuckling entertainment of the moment, not for actual policy; personal promises have come to mean very little, including in marriage and family relationships; and long-term commitments rarely endure the latest wave of emotion.

King David lived in a time and place when words did mean something. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of God’s living Word;² He alone speaks “*the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68). When you were baptised into the living Christ, you were individually drawn up and out from the cesspool of the world’s “empty words.” In Baptism, the blood of Christ did something more than wash you clean from every sin of empty words and “evil deeds³” - through Baptism, you were relocated to that one, eternal place where words still matter: “*the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints*” (Apostles’ Creed, Third Petition).

“When one of them comes to visit me, he speaks what is worthless. His heart gathers what is evil. Then he goes outside and talks about it.” When David prayed those words in Psalm 41, he was praying in the voice of the Christ. All the

¹ James 4:5

² John 1:1-4

³ Colossians 1:21

psalms are about the Christ.⁴ Like us, Jesus of Nazareth had plenty of empty words around Him all the time. The empty words that surrounded our Lord proved to be deadly words.

There are NO emptier words than the devil's words. That snake started in the Garden of Eden: "*You will certainly not die,*" he hissed, "*For God knows that in the day when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God*" (Genesis 3:4-5). Later, the devil's empty words focused their intent upon Jesus: "*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down,*" ..."*all these [kingdoms of the world] I will give You,*" he said (Matthew 4:6, 9). Empty words.

Peter, despite his earnest desire and best intentions, likewise uttered empty words to Jesus, and Jesus endured those words: "*Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!*" Peter gushed, not knowing what he was saying (Luke 9:33). "*Even if I must die with You, I shall certainly not deny You,*" Peter swore (Matthew 26:35). But then to the servant girl, he declared "*with an oath: 'I do not know the Man'*" (Matthew 26:72). Empty words.

All the other disciples joined their empty words to Peter's, making empty pledges that they also would never deny Christ.⁵ Among the Twelve, the empty words spoken by Judas Iscariot stand out as the deadliest: "*I am not the one, am I, Rabbi?*" (Matthew 26:25); "*Greetings, Rabbi!*" (Matthew 26:49). Empty words.

"When one of them comes to visit me, he speaks what is worthless. His heart gathers what is evil. Then he goes outside and talks about it." Thus, the Lord of Life was sentenced to death on the testimony of those who spoke empty words: "*The Chief Priests and the whole Jewish council kept on looking for false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death.*"⁶⁰ *However, they did not find any, although many false witnesses came forward. Later two men came forward,*⁶¹ *and said, 'This fellow said, 'I can destroy the Temple of God and build it in three days.'*" ...*Then the Chief Priest tore his robes and said, 'He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses?'*" (Matthew 26:59-61, 65).

In these midweek Lenten sermons, I have emphasised two things for you: (1) that the Psalms speak about Jesus and (2) that because the Psalms speak about Jesus, they therefore speak also about you. In Baptism, you were "*joined to the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 6:7). Through your Baptism into Christ, your Lord's burdens have become yours, just as surely as your Lord has fully taken up your burdens. Jesus

⁴ John 5:39

⁵ Matthew 26:35

assured and promised you that His burden would NOT be too heavy for you: *“Take My yoke upon you, . . . for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:29-30).

“When one of them comes to visit me, he speaks what is worthless. His heart gathers what is evil. Then he goes outside and talks about it.” Because David’s words speak the pious lament of Jesus, those same words are also available to you for your lament. Have you ever felt the urge and need for such a lament?

Has a dear friend betrayed you, allowing you to treat him as a confidant, only to turn around and tell it abroad, either verbally or on social media?

Have you entered into a business contract with someone you thought you could trust, only to have your trust violated?

If you have suffered such things as these, then David’s words and our Lord’s words are also YOUR words: **“When one of them comes to visit me, he speaks what is worthless. His heart gathers what is evil. Then he goes outside and talks about it.”** When you pray those words, you can know and trust that you are NOT alone. The entire Church in this vale of tears, and all her Christians, have always had plenty of reasons to pray those words with you. Psalm 41 indicates that Jesus and David also prayed those words before you.

Take special comfort in the fact that your Lord Jesus prayed those words before you. He knows well the heartbroken feeling of betrayal. He knows personally the dismay that rises from a sense of exposure. He knows intimately the devastating pain that can be caused by a close friend, *“Even My close friend, whom I trust”* (Psalm 41:9), as it is written later in the psalm. Jesus also said in another place, expressing personal familiarity with your pain, *“I walked around as if it were my friend or my brother. I used to dress in mourning clothes and stoop down as if I were in mourning for my mother”* (Psalm 35:14). Again, Jesus said in the voice of yet another psalm, *“However, it is not an enemy who is insulting me. I could endure that. It is not one who hates me and who has exalted himself against me. Otherwise, I could hide from him. Rather, it is you, a man of my own rank, my close friend and one whom I have known well. We used to engage in sweet and confidential conversation together and walk to the house of God when there was unrest”* (Psalm 55:12-14).

Believe the words of the Scriptures: Jesus knows how it feels to be betrayed by empty words. Jesus died for that betrayal and its shame. Jesus promises you, by the power of His glorious resurrection, that you will NOT be tortured forever by the betrayal of empty words. Amen.