

Hope for our Future

Lenten Devotional Booklet

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” 1 Peter 1:3 (NIV-UK)

What do you hope for? In what do you put your hopes and dreams?

To ‘hope’ is to have the feeling of expectation or a desire for something to happen. It is not wishful thinking, rather it is an assurance for the future, a future that is guaranteed by God’s promises, even though we cannot see it. It involves a **confident expectation**, which is **rooted in God** and has the **foundation in Christ Jesus**. It is more than optimism; it is a firm belief that God will fulfil all that He has said through His Word – The Bible. This hope is an anchor amongst all the storms of life. *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Hebrews 6:19 (NIV-UK)*

Through the devotional readings we will read how God gave hope to His people in the Old Testament through the prophets and His promises. In the New Testament, God fulfilled many of these promises in His Son, Jesus. Through the life of Jesus, we learn about His love for all people. Then how through the death and resurrection of Jesus we can realise that all our hope in Him has come to fulfilment. Through Jesus, we have a future promised with our Heavenly Father that we will live with Him for eternity. Our future and hopes are assured.

The Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday and goes right through to Easter Sunday – there are 40 days and 7 Sundays (culminating on Easter Sunday). This is a booklet of 47 short devotionals, Bible readings and prayers for each day during the Lenten Season (including Sundays). The Bible readings point to the hope that God has for each of our futures. Each day, we will walk through a devotion dwelling on the love of God for all His people.

**Know that our future hope
rests with a loving God!**

Contents

Promised Presence (Deuteronomy 31:6-8).....	4
Standing Up (Job 13:8-16).....	5
Generous Hope (Psalm 33:12-22).....	6
Pain Relief (Psalm 42:1-5).....	7
Castles Fall (Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8).....	8
Psalm 119 (Psalm 119:41-48, 81)	9
Hope Filled Waiting (Psalm 130:1-8)	10
Hope Builds Faith (Psalm 147:1-11)	11
Our Present Hope (Proverbs 23:15-19)....	12
Eagles' Wings (Isaiah 40:1-8, 28-31)	13
Hope? Trust? (Jeremiah 17:7-8).....	14
Don't Quit! (Jeremiah 29:11-14a)	15
Newness (Lamentations 3:21-26).....	16
Hopelessness? (Micah 7:1-7)	17
God Delights in You (Zephaniah 3:14-17, 20).....	18
In Hope of Rest (Matthew 11:25-30).....	19
Confident Hope (Acts 2:22-32).....	20
God's Voucher (Romans 4:18-25).....	21
Producing Flowers (Romans 5:1-5).....	22
Comparisons (Romans 8:18-21).....	23
Waiting for Christmas (Romans 8:22-25)	24
Absolutely Certain (Romans 8:31-39)....	25
Joyful in Hope (Romans 12:9-21)	26
Stories of the Past (Romans 15:1-6).....	27
Hope Overflowing (Romans 15:13-21)	28
Unsurpassed Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-7) ..	29
God Knows Better (1 Corinthians 13:8-13) ..	30
Place Your Hope (2 Corinthians 1:3-11)	31
'The God Who Stays' (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).....	32
Working of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25)	33
Being Enlightened (Ephesians 1:15-23)....	34
You Have Been Called (Ephesians 4:1-6) ...	35
Our Hope is Assured (Philippians 1:3-11) ..	36
A Believing Heart (Colossians 1:3-6)	37
Remembering God (1 Thessalonians 1:2-6)	38
Prize of Salvation (2 Timothy 2:1-10)	39
God Promises You (Titus 1:1-3)	40
Blessed Hope (Titus 2:11-14)	41
Eternal Hope (Titus 3:3-8)	42
Christ Our Hero (Hebrews 3:1-6).....	43
My Secure Anchor (Hebrews 6:16-20) ...	44
Full Assurance (Hebrews 10:19-23).....	45
Our Inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-9)	46
Through the Blood (1 Peter 1:18-25)	47
Suffering (1 Peter 5:6-11)	48
Eyes to See (Luke 24:13-35)	49
My Future Hope (Revelation 21:1-4).....	50
Lord's Prayer & Luther's Prayers	51



Promised Presence

Ash Wednesday

Read: Deuteronomy 31:6-8

Moses said to Joshua: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV)

On the 25th of April 2006 the Beaconsfield gold mine in Tasmania collapsed. Who remembers this? I remember the constant news coverage as people hung onto the hope of recovering the two miners – Brant Webb and Todd Russell. A small earthquake triggered a rockfall in this mine. There were seventeen people in the mine at the time, fourteen escaped immediately, one was killed and two were trapped one kilometre underground. People stayed outside the mine working day and night to reach these men and so many prayed. After two hope-filled weeks, the men were brought to the surface alive.

Moses spoke the above words to Joshua after wandering through the wilderness for 40 years and were about to enter the Promised Land. Joshua and the Israelites were unsure of what the future held for them in this new land, and God had told Moses that he would not be entering the new land. Moses spoke the words to give them assurance and the promise that God would be with them and would go before them, even if Moses wasn't there with them. This promise of God's presence gave them courage and strength to face all the unknown challenges of entering this new land. They didn't know what lay before them, but they could be assured of God's presence.

Just as God gave His promise to Joshua and the Israelites, He also gives this promise of His continued presence in our lives. Whatever we face today, God is there with us – in that we can place our trust and hope. God's presence is always our source of courage and strength. Many at the Beaconsfield mine placed their hope in the rescue crew, we can place our hope in a God who will lead us and rescue us from all harm and danger and lead us to our eternal Promised Land. As we begin our Lenten journey today, on Ash Wednesday, be assured that God goes before, beside and behind you – He has promised that!

Embrace God's promise of His presence in our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as you led Moses and Joshua to the Promised Land, help me to trust in your promises to also lead me through my life to my Eternal Home. Amen.

Standing Up

2nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Job 13:8-16

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.”
Job 13:15 (NIV)

People throughout history have stood up for their faith amid terrible persecution and suffering, because they would not deny their beliefs. They put their hope in a God of love rather than the wickedness and cruelty of people and evil. I am reading the historical fiction Giordano Bruno series by S.J. Parris set in England in the 1580's. It is an interesting period, being half-way through Elizabeth 1's reign, where England is new as a Protestant nation and the great Catholic powers throughout Europe plot her demise. Being a time soon after the Reformation, there is unrest in the church with constant threats of invasion and espionage. Catholic spies and priests are hidden all over the country. If discovered, they needed to renounce their faith or be subject to extremely painful and excruciating public deaths. In later times, there were many during WW2 who stood up to the enemy powers and were then killed for their faith.

Job was a faithful man of God, who was allowed to be tormented by the devil. God knew Job would never renounce his faith. Job lost his family, his health, his livelihood and all his livestock – yet he remained faithful. His so-called friends encouraged Job to give up on God and to be put out of his misery. Yet, Job remained faithful and knew that whatever happened, God would be there – in that promise Job placed his hope. Many have died for their faith throughout history and even today many still die. God does not allow this to happen – He is a God of love; it is the wickedness of people through whom this happens.

Each day we are also faced with situations whereby we choose where our faith and hope lie. Will we join in with uplifting Jesus or go the worldly way? Will we choose Jesus and church over other activities? This Lenten season know that God will always be with you leading and guiding you to stand up for Him. It is in God that our hope lies, for it is only through Him that we can enter our Heavenly Home.

In a God of love do I place my life, my hope.

Prayer: *Gracious God, you help me through all difficulties. Help me to be strong in faith to be able to stand up for you when it matters. It is in you that I place my life. Amen.*



Generous Hope

3rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 33:12-22

"We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you." Psalm 33:20-22 (NIV)

Jonathan Krause, from ALWS (Australian Lutheran World Service) has a wonderful gift of writing about the needs of others. I enjoy reading the 'Hope Spots' where we are told stories of people in war-ravaged, or drought-inflicted areas where Hope is given through the gifts of generous people. Each 'Hope Spot' tells of people who are left destitute and without hope for any future; children left orphaned, mother's left without a husband due to war or famine, and just the basic needs of food and water needed for life. God places a conviction onto the reader's hearts to try to help those without hope, to gain some dignity and hope for their future and their children. Through the wonderful efforts of ALWS hope and respect for the sanctity of life can be restored to those in greatest need.

In the Bible, Jesus tells us that we will always have the poor and those in need around us. But that should not make us blind to their needs. Through our help, those in need can be helped and be given a hope for their future. God is our hope, and it is only because of our love and trust in Him that we can see and help those in need. God is a gracious God who loves all His people unconditionally. Because of His love, grace and forgiveness we can see our future which rests in our loving Saviour's arms for all eternity.

The last 'Hope Spot' I read by Jonathan, was about how 'No toothpaste can give smiles like these...' People fleeing from war-torn Congo were welcomed with love as they walked to the safety of Burundi. The LWF team were able to meet them, welcome them and care for them through the gifts of people like us from Australia. I can't say I have ever seen the horrors of war, but I know that God works through us to bring hope to others. Maybe this Lenten season as we give up our luxuries, maybe take up praying for those in need of hope and put the 'given up funds' to someone in greater need.

We put our hope in a loving God!

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord God, for showing me how I can give hope to others.*

Bless the work of ALWS and caring organisations who look after those without hope. Give me a grateful heart to respond. Amen.

Pain Relief

4th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: *Psalm 42:1-5*

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.” Psalm 42:5 (NIV)

With the loss of a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, cot death or accident, there is such an intense feeling of pain and loss – words are hard to explain it. In the above verse it talks of being downcast, looking down, nothing can ever feel good again and to ‘look up’ takes a huge effort – so great is the loss! I experienced six pregnancies, but three little ones are resting in the hands of my loving Saviour. I don’t know why a mother miscarries or why the other reasons a child is lost, but we can rely on a loving Father who holds and comforts us and gives hope for the future.

Any loss is an intense feeling of never being able to feel happy again. But that’s where our hope in God comes to the fore. God understands, God knows what it is to lose a beloved child. With loss there can also be a loss of faith leading to despair. To acknowledge a loss, to grieve and then to know the power of being able to ‘look up’ again and hope for a future is to then be able to move forward. Placing hope in God means leaving the pain and the grief with Him, knowing that He can share this pain and grief, and wants us to have a future.

Within this hope is an expectancy and trust that God is a God who knows us completely and cares for us unconditionally. We have all and will all experience the gut-wrenching grief of loss and pain. We can do two things – remain permanently in grief or move forward in hope. Lent is a time of reflection – to reflect on our lives and also the life of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to give us hope and a future. In this we can praise Him for His amazing life and the example He is to show us how to live. Move forward in hope and live your life knowing that God has all things in His care and keeping.

Hope in God is the remedy for pain.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you were sent to earth by a loving Father who loves me as His child. When I am in pain, make yourself present so that I may again place my hope and trust in you and praise you. Amen.*



Castles Fall

1st Sunday during Lent
Read: *Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8*

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.” Psalm 62:5-6 (NIV)

The United Kingdom has the most amazing castles, each with a story and incredible history. While nannying in England in 1991, I was asked to take the children to visit their grandparents in Perth, Scotland. A short plane trip later, we were in Scotland. On one of my days off, I borrowed a car and drove to St Andrews (birthplace of golf), but didn't stop there, I went further to St Andrews Castle built on the shore and cliffs overlooking the North Sea. The first castle built on this site was in 1189–1202. It housed the wealthy and powerful lairds of that time. During various Scottish wars it was destroyed and rebuilt as it changed hands from the Scots to the English over the next couple centuries. It was only in 1400 that it was rebuilt, and the ruins today are from that time, but the foundations are from hundreds of years before.

St. Andrews Castle has a colourful history and at one stage in the 1500's it was the centre of religious persecution and controversy. The 'bottle dungeon' can still be seen and many Christians were imprisoned there. Visiting such a historic site enables the imagination to run riot with all that could have and would have happened within the grounds of the walls. Castles were built as a fortification against enemies. A place where the ruling government could be secure, rest and find safety. But really, could they? There was always an enemy plotting their overthrow and wanting to take over the castle.

When King David wrote some of the Psalms, I am sure he was relating God's strength to the castles and fortresses of the time. It would have felt so secure and invincible living in them, but we know through history that castles do fall. But that was the closest King David could come to describe the security he felt when in God's presence. We know that earthly buildings and structures will decay and fall away, but to have our hope built on the rock that is Christ Jesus we have a foundation for life and beyond.

Place your hope and life on the rock of Jesus!

Prayer: *My Loving Father, help me to not put my trust in earthly things, but to build my life on the rock of Jesus. He is the only one who can give me security and safety and in Him I find hope for my future. Amen.*

Psalm 119

5th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 119:41-48, 81

"My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word." Psalm 119:81 (NIV)

So, what do you know about Psalm 119? It is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. But did you know that Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem written in 8 verse stanzas and each eight verses is named after a letter of the Hebrew alphabet? It is not known who wrote this chapter – some say King David, others Ezra and others Daniel. What we do know is that the author has a profound love and desire to obey all of God's Words which are a source of life, hope and wisdom. The overall theme of this chapter is that through obeying God's Word we will be blessed with happiness, guidance and security.

The word 'hope' only appears five times throughout this chapter, but each time it is mentioned, the hope is related to God's Word. God's Word, the Bible, has power – the laws, the testimonies, commandments, judgements, promises and words are all written to guide, comfort, give security, life and hope. God's Word is described as "sweeter than honey" (verse 103), "a lamp to my feet" (verse 105), "more precious than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (verse 72) and "a refuge and shield" (verse 114). The writer faces some sort of persecution and opposition because he is so devoted to God, but he finds security and comfort in all God's promises.

The Bible (God's Word) is not just an ancient piece of history written about people from an ancient time, but it is God's living Word. Every time it is opened and read, something new about God's love and faithfulness is discovered. God's Word is a "light for my path" (verse 105), and "All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal." (verse 160). It is in God's Word that our answers can be found, and our life has purpose. For in our God, we find strength for each day, comfort in pain and hope for a blessed future with a loving God.

Read the Bible, it will give your life purpose and hope for the future!

Prayer: *It is in your Word, Lord, that I find direction and peace for my life. Your Bible is living and active and help me to read it regularly and apply the messages to my life. Amen.*



Hope Filled Waiting

6th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: *Psalm 130:1-8*

"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning," Psalm 130:5-6 (NIV)

It was 1980 and I sat at the bus stop waiting and waiting for my bus to come to take me to the city where I would catch another bus to take me to Immanuel College, Novar Gardens SA. The bus was to come 10 minutes ago; I was going to miss my connection with the city bus. What can I do? There were no mobile phones to call or to check if the bus was on time. I couldn't contact my mum, so I just had to sit and wait and hope that the bus would come. My bus had broken down; another came to take its place to then take me to my destination. I was late that day to school.

I had sat there trusting that a bus was going to come to take me to school. I knew I had the right time, the right place, I just had to sit and wait in hope. How many times have you sat and waited in hope for God to come and act? Waiting for a family member to come home when they are late? Sitting by the bedside of a loved one as they struggle in pain? Waiting by the phone to hear the results of a test, but it seems to take hours? God hears and cares; still, we wait in hope for the Lord.

The writer of this Psalm, presumed to be King David, repeats a part of the above verse; *"more than watchmen wait for the morning"*. I have learnt that things that are repeated in the Bible are given emphasis for a reason. Watchmen are night workers; they work all night and finish when the sun comes up in the morning. They know that their shift will end, for morning does come, but it just takes time. We are to put our hope in the Lord our God. He hears our cries, prayers and pleas, we just must wait for the morning to come. It will inevitably come... just wait with hope!

We wait 'as watchmen wait for the morning':

Prayer: *My Lord and Saviour, help me to wait and to trust that you will bring me an answer in your timing. Sometimes it is really hard to wait, but please give me patience in my hope for your help. Amen.*

Hope Builds Faith

7th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: *Psalm 147:1-11*

“...the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.” Psalm 147:11 (NIV)

I believe that God gave farmers a mammoth share of faith. Year after year they sow their crops in the hope that God will send rain for a good harvest. Other farmers spend money and time on feeding their animals in the hope that God will give a good return at the market. While in Loxton, South Australia, I truly got to understand the meanings of faith and hope. In verses 8 and 9 of Psalm 147 is written: *“He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.”* But what happens when this doesn't occur in our timing?

My farmer friends from Loxton had their times of lack of rain (quite desperate now), and we saw seasons of good harvest. God asks us and those farmers to fear Him (respect Him) and keep hoping that God in His unfailing love will bring what is needed. It may not be the wanted rain, but it may come in the helping of friends, neighbours and family coming together in faith. When we are in need of hope; we pray! God hears the prayers of the faithful and He will uphold you with the strength to cope for another day. Throughout the Bible we read of God's love and faithfulness, we just need to hold onto this hope and promise.

This is a beautiful Psalm of promise in remembering all that God does for us: *“He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.”* (Psalm 147:3-5) Our God is an incredible God. If He knows the billions and trillions of stars by name, He knows your name and hears the prayers of His children. God wants us to rest in the hope that He loves and hears all our concerns. This Lenten season open your hearts to pray – for your family, your neighbours, those in need and the world.

Hope builds faith!

Prayer: Loving Father, you know all my needs and concerns. I come to you in prayer asking for help for our farmers. Knowing that you hear my prayers I place my hope in your promises. Amen.



Our Present Hope

8th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Proverbs 23:15-19

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.”
Proverbs 23:18 (NIV)

A year ago, my nephew went on a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) expedition taking a wooden sailing boat called the Vaka Hop'e from the Philippine Islands to the Solomon Islands. (You can google it to get all the tales of their journey.) The name signifies that it is a boat bringing hope across to the Solomon Islanders who will use it through mission activities and development within the community. During my nephew's journey which took three months, and sailed over 2,900 nautical miles, the crew of four experienced many adventures. It was a simple catamaran tied together with ropes to give flexibility on the seas.

While travelling through the Indonesian waters in the night a rudder broke in heavy seas, then the second of the rudders broke. They thought they would be carried on to the rocks, but somehow using an oar as a rudder, they got to the shore of an island where a local islander made them two new rudders. In Papua New Guinea they encountered thieves and pirates, but all escaped unharmed. God was with them through their journey, and many friends and family (including us) were lifting them all up in prayer. Throughout the journey, they felt the calling to do God's work to bring and provide the Solomon Island community with this boat for their work and mission.

We all are on a journey. Maybe not one like the Vaka Hop'e, but it is a personal journey through life. In Proverbs 23:15-19, the writer gives wisdom to his son. It is also wisdom to us. We are to be wise and put our hope in the Lord. God is our present hope and our future hope. In your life, whatever adventures and mishaps that may steer you off path and cause concern, *“...be wise, and keep your heart on the right path.”* (verse 19) When your heart and sight is set on God, everything else will fall into place. Meditate on God's Word this Lenten season and watch Him steer your life.

Our future hope starts with our present hope.

Prayer: *My loving Saviour, through your life and the adventures you encountered, you never swayed from where your sight was set. God set your course to the cross to secure my future hope. Thank you. Amen.*

Eagles' Wings

9th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Isaiah 40:1-8, 28-31

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 440:31 (NIV)

In January of 1991, I left Australia to join a Lutheran Youth Encounter team out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. I had no idea what that would entail. It was a journey of faith. Looking back, I realise how incredibly unprepared I was for this ministry. Training was to be held in the Black Hills of South Dakota (camping) for two weeks, but as I left Australia early, I missed all the correspondence of what to have and bring. I didn't have a sleeping bag, or pillow, or towel – just me, clothes, guitar and flute.

As part of the training in South Dakota, we were to spend 24 hours in solitude in the bush, away from people and tents, just a sleeping bag, food and a Bible. I was rather concerned, not knowing if there were bears or mountain lions. Anyway, off I went – just me! I hiked to a hill above the camp – could just see it through the trees, it was at a point called 'Eagles' Nest'. There I lay my sleeping bag on the ground and sat on it. Silence can be very loud. Well, I thought, let's see what God has to say to me, so I just closed my eyes and opened my Bible, and it came to Isaiah 40. That day these verses spoke to me and gave me comfort. The Word of God is living, and the Bible says different things to me each time I open it. As I was reading the above verse, Isaiah 40:31, I looked up and there was an eagle soaring above me.

I truly felt God's presence and left all my fears of bears and mountain lions with God. To show me His presence, when I awoke the next morning, there was a small deer one metre from where I lay. That time of solitude showed me so much about placing my hope and trust in a loving God. I pray that you also can experience this strength and comfort. Open your Bible and have it speak to you.

Put your hope in God and feel yourself soar like on eagles' wings!

Prayer: *In you Lord, I put my trust. In you I hope and this gives me strength for each day. Help me to read your Word regularly and allow myself space and time to fully comprehend what you are saying. Amen.*



Hope? Trust?

10th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Jeremiah 17:7-8

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.”
Jeremiah 17:7 (NIV)

In 1989, Tania (a friend from school) and myself decided to go and visit another one of our friends, Julie. Julie had taken up a job as a nursing sister in the far north of Queensland amongst the community of Wujal Wujal. The thing is, both Tania and I worked in Adelaide. So, we packed up my car, a Toyota Corona MK II, and began our trek. It was during the January school holidays, and it was hot. Back then, no mobile phones so we just trusted that this car would get us there and hoped to be able to spend a couple weeks with our friend. We did have a few mishaps needing to stay in one town for a couple nights to have the engine repaired, but we finally arrived in Cairns.

Julie met us at the Lutheran church where we left my car and packed into her 4WD. Wujal Wujal is a remote Aboriginal community, and we needed to go through rivers and across extremely rugged roads. What an experience! Living amongst this community was incredible, and they had to rely and trust on getting supplies across the Bloomfield River. This river was tidal, so during the wet season it became very dangerous. To get us across, Julie knew the tide times and got us safely across at low tide.

What is the difference between hope and trust? Hope is the feeling of desiring and expecting a particular thing to happen. Trust, on the other hand, is the firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something. In the Bible, sometimes we may think that hope and trust are interchangeable, and in some cases it does work. But, in our lives, we put our trust (firm belief, reliability) in a loving God who sent His only Son to earth for our salvation. Our hope (expectation) lies in the promises that we are given by Jesus – He has many rooms in His Father’s house, and He has prepared a place for us. (John 14:2)

We put our trust in God for the hope of a future with Him!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I confidently place my trust in the fact that you died for me. My hope lies in your resurrection and that you also will take me to be with you where you are. Amen.

Don't Quit!

2nd Sunday during Lent

Read: Jeremiah 29:11-14a

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Ignace Jan Paderewski, the famous composer-pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. In the audience that evening was a mother with her fidgety nine-year-old son. The mother was hopeful that her son would be encouraged to practice the piano if he could just hear the immortal Paderewski at the piano. As she turned to talk with friends, her son slipped away from her side, drawn to the ebony concert grand Steinway piano. He placed his small, trembling fingers in the right location and began to play “Chopsticks.” Hundreds of frowning faces pointed in his direction. Irritated and embarrassed, they began to shout: “Where’s his mother?” “Somebody stop him!”

Backstage, the master overheard the sounds out front and quickly put together in his mind what was happening. Without one word of announcement, he stooped over behind the boy, reached around both sides, and began to improvise a countermelody to harmonize with and enhance “Chopsticks.” As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy’s ear: “Keep going. Don’t quit. Keep on playing... don’t stop... don’t quit.”

God knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope. This does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship... God never promised us that; in fact, there will be many trials and temptations in our lives. But He wants us to prosper and have a peace that Jesus gives us through His death on the cross. Sometimes we do things we shouldn’t, like the little boy, but God makes good out of any circumstance we may find ourselves in. God is the kind of leader that will never leave us. He will always be with us. He will carry us when we cannot walk. When we are down, it will be Him, that will reach down with his loving hand and pick us up, dust off our clothes, put a Band-Aid on our scrape, kiss it better then send us back to try again. This Lenten season remember that there is a God who loves and cares for you and your future.

Start playing. Keep playing. Don’t stop, don’t quit.

Prayer: *My Father God, you reach out to me, encouraging me to keep going, even when things are hard. Thank you for your plans and promises for my life. I live in hope of my future. Amen.*



Newness

11th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: *Lamentations 3:21-26*

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:21-23 (NIV)

I have a son who, when younger, did not like to wear anything new. I don't know why whether it was the scratchiness of the material or the label, or that they were unfamiliar, but he liked his old faithfuls. It got to the point where I would keep some newer yet older clothes that he could wear when we went out and to church. It is interesting that this didn't apply to underwear or school clothes. It took a couple of years, but he grew out of this quirkiness and is now a fan of new clothes!

There is comfort in the familiar. My husband says when we have hamburgers or spaghetti, “This is comfort food.” I understand that this is the food he grew up with, and it brings memories. I value the above Bible verse, that God’s love is not the same every day. Each day He shows His love to us in a different way, but it is comfortable and brings peace. There is nothing unfamiliar about God’s great love and His feelings towards us, so each day we can put them on, it is a faithfulness that does not change. Each day I can wake up in the hope and with the promise that God has said that my day is a new one, but nothing unfamiliar will change with His love.

This devotional theme challenges me, like all the ones before. How can I come up with new stories, new illustrations to share the hope I have in a loving God who sent His Son to live a human life, and then on a painful journey to the cross and a tortuous death. This was all for you and me. Jesus didn’t stay dead – God had Jesus beat death and rise from the dead so that we can have hope and a future with our Heavenly Father. Jesus paid the cost for all our sins. This might sound familiar and it brings comfort, but chew over this comfort food, read a new Bible verse and remember God’s goodness.

Each day is a new day to love God and each other.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for your familiar yet new love and grace which you give me every day. Help me to appreciate your forgiveness and all you did for me on the cross. Amen.*

Hopelessness?

12th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: *Micah 7:1-7*

"But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me." Micah 7:7 (NIV)

Our world seems to be in disarray. Political leaders are vying for more land and beginning wars over this land. People are upset over rights and rally about injustices, our youth run rampant in the streets hurting themselves and others. Can there be any hope for our world? In the reading from Micah 7:1–7, it sounds so much like the world today, but this was written between 750 and 686 BCE. Has nothing changed with a godless society? Micah was lamenting over a decadent society and the godlessness of his generation. In verse 6 we also read of the breakdown of the family unit. There was hopelessness then as well as now.

We see people turn away from their faith and the truth of God. They turn to other gods: property, wealth, holidays, possessions, entertainment and experiences. Our prayer is that families will turn to God, that they will teach their children the truth and that the world will turn to see God and worship Him. That is our hope! Let's follow the example of Micah and not dwell in the hopelessness that we see, rather, we watch and wait in hope for the Lord. We can also rest securely in this hope. That God will hear our prayers and that we can make a difference even in our small part of the world and remain faithful to God and His Word.

God sending Jesus at Christmas was the greatest gift God could give to a fallen world. This gift paved a new way of living in God's grace and forgiveness and the hope of a better day. God looked at His sin-diseased world and provided the remedy for that condition in His only Son. We are sinful people, but we are also God's forgiven people who walk through life with hope. Jesus promises us eternal life as a gift from our Heavenly Father. The world may be scary, and unrest surrounds us but know that there is hope for all the world for we have a God who loves and cares for His children.

Discouraged? Feeling hopeless? Know that God brings hope!

Prayer: *My God, I know you care for your world. Bring peace and comfort to your people. Help me know that in you only can I find hope and peace for my life and soul. Amen.*



God Delights in You

13th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Zephaniah 3:14-17, 20

"The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."
Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)

On one occasion, a pastor asked one of his parishioners: "Do you believe in the hereafter?" The parishioner replied: "You bet I do. I often go in a room and say, 'What am I here after?'"

Above the massive front doors of a cathedral these words were inscribed: **THE GATE OF HEAVEN**. Below was a small sign, which read: **PLEASE USE OTHER ENTRANCE**.

If we were honest with ourselves and each other, we would say that we hope one day to be with God in Heaven. Why do we use this word 'hope'? Isn't this a certainty? Haven't we been told that "Those who believe and are baptised will be saved"? (Mark 16:16a) We all know that Jesus loves us and that we have been saved by grace through our faith, what then makes us doubt God's promise?

I have a copy of the above verse on the wall of my office. It is there to remind me that God will calm any fear I have and that He is so happy with me that He rejoices over me with songs – He is that happy! It is full of hope and the promise that God will do what He has promised to do. Zephaniah was a prophet in ancient Judah during the time when King Josiah reigned (640–609 BCE). He was there to warn the people that God's Day of judgement was coming. God's people had strayed, and they thought that they could enter heaven by other doors – worshipping other gods.

Then in verse 17, Zephaniah tells them that even though the people will experience consequences, God will bless His people and take away all the judgements put on them. God sent Jesus to take the wrath of sin on Himself for all of humankind. Heaven is on earth already... God is here with us! Our hope is in the here and now – not only the hereafter. A little girl promised her daddy a hug when he finished his work. Suddenly, she ran to him and gave him a bone-crushing hug saying: 'I just want you to know what to look forward to.'

We can live in the hope and joy promised us every day!

Prayer: Dear God, you love me so much that you rejoice over me with singing, you are that happy to have me in your family. Calm any fears I may have and bring me into the assurance of being with you already. Amen.

In Hope of Rest

14th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 11:25-30

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 11:28-29 (NIV)

Craving rest is natural. When I begin a week, I look in hope to the weekend which I hope will bring rest. But not always. It seems that we all seem to run around and work ourselves into a frantic pace that will eventually forcibly slow us down or cause our inner 'check engine' light to turn on. That is just the time that we find we need to stop or 'break-down'. Even Jesus found time in his ministry to stop and be refreshed, and he found that time especially in prayer with His Heavenly Father. Jesus has promised to ease my burdens and in that I place my hope.

In the Bible verse above, I read that Jesus wants me to carry something more, a yoke. This doesn't necessarily provide me with confidence of more rest, rather it sounds like more work. But when we understand what Jesus means – he is by our side helping us through any circumstance and issue we may find ourselves in. The word 'yoke' comes from the Greek word *zugos* which refers to the wooden yoke that joined two animals together, so that with their combined strength they can do what one animal alone cannot. So, we are not going it alone... Jesus is there right beside us sharing and offering to do all the hard work while we rest in his presence.

Jesus implores us to find rest in Him. He doesn't ask us to do anything other than to simply come to him however burned out or burdened that we are. Just to find rest in His presence. Who isn't weary of all that life throws at us? Who isn't in need of a greater physical, emotional, and spiritual rest? This Lenten season, take time out to rest in the presence of our loving Saviour. Jesus knows what you hope for. He is well aware of our overworked hearts and our stretched lifestyles, and He has a softer, much gentler way for us.

Jesus our hope, is the right refreshment and nourishment we crave.

Prayer: *Lord, I get myself so overrun with life that it leaves me empty and desperate for rest. You are my hope in whom I know rest will come. Bring peace and calm to my life and soul. Amen.*



Confident Hope

15th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Acts 2:22-32

"David said about him: 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope... You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.' Acts 2:25-26, 28 (NIV)

There are some people who seem to have an eternal optimism. No matter what may be happening in their lives, whatever hardships may come, they seem to be able to shake it all off and know that tomorrow is another day and will be much better. In KYB (Know Your Bible) this last term we studied 1 Samuel. David had confidence that God was there with him when he went against the mighty Goliath with just a sling shot. He was confident that God would save him when a spear was thrown at him by King Saul and had armies sent out to kill him. David had confidence that God would protect him to do all the things he had promised. And David did become King and was a 'king after God's own heart'.

There are times when I feel that God is a bit slow on the uptake and maybe I should get in there and help God make all the promises to me come to fruition. But I do need to realise that God doesn't need my help, He has everything under control and all I need to do is have faith and rest in the hope that God will do all He said He would. In Acts 2, we read that Peter referred to David's words from Psalm 16:8-11. Peter was talking to the crowds about Jesus who had died and was risen from the dead. The people of the times would have known the stories of David, so they could relate to what Peter was saying. Peter told them of David's hope, which in turn had come true through Jesus Christ.

We can also relate this to us. We live here on earth, but only for the days that God has given us. Then He has promised that we will be taken to live with our Heavenly Father for ever. This is the hope that we have as Christians, and we can be joyful and be confident like David.

Be confident, our eternal hope is secure!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have battled death through your resurrection and won the victory for me. Let me live confidently in this hope of eternal life and be prepared to share this hope with others. Amen.

God's Voucher

16th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Romans 4:18-25

"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"
Romans 4:18 (NIV)

Gifting experiences or vouchers have been the new go-to for birthdays and other significant events. I lately had a larger birthday, and I was given a massage. That was very much appreciated. I also received a 'Floatage' (Float & Massage) for Mother's Day. Some in my family have also received a cemetery tour, tickets to the movies and even gift cards worth a certain amount that can be used anytime for anything. All these sorts of these things have already been bought and given, and it is just up to the receiver of the gift to use!

Reading this Bible verse, it appears that God gave Abraham a voucher of 'The Father of Many Nations'. The difference with this is that Abraham could see that the expiry date was well and truly over – Abraham one hundred years old and Sarah had well and truly gone through menopause. He tried to use his voucher too early (Hagar and Ishmael), but God reminded him it will all come in His timing. God never puts expiry dates on His vouchers of love and promise. Abraham needed to be reminded of God's faithfulness and rely on His promise for Sarah did have a baby – Isaac! God has also given each one of us vouchers for our eternal life and that we have credit in righteousness. Jesus paid for our salvation once and for all and for all time.

God gave His only innocent son to pay the exorbitant cost for our sinfulness. Our sinfulness can only lead to eternal death and separation from God. But God in His love for all of us sent Jesus who paid for all our sins (past, present and future) for all time. This is our eternal life voucher. All we have to do is have faith and believe that God will do what He said He would. We have been washed clean and made righteous through our baptism. Now enjoy this incredible gift. This Lenten season remember that this gift has already been paid for – just bask in God's goodness.

God's voucher never expires nor ever runs out!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for giving me the experience of eternal life with you in Heaven. You have blessed me every day with your love and your promises, help me to appreciate your goodness. Amen.



Producing Flowers

3rd Sunday during Lent

Read: Romans 5:1-5

“And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”
Romans 5:5 (NIV)

I do enjoy gardening. Roses are my favourite. Growing roses in the Noosa climate is not easy as the humidity causes rust and the leaves brown easily. I bought a rose when arriving in Noosa after having had many roses in my garden in Loxton. I put it in a pot on my front porch, sheltered from the rain, but it gets morning sun and it just loves it there. All around the year I get not just one bloom, but sometimes eight to ten blooms on one stem. I have learned that it is in the right spot, to give it the right amount of water and fertiliser and I can be confident I will see results if I keep looking after it.

God loves each one of us. He has justified us which means that He has done the planting, the watering and the pruning of our lives and that because He has done it all, we get to bloom under His love. It was through the love of God that He sent His son to die on the cross for each of us and rise on the third day. Because of this we can bloom in heaven eternally with our heavenly Father. This is the hope we have and can live in. God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit to give us the ability to grow and thrive and be confident in the hope of eternal life.

God knows what each of us need to thrive and grow. He places us just where we need to be and gives us just what we need to encourage growth. It is easy to think that we know what to do and that we know better. I could try moving my rose to a new place or try not pruning it each year; but I have a feeling that would stop my beautiful flowers appearing. Persevere in your faith, allow yourself to be pruned and God in His love will produce some beautiful flowers in your life.

God knows what is best for us - always!

Prayer: *Merciful God and our loving Saviour Jesus Christ, you know what is best for me. Allow me to be shaped and pruned by you so that I can grow in your love and faith. Amen.*

Comparisons

17th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Romans 8:18-21

"I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us." Romans 8:18 (GNT)

I grew up eating rissoles in hamburgers. Made with minced meat, flour, egg, breadcrumbs, chicken noodle soup mix and spices all these things added made the minced meat go further, especially having four older brothers. My husband, Mark, on the other hand grew up with hamburgers being 100% minced beef – nothing added. Apart from MacDonald's there are not many places in Australia that serves 100% beef patties. This at times causes Mark consternation. He doesn't understand why things need to be added to the minced meat. For him there is no comparison in taste. Me on the other hand, prefer the rissoles for that is what I grew up with; so, we agree to disagree and have to suffer with our differences, depending on who cooks.

St Paul tells us throughout Romans and the other letters he has written that we are going to suffer through this life. Hamburger preferences are probably the least of our sufferings. We cannot understand why things happen, 'Why did God let this happen to me?' God does not let bad things happen to His children. It is because we sin and we continually do wrong things that evil takes over. God is always there to pick up the pieces and bring comfort, peace and understanding over these situations. God wants us to keep our faith and strengthen our trust in Him.

In the above verse, Paul writes that our suffering is nothing compared to our future glory that we all wait in hope for. God gives us in the Bible, little glimpses of what things will be like when we die, but I think it is 100% better than even my greatest hope. So, we suffer through our hamburger preferences (the little sufferings) and then the bigger times of trials (sickness, loss, family, etc). We know that this suffering will pass and God's glory will take over, and all creation will experience freedom and be fully restored. Then we will live in an eternal kingdom with no pain or sorrow.

Our future hope is 100% better.

Prayer: *My loving Father God, I cannot compare what it will be like to live with you in glory. You have planned out my future, and I trust and hope in your promises. Amen.*



Waiting for Christmas

18th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Romans 8:22-25

“For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” Romans 8:24-25 (GNT)

In the beginning of ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’, by C. S. Lewis, the land of Narnia is described as always winter and never Christmas. Narnia has been in a perpetual winter for as long as any of the Narnians could remember because of the reign of the White Witch. There was no hope or light in this winter to remind the Narnians that winter is only temporary (in the Northern Hemisphere, winter means that Christmas is coming). They could see nothing to be hopeful for, yet they hung onto the prophecy of the downfall of the White Witch and the return of Aslan.

For those who haven’t yet read this book, I hope I have given you the incentive to read it. It may seem like a children’s book, but there is so much gospel in it. There is disobedience and forgiveness, evil and the overcoming goodness, sadness and joy! Aslan is the ‘Jesus figure’ who returns to Narnia bringing hope and Christmas and the ending of despair and winter. The coming of Christmas in Narnia is a reminder that no matter how dark the world gets, darkness cannot overcome the light.

Christmas was a few months ago now, but every day we need to be reminded of Christmas and the coming of our Saviour. That is a reason I keep a few nativity scenes up all year round! Jesus has come to bring light into a dark world. So then at Easter, our Saviour’s purpose comes into focus. He came to bring us hope and the surety of eternal life. Lent is sometimes seen as a sombre, dark time as we follow Jesus to the cross. But Jesus did this all for you and me. He went to the cross willingly to give us hope and a future where before there was no hope. So now we can wait for our salvation patiently knowing that it is in heaven that our Saviour will welcome us with open arms and it will always be Christmas!

Even though we can’t see ‘hope’ – know that Jesus is your hope!

Prayer: *My loving Saviour, you bring me hope in a darkened world. Give me patience to wait for this eternal joy in your presence. I can’t see it yet, but I wait expectantly and with hope. Amen.*

Absolutely Certain

19th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Romans 8:31-39

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

There is not a lot in this world to which I hold absolute certainty! We lived through COVID 19 and saw how quickly a world can shut down, new laws put in place, not being able to buy toilet paper, and be faced with fear and uncertainty of catching this dreaded virus. Then with the weather, will the forecast be correct or should I doubt BOM (Bureau of Meteorology)? With all the computer scamming happening can I be absolutely certain that my money will still be in the bank when I want to use it? Going for holidays, can I be absolutely certain that my home will not be burgled while I am away? All these things happening in the world bring fear to our lives and it seems there is nothing certain to hold on to.

The Apostle Paul points us to our God: *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31b–32 NIV)* This is something we can be absolutely certain about. God loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to suffer and die for all our sins and wrongdoings. God then raised Him to life, after beating death so that you and I can now no longer be left condemned of all our sin but be made righteous (perfect) in God's eyes.

You can be absolutely certain, that nothing can now separate us from God... read the list above in verses 38 and 39. This is the hope we have, that there is a loving God who wants us to be with Him for all eternity and there is nothing in this world now that can stop this. God made sure of this 2,000 years ago when He sent His sinless Son to die for our sins. This broke the power that the devil had over us. You are God's child now and for eternity!

You can be absolutely certain of this!

Prayer: *Thank you, Jesus, that you made a way for me to be righteous and holy before God. You have made my salvation and all your promises absolutely certain. I don't need to fear but live in hope. Amen.*



Joyful in Hope

20th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Romans 12:9-21

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Romans 12:12 (NIV)

In 17th century Italy, in the town of Cremona, lived a young boy named Antonio. Antonio was often sad because he lived in a town that was famous for its music, but he could neither sing nor play. Antonio's voice was high and squeaky, so he was not welcome in the Cremona Boys' Choir. When he took violin lessons, the neighbours persuaded his parents to make him stop. Yet Antonio still wanted to make music. Antonio's friends kidded him because it seemed that his only talent was whittling, but he did not give up. One day the boy learned that a world-famous violinmaker named Amati lived in Cremona. The next morning Antonio went to visit Amati and begged to serve as his apprentice. For many years he studied and worked. Antonio's knack for whittling grew into a skill of carving; his hobby became his craft. Patiently he fashioned many violins, striving to make each one better and more beautiful than the one before.

When Antonio died, he left over 1,500 violins, each one bearing a label that said “Antonio Stradivarius.” Today they are the most sought after violins in all the world. The clarity of tone and careful craftsmanship remain untouched by the centuries. Today Antonio's violins sell for more than \$100,000. Antonio Stradivarius could neither sing nor play, but he did what he could, and now, over 300 years later, his violins are still making beautiful music.

In the above story, this little boy had a passion and wanted to make music. He persevered to find his calling, the place where he knew he fitted. God has a place for each of us, and it is a place where our gifts can be used. A place where we can make ‘beautiful music’. We are to be joyful with hope to find the place where God blesses and guides you to where there is also a need in the world. Your calling is where the needs of the world intercept with your passion. God will use you for His glory.

Your place is where God is calling you to be. Be joy filled in hope.

Prayer: Lord, you know where my life is going. Direct and guide me that I may find joy in all that you have prepared for me. My hope and life is in you – use me Lord! Amen.

Stories of the Past

21st Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Romans 15:1-6

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.” Romans 15:4 (NIV)

Another of my passions is family history. I have most of the family history books about my family from when they arrived in Australia. I would love to know more about the time they lived in Prussia and Germany – what they did, what family they had, and about their faith. But after my visit to the family towns in both Prussia and Germany last year, I realised that this past has been forgotten or destroyed. So, I enjoy hearing stories from my mother and my grandmother when she was alive. I listen to stories of the faithfulness of my ancestors which have guided and directed myself and my family to our faith.

Paul reminds us in Romans 15, that through the stories written in the Bible we also can be strengthened in our faith. The Bible stories of the past shape our lives and bring us to understanding the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father, the love of His Son and the guiding power of the Holy Spirit. All this can help us when we are weak, when we need comfort and when faced with uncertainty. Learning about the faith of Abraham – having to wait until he was 100 before God gave Him his promised heir. Recognizing the continual repentance of King David who came asking for God's forgiveness again and again; and he was blessed by God. Reading about the strength of Esther who stood up against the King for her people, and they were saved.

Then we read in the New Testament of the strength of the apostles and disciples who went throughout the known world spreading the news about Jesus dying and rising. God blessed them and the church grew. Sometimes we put aside the past and say we are living in the present. Remember the hope of our eternal future. Learn from our ancestors and God's faithfulness to His people and grow your children and grandchildren's faith so that they too may know the hope we have in a loving God.

The past guides us into the present and gives hope for our future!

Prayer: *My loving Father, you have given me your Word, the Bible, to teach me and my family about your love and faithfulness from the beginning of time. This gives me hope for my future. Thank you. Amen.*



Hope Overflowing

22nd Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Romans 15:13-21

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13 (NIV)

In 2010, our family took a thirteen-week holiday in an RV driving across the USA from Los Angeles to New York City and visited everywhere in between. Before we left Australia, I remember my husband asking the children to give him three things that they wanted to see and do while there. Disneyland was on the list, a dinosaur park in Colorado, The Grand Canyon, Greenfield Village in Michigan and Niagara Falls in New York/ Canada. (There were lots of other ideas and places!) We were also to visit Monument Valley in Arizona and Central Park in New York City as well as visiting family and friends in Iowa and Minnesota. It was to be a journey full of experiences and we went with the hopes of all that we were to see and do.

The plans were made, and we set off and so many of our dreams came true, but plans also had to change due to weather, building construction and closures. Snow stopped us seeing Yellowstone National Park and Old Faithful (on my list). But instead, we saw more of South Dakota and Bear Country. I am sure that you have also had times where you were so excited for the future with hope overflowing – having children, children's weddings, grandchildren, retirement, a new job and finishing school knowing that a new chapter is beginning. These are the hopes and dreams that God wants us to have.

I think that is the sort of joy and hope that Paul is talking about. It is a hope without boundaries where anything is possible. It is the joy we experience in the faithfulness of a loving God. This joy and hope we can also relate to during Lent. We know that our Saviour went through a horrific death for you and me, but that is not the end of the story. Jesus rose again to give us a hope that overflows. It is in this that we can find joy for our future and the peace that God knows and cares for each of us.

Our hope lies in the love of our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord God, for giving me a future filled with hope and your promises. You guide and direct me through each day, let me rest in your peace and the joy of a future with you. Amen.*

Unsurpassed Love

4th Sunday during Lent
Read: *1 Corinthians 13:1-7*

"Love is patient, love is kind... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 4a, 7 (NIV)

My husband and I have just celebrated thirty years of marriage. The above verses were not the text for our wedding, but I do know that this is a favourite for many couples about to be married. This verse is filled with optimism for a future filled with love. It is a verse encouraging each person to live in this love knowing that only a love filled with God and the Holy Spirit can get through all the tough times. This sort of love always has the best intentions for the other person; it protects them from any hurts of body, mind and spirit; it trusts that the other person will be there through thick and thin; there are shared hopes and dreams; and that one person will never give up on the other.

Such a marriage, for those who have been married for a while, seems almost 'pie in the sky', unrealistic and possibly naive, but those entering marriage don't think so and look at their future with love, hopes and dreams. God wants us to have this sort of love not just as a married couple but also for all our relationships, whether it be between family members, parents, friends and church members. The love we have for each other needs to be filled with God's love. There will also be people that perhaps we do not like, but God calls us to love them. We need to love them with a servant heart, always putting their interests above our own and praying for their future.

God has this love for each of us. He is patient and kind when we say unkind things. He will protect us with His angels; we can always trust that God has our best interests at heart. We know that our future is secured and that is where we place our hope. God will never give up on us but comes back to us again and again with His forgiveness and love. For us as humans, this sort of love can seem impossible, but with God it surpasses all our understanding.

Know that God's love is unsurpassed!

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for your incredible love for me. I cannot understand this depth of love that gives His only Son to save me. Help me to pass this love on to those around me. Amen.*



God Knows Better

23rd Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

The story of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter follows the story of a little rabbit who thinks he knows everything and what is best, when realistically he should have listened to his mother. Peter's mother warned her four children – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter to have fun but not to go into Mr McGregor's garden, for that is where their father was made into a rabbit pie. Disobedient Peter did go into the garden and had his fill of the vegetables growing there but then was chased by Mr McGregor where he lost his shoes and his jacket which got caught on a net. He hid in a watering can filled with water until his sneeze gave him away, he was chased again and finally escaped under the gate. He was so exhausted when he got home that he was put to bed with only chamomile tea while his sisters had a lovely supper.

It is very easy to think that we know better than God. The Bible (God's Word) was written so long ago, is it even relevant? God does know what is best for us and warns us to stay out of the forbidden places where we could get hurt. In the Bible reading, God tells us that His love never fails. When we were younger (in our faith) we accepted God's love, grace and forgiveness most of the time without question. God told us not to do something and hopefully we obeyed.

With a more mature faith, we can understand more the cost of our disobedience (sin) and how that hurts us and others around us. We know we need to listen to God, but sometimes over the fence in the garden, everything looks so much better. God has assured us of His love. He forgives us continually. He has shown us His love through Jesus' death on the cross and then overcoming death by rising again. And He has given us the promise and hope of spending eternity in heaven.

Listen to God, He really does know better!

Prayer: *Loving Father, you love me with an unconditional love which surrounds me every day. Help me to rely on you for wisdom and to listen to your guiding me. Bring me to your eternal home. Amen.*

Place Your Hope

24th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: *2 Corinthians 1:3-11*

"On [God] we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers." 2 Corinthians 10b-11a (NIV)

I was homesick. I had left Australia filled with a spirit of adventure to the UK and had found myself in a busy home looking after someone else's children as a nanny. The first weeks flew by as I settled into the children's routine and the routine of the house. But then I started to think of home and my family in Adelaide. They were such a long way away and I yearned for something familiar. Then, came a letter and every week there was another – my faithful mother wrote an aerogramme letter every week to me. This became my source of comfort and I in turn wrote every week back sharing all my needs, joys and concerns. I placed my hope in this letter knowing my mum understood.

Our Heavenly Father also understands our needs, concerns and worries and listens and comforts us. As a sinful human we know that we will experience troubles, homesickness, pain and hurt because that is all part of being a human. God doesn't want us to hurt any more than He wants us to sin, but no matter what, He is always there sharing His love with us through all His letters (The Bible). We can rely on our loving Father to provide us with every good thing. He loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son to the cross to forgive us and provide a way for our salvation. That truly is a God who loves.

So, place your hope in a God who doesn't change, who listens to all your prayers, who understands all your pain and hurt, and who forgives you unconditionally. Paul in his second letter to the people of Corinth, wanted to tell them all about this God who is "*the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,*" (verse 3). This loving God gives us the example of how to care and comfort people so that we in turn can show this same care and comfort to others.

So, place your trust and hope in a God who knows and understands!

Prayer: *My loving God, thank you for the way you understand me. You know what I need before I ask for help. Help me to understand your ways so that I too may share them with others. Amen.*



‘The God Who Stays’

25th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV)

I am sitting in my home office looking at all the devotions I need to write for this Lenten devotional, and I feel somewhat overwhelmed. How can I write another one? Surely, I have said everything. Then, on my Spotify Christian play list, this song comes on by Matthew West – ‘The God who Stays’. This is exactly what I need to say for this devotion.

“If I were You I would've given up on me by now I would've labelled me a lost cause
‘Cause I feel just like a lost cause
If I were You I would've turned around and walked away I would've labelled me
beyond repair ‘Cause I feel like I'm beyond repair
Oh, but somehow You don't see me like I do Somehow You're still here
You're the God who stays, You're the God who stays
You're the one who runs in my direction, When the whole world walks away
You're the God who stands, With wide open arms
And You tell me nothing I have ever done can separate my heart
From the God who stays”
[by Matthew West]

Throughout the Bible we have examples of God remaining by His people when they have sinned and turned away from Him. God returns again and again in love to a people who don't deserve His love. Are we really any different? As God's people we have experienced many ups and downs, we may have turned away from Him and yet, “*inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*” (verses 16b, 17)

I love in the song lyrics that it says that God not only stays beside us through thick and thin, but He also runs towards us like the father in the story of the prodigal son. No matter what the world throws at us or accuses us of, there is nothing “*...nor anything else in all creation, that will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 8:39)

A God who never leaves me is the God in whom I place my hope!

Prayer: Thank you, dear God, for always staying by my side. You are there in my joyous times and also when I am discouraged and sad. In you I place my hope and trust. Amen.

Working of God's Spirit

26th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Galatians 5:22-25

"As for us, our hope is that God will put us right with him; and this is what we wait for by the power of God's Spirit working through our faith."
Galatians 5:5 (GNT)

God works through the Holy Spirit which in turns works in our lives. A quote I have heard is: 'Christian's aren't different, just forgiven.' But really, we should be different. I sin like everyone else, I ask for God's forgiveness and then I get to begin each day with a clean slate. That is basically what this quote is telling us. God's Spirit works through each of us, that in itself makes us different – the Holy Spirit produces the fruits of the Spirit to impact our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Showing these qualities in themselves makes us different in a world that is selfish and self-serving, each of these qualities show how we act and react to others.

In our Mainly Music Team meetings, before our sessions, we talk and pray that we will be different so that the families and caregivers can wonder what makes us different to then open the door to sharing about Jesus. Jesus was different. In the society back in 30 AD, he showed uncompromising love and acceptance for all. He stood up for those who were outsiders and expelled from normal society and through love made them whole. He used and showed every possible fruit given by the Spirit to show that He was different. People were drawn to these differences and wanted to know more. The most amazing act was when Jesus went to the cross for you and me – He loves us so much.

Each of us has unlimited access to the Holy Spirit and the fruits and gifts that He provides for each of us. I pray that you will be different and that you will show others that Jesus is your Saviour by how you act and behave. Society is quick to label and ostracise; it is not easy to be different. So rather, show that you are a Christian by your love.

God helps us through the Holy Spirit – don't forget to use this amazing power!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you that you were different and that I have an example of a true servant to follow. Help me to not be ashamed of you and the Gospel, but to shine out to all displaying the fruits of the Spirit. Amen.



Being Enlightened

27th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."
Ephesians 1:18-19a (NIV)

The Pixar movie 'Inside Out' was released in 2015. My children were teenagers, and I could really relate to the plot and the workings of a teenage mind. Pete Docter conceived this movie after observing changes in his own daughter's personality as she grew older. The storyline is as follows and for those who haven't seen it and have teenagers, it can be an eye-opener. *'Inside Out follows the personified emotions – Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust – inside the mind of 11-year-old Riley, who is forced to move from Minnesota to San Francisco. When a struggle between Joy and Sadness leads to core memories being lost and personality islands crumbling, Joy and Sadness embark on a dangerous journey to return to Headquarters, ultimately realising that all emotions especially Sadness, are vital for Riley's well-being and growth.'* [Wikipedia]

Read through the Bible reading for today again (Ephesians 1:15–23). All that God has done in sending Jesus to pay the debt of my sin brings so many emotions within me. I am grateful, thankful, filled with joy, but also with sadness as I know the pain that it cost both Jesus and God. In the above passage, Paul prays that God may open the eyes of the people of Ephesus to the extreme love God has for them and the workings of the Holy Spirit as he brings wisdom and knowledge to their lives about how much God has done and will do in each of their lives. Paul is telling us that too!

God loves you so much love that He sent His only Son to the cross as a willing sinless Saviour. God then raised Jesus from the dead after a gruesome death and is seated with God and now rules for eternity. God has given Jesus all power and authority. But, even with this incredible reign and dominion, you and I were chosen to live with Him. Celebrate with joy and thanksgiving!

You have been chosen to enter Heaven – live like that matters!

Prayer: Help me Lord Jesus to understand all that you are saying to me through your Word, the Bible. So often I take things for granted and don't try to get it. You are always patient with me, thank you. Amen.

You Have Been Called

28th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: *Ephesians 4:1-6*

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV)

Have you ever felt that God has called you to something? Was it a feeling of foreboding, or was it a feeling of excitement? The church uses the 'calling' process for congregations to ask a Pastor to come and be their pastor. When I was in LTC (Lutheran Teachers College) back in the 1980's, the church also used this 'calling' process for teachers. I know that when people were sent to Papua New Guinea as missionaries – they were also 'called'. Is it only 'super-Christians' that can be 'called' to serve God? No, I don't believe that is the case. Each one of us is 'called' by God to work in His kingdom.

Four years ago, I felt an urging by the Spirit to start a young children's ministry. Mainly Music started in our church, just through having a feeling that God wanted me to do something for families and children. God is calling each of us, all the time to do something special for Him. Maybe to talk to that group at work who sit off by themselves. Maybe it is to begin a new initiative within the church. Maybe it is to put your hand up to usher, play an instrument, lead a small group, participate in a small group. Jesus called the disciples to be His followers; He is also calling you to be His follower. What is God calling you to do?

In the Bible reading from Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul talks about us all to live a life worthy of being called by God. What does that look like? We are to be humble, patient, forgiving, loving and bring peace. Sometimes this can seem like a big ask when life is just turning us all upside down with demands pulling us everywhere. But I have always found it interesting that when God wants us to do something He always makes a way for it to happen. Each of us are called to serve God where we are and He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us. It is so good to know where our hope and help come from.

You have been called by God – what does this look like?

Prayer: *Loving Saviour, thank you for calling me into your service. I don't yet know how you want me to serve but open my eyes and ears to hear and see what you have in store for me. Amen.*



Our Hope is Assured

5th Sunday during Lent

Read: *Philippians 1:3-11*

“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

“Jesus is coming back someday.
Could be tomorrow, could be today!
Jesus is coming back I know
for the Holy Spirit told me so”

This was a song I learned while on a Lutheran Youth Encounter Team in the USA. It was a fun song where the leader would choose someone to tell a story (fact or fiction) and then just at the crunch line, the song would start. I remember thinking, wow, Jesus really could come back while I am brushing my teeth or writing a devotion or spending time with family. We just don't know, and in the Bible, it tells us that not even Jesus knows, only our Heavenly Father. That means we need to be ready!

When Jesus comes back, is He really going to take me with Him, or is He going to change His mind at the last minute? That can be a really scary thought, but Paul in the Bible verse tells us that we have this hope of eternal life given to us by the Holy Spirit and so we can be confident that God will be with us always. Thinking about the day of Christ's return should be a joyous thought. But for many it can be scary. Have they done enough? Have they told enough people about Jesus? “What about my family – they won't listen to me!”

Paul assures us that our hope with Jesus is assured, “*all of you share in God's grace with me.*” (verse 7b) God sent His son Jesus to be a substitute for us and take all our sins and wrongdoings on Himself. He took all our burdens, uncertainties and failures to the cross with Him and washed them away with His precious blood. With Jesus doing that for us, we can have the hope of a future life in the presence of a loving Father. God wants this for you and me. Trust and believe in God and that He has your life in His arms.

Be assured, God will take you to be with Him on the day of Christ Jesus!

Prayer: *My dear Jesus, you have saved me through your death and rising from the dead. I know and believe in you and trust that you also have my eternal life in your hands. Amen.*

A Believing Heart

29th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: *Colossians 1:3-6*

“...the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel...”
Colossians 1:5 (NIV)

I have eaten a Toblerone chocolate quite a few times. It is the chocolate nougat bar shaped in a triangle and has a mountain picture on the packet. It was only last year when my son took us to the Matterhorn in Switzerland and we took a Toblerone chocolate with us that I saw the correlation between the chocolate and the mountain. I had been told that the mountain looked the shape of the chocolate, seen pictures and even drawings (on the box). But it was only when having the mountain and the chocolate together and right in front of me that I finally saw it. A Toblerone chocolate piece really is the shape of the Matterhorn (one of the highest mountains in the Alps and Europe).

I was told about this fact. I saw pictures. I had people tell me about it. But it took a personal experience to finally believe it. We have heard about God's love for us, we have read about Jesus' life, death and resurrection just for us in the Bible, we have seen movies and pictures, but do you really believe all that God has told us. Paul wrote to the people in Colossae encouraging them and praying that they would understand the Gospel of Jesus and take it to their hearts. It is so important to pray for each other now as well. We have been told about it so many times and how He has an eternal life prepared for us. I believe this and have this hope. Do you?

Our belief and faith will show itself in bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit and also by wanting to make sure everyone knows about Jesus. God wants all people to be saved and for them all to be a part of His family. Just having faith in a god is not good enough. Christianity is all about Jesus and what Christ has done for us through the cross. Universalism will not get us to heaven – only through Jesus can we be saved!

The love of Jesus is for all – share this love and maybe a Toblerone!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to know and experience your love and take it into my heart and life. You have given me a mission to spread the Gospel. Guide my words and actions that others will know this love. Amen.*



Remembering God

30th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-6

"We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV)

"A teenager was sitting in the pastor's office saying, 'Sometimes I don't think I am a Christian. I don't seem to have the same interest and excitement, or enthusiasm I once did. It isn't easy for me to remember God, to come to church, and to pray. It is too easy to find excuses to stay away from church and then to make those excuses into reasons why I should stay away. Pastor, I know God hasn't left me, but boy I sure feel as if I have left Him.'

The pastor said, 'Remember the time your father was away from home on those long business trips? Was it difficult for you to remember him?' 'Not a bit,' the boy said, 'I had letters from him, and I kept thinking about him, and he sent me gifts in the mail so I would remember him.' 'Suppose' said the pastor, 'There were no letters, no gifts and you never mentioned his name in conversation around the house. What then???' 'Then, maybe, I would have forgotten about him. That would have made a difference,' said the boy.

'Well,' said the pastor, 'that is the way it is with God. Sure, it is tough to remember God, it is tough to stay a Christian in this world. But God has given us His Word, like your father's letters, to remember Him. God has given us His gifts of Holy Communion & Baptism as a physical reminder of His love for us, like the gifts your father sent you. God also wants us to include Him in our conversations, not just on Sunday, but throughout the week, so that we will remember Him. It is tough to stay a Christian, it is tough to remember God doesn't leave you, it is tough to keep a relationship with God alive, exciting and fresh. God is working on His end, and He wants you to continue to work on your end. He has given you all the tools, necessary, only, you have to decide if you will use them.'" [by Tim Zingale]

Try this: Work produced by faith, labour prompted by love and endurance inspired by hope!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the work you do to help me grow in faith and in knowledge of your love. Guide me as I grow in faith, love and hope. I believe that you are my God and I want to know you better. Amen.

Prize of Salvation

31st Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: *2 Timothy 2:1-10*

“...and so I endure everything for the sake of God’s chosen people, in order that they too may obtain the salvation that comes through Christ Jesus and brings eternal glory.” 2 Timothy 2:10 (GNT)

When we lived in Loxton my husband had a little TJ Jeep which he used to love to drive around the town. One beautiful Saturday our family decided to pile in this little Jeep with a picnic lunch and the top off to go and explore Sunset National Park, which is just across the border into Victoria. Being in the Mallee region, the earth was red and dusty, and we drove on mostly unsealed roads. The dust got into everything – through the Jeep, our clothes, hair and even into our ears! Driving through Sunset National Park (633,000 hectares) was beautiful, seeing all the wildflowers, the pink lakes and the old pine log tank. We ended up having lunch at the Millewa Pioneer Park in Meringur and were surprised with all that it offered, but first we needed to find water to clean ourselves.

Just as our family had to go through the trials of eating dust to reach our goal, so too we experience hard times to then be promised the hope of the glory and salvation set aside for us in heaven. We don't know what we may find as we travel through our lives. There may be dusty patches where everything seems to stick and you can't see a way out, but then we focus on what we can see – the flowers, the beauty, the unusual and the hope of being washed clean from all that covers us. Each day we can declare we have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus through remembering our baptism. Do that when you have a shower!

There is much for us to endure in the time we have on this earth, just as Paul talks to Timothy in his letter. He encourages Timothy to keep his eyes fixed on the prize of salvation and eternal glory. So also, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and what He has done for us. At Millewa Pioneer Park we were surprised by what we found – cottages, railway buildings, school, church, barns and no ticket office, just a donation box. God has prepared a place for us – it's free and we will be surprised!

With endurance comes salvation!

Prayer: Lord God, you have told me that there will be things to endure in this world. Help me to endure with patience and faith, knowing that what you have prepared for me is beyond anything I could imagine. Amen.



God Promises You

32nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Titus 1:1-3

“... in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised from the beginning of time...” Titus 1:2 (NIV)

I don't like to work in silence. I have Christian music playing in the background while I write and work. I find that it inspires me and doesn't make me feel like I am alone. I have worked out of my home in a study for the last 9 years and most of the time am alone in the house. When I have a blockage with my thoughts or words, I just stop and listen carefully to the lyrics of the songs and more times than not I get inspiration. I have just been listening to the words from the Christian musician, Jeremy Camp and the words to the song, 'Same Power'. Here is part of what I heard:

The same power that rose Jesus from the grave
The same power that commands the dead to wake
Lives in us, lives in us
The same power that moves mountains when He speaks
The same power that can calm a raging sea
Lives in us, Lives in us
We have hope that His promises are true
In His strength there is nothing we can't do
Yes, we know there are greater things in store
We will not be overtaken. We will not be overcome.
[Jeremy Camp]

It shouldn't amaze me how God works through things and people. When we seek God, we will find Him. We have been told by Jesus, that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we can move mountains. As it is written in the lyrics above, we have this same power! God has promised us from the beginning of time that we are His children and that we will be with Him always – God doesn't lie – so, we can have hope in all His promises. God sent Jesus who came as a substitute for all our sins. Next week is Holy Week as we follow Jesus to the cross and see all God's promises come true! We can live knowing that we have the hope of Eternal Life with Him.

Live in the hope of knowing all God's promises are true!

Prayer: Loving God, you have promised me life forever with you. I can live each day in hope knowing that all that you have promised me is true and sure. My hope lies in your love and promises. Amen.

Blessed Hope

33rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: *Titus 2:11-14*

“... while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ...” Titus 2:13 (NIV)

The story is told of a young girl who left work early so she could have some uninterrupted study time right before a final exam in religion class. She studied all night. When she arrived at class in the morning everybody was cramming as much last-minute info as their minds could handle. The teacher walked in and said, “Let’s do a quick review before the test.” They followed him through the review that was laid out on the study guide. As he covered item by item, he finally jumped to issues the young girl had never heard covered in class. Several hands went up, “We never had that information before.” The teacher picked up the textbook and held it in his left hand and said, “Everything is in the book, and you need to know everything in the book.”

Finally, it was time to take the test. The assistants passed out the test and the professor said, “Leave your test face down on the desk until everyone has one. I’ll tell you when to turn your paper over and start.” Two minutes later the class heard, “OK, you may start.” When the young girl turned her test over, every answer was filled in! A note at the bottom of the last page said: “Your Final Exam is now over. All your answers are correct. You are blessed with an ‘A’ on the final exam.” Every student read the same thing and looked up at the professor in utter astonishment! When the professor was sure all eyes were on him, he said, “You passed the test for one reason only – because the creator of the test took the test for you. All your study time, class time and hard work in preparation for this exam did not help you get the “A”. You have just experienced – GRACE.” [author unknown]

God does the same thing for us. No matter what we have done in this life to try and achieve salvation, it is all in vain. God has done everything for us through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, so we can have eternal life.

Through Jesus we have this blessed hope!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are my Saviour and the Lord of my life. Thank you for your grace and the gift of salvation you have blessed me with. Help me to always remember it is in only you that I have this blessed hope. Amen.*



Eternal Hope

34th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: *Titus 3:3-8*

“... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:7 (NIV)

For his birthday, I gave my husband a subscription to the website – ‘My Heritage’. Since travelling to Europe last year and doing a pilgrimage through my family’s heritage towns in Poland and Harz Mountains, Germany and then Mark’s family towns throughout Denmark; even through all the Martin Luther heritage places, we have become excited about knowing more about our family history. Not only finding out their names and places and dates but also trying to find out who they were and about their faith. Why did our families want to travel a long and unknown journey to Australia and USA? What drove them to leave their families and church?

Mark has been able to trace one of his ancestors back to the 1600’s on the tiny island of **Aero**, one of Denmark’s islands. Apparently, generations have lived there and grown up on this little island. We are the heirs of all our ancestor’s faith wherever they lived as families. Our faith has been passed down through the faithfulness of our ancestors who are now experiencing the eternal hope of life with God. Our ancestors were not perfect, nor did they have perfect lives and never sinned. But one thing that was passed on is that we are forgiven through the love of a loving Father who sent his Son and heir to suffer for us and bring us justification (forgiveness) for our wrongdoings.

God gave this to us freely because we are His children and he has made us heirs of His kingdom. All those faithful who have gone before us are enjoying their eternal home. We can also read of all the faithful people of God in the Bible. God saved them, not because He had to, but because He wanted all to inherit eternal life. Our God is a generous and loving Father wanting all to come to know Him. Help the future generations to come to know Jesus. They are also heirs, but they just need to know Him.

Remember, God’s family extends beyond us... make sure they know!

Prayer: *My dear loving Father, you have loved and cared for me before I was even born. Your love extends through generations. Help me to teach my family about the love of a faithful Father. Amen.*

Christ Our Hero

Palm/Passion Sunday

Read: Hebrews 3:1-6

“But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”
Hebrews 3:6 (NIV)

Many have heard of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) for his unfailing faith and hope in His Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and expressed anti-Nazi sentiments during WW2 for which he was imprisoned for two years. Due to his resistance to the Nazi regime, he was hung for his beliefs in Flossenbürg Concentration Camp one month before the end of WW2 in Europe. He was considered a hero of the faith, for he served as an example of faithfulness to his Lord. He never thought himself a hero, rather Dietrich emphasised that the greatest heroism and salvation comes from Jesus Christ.

Today is Palm Sunday and we celebrate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as a King. Later this week we see the sentiments change very quickly, with Jesus being sentenced to death as a usurper and troublemaker by the very people He was trying to save. But today we see Him being heralded as a King. People saw Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a martyr of the faith, but really it is Jesus who Dietrich was defending who was the martyr. Bonhoeffer was faithful to the end, but Jesus has been faithful to His Heavenly Father from the beginning of time. Jesus returned to Jerusalem knowing that He was going to His death, but the people greeted Him with loud ‘Hosannas’ – He was coming to be their King and Saviour.

The people of the time wanted Jesus as an earthly King to overthrow the Roman Government, but Jesus came to overthrow the power that sin and death has on everyone. He came as a Heavenly King. This is the hope that we hold on to. We have a hope and confidence in Jesus as our Saviour. The Bible verse encourages all believers to hold tight to this hope and to remain faithful to the end. Bonhoeffer and other heroes of the faith were faithful to their Lord and Saviour which remind us to also hold fast to our faith and hope.

Jesus Christ remains faithful to us, let us remain faithful to Him!

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you love me with an everlasting love. Your grace and love bring me the hope of salvation and life everlasting with you. Hosanna in the Highest! Amen.*



My Secure Anchor

35th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Hebrews 6:16-20

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”
Hebrews 6:19a (NIV)

While living in Loxton we got ourselves a little runabout boat to tour the Murray River and to have some fun with inflatables that we pulled behind it. One weekend we took the boat out for a picnic to have on board with the children. We motored to a lovely inlet just off the main Murray (Katarapko Creek) and my husband put down the anchor. The Murray River is a dangerous river, for there are swift undercurrents as well as holes in the river floor. It is very important to wear a life jacket. We were not planning on swimming as the weather was cool. But... that was until our anchor became stuck and wedged on a tree root. I volunteered to go in (with a life jacket) to untangle the anchor. We were close to shore, so I thought it wasn't deep – that was before going in and finding the water over my head. My husband had a hold of my life jacket the whole time I tried to untangle the anchor. I finally got it free, and the boat started to drift off. But my husband kept ahold of me.

I really love the analogy that Paul uses for God as an anchor. There are so many things around us that keep changing – circumstances with family, finances, jobs; but that is what is so wonderful about God – He will never let go of us in any circumstance. This is the hope that we hold onto. This can encourage us when faced with seemingly calm waters, but underneath are huge currents and holes which can cause us to go under. God holds onto us in all and every situation. He is a firm and secure anchor!

We are going through Holy Week. Yesterday we celebrated with the King entering Jerusalem, today we walk with Jesus towards the cross. For God to send His Son to the cross for our sake, sealed our salvation. God's love for us is unwavering – He has promised us eternal life, and He sealed it for us forever with an oath. His sinless Son would take our sin upon Himself on the cross and then rise to glory.

This promise for us is sure!

Prayer: *My loving Father, thank you that you hold onto me and will never let me go. You love me with an unfailing love. Help me to share the hope of life eternal with you. Amen.*

Full Assurance

36th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Hebrews 10:19-23

“...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:22-23 (NIV)

As a child, I remember our family really enjoyed fish and seafood of all sorts. One year I remember we got together with friends and went crabbing at some mudflats near Adelaide. We had to have old shoes on – in case the crabs got our toes – and a bucket and spade. I was younger so I went with an adult. The way to find crabs is to look for the bubbles on the surface of the very wet sand/mud and then dig down with a spade and see what comes up. I remember getting so dirty with mud and sand that my father would not let us in the car until we had washed the mud off. We ended up getting quite a few crabs that we shared between the families. Quite a feast!

You may also remember times when you got dirty, muddy or just covered with dust. Every day we get dirty – if not on the outside, it's on the inside when we do wrong things, hurt someone else, or even think bad things. That is where it is important to be washed. We can do the outside with a shower or bath, but it is only God who can clean us on the inside. In the Bible verse above we read that Jesus cleans us through the sprinkling of water (baptism) and in verses 19 and 20 we are told that it is by the blood of Jesus that we can be totally cleansed and brought before God as His holy people.

We are another day closer to Good Friday when Jesus suffered and died for our sake. Why do we call it 'Good' Friday? Because that is the day that Jesus (the Son of God) put His life on the line for all our dirtiness and wrongdoing which made us unacceptable to God. Through the precious blood of Jesus and what He did for us on the cross we can draw close to God with full assurance of our forgiveness.

Hold onto this faith and the hope – for God's promises are sure and He is faithful.

Prayer: *My Saviour Jesus, thank you for cleaning me inside and out so that I can be forgiven and acceptable in your Father's sight. You bless me each day with the full assurance of this forgiveness. Amen.*



Our Inheritance

37th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-9

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”

1 Peter 1:3-4a (NIV)

Money can be a good thing that helps, but also one that divides families. I have heard stories and seen movies where in the reading of the will of a deceased family member, arguments occur, division and rifts happen between families when family members do not receive what they feel they deserve. There are also other families who do not think about the inheritance but rather feel blessed when some help comes their way. There are stories in the Bible where these issues also occur – one that comes to mind is the Prodigal Son story (Luke 15:11–32). People throughout the ages, in the Bible, in royal families, whether rich or poor, have squabbled over inheritance and riches.

Inheritance depends on the person writing the will and what they feel others deserve. When God writes out His will, we are all included and the inheritance He gives us is eternally amazing. None of us actually deserve God's inheritance – we disobey, we say bad things, we hurt others, we turn away from God and ignore what He asks us. But still, God has given us a way to be cleansed, forgiven, and become worthy of this inheritance. It is not through anything we can do, rather it is everything that God does. He sent His pure and only Son to the cross to suffer for our sake, so that we also get to share the inheritance of Heaven with Jesus.

Our inheritance is being washed clean through Jesus' death and resurrection (He suffered for us). Then we get to join in the riches that are ours in Heaven and in living with God eternally. As Christians we have this hope for we have faith and believe that God is truly our Heavenly Father and that we are His children. This inheritance cannot be taken away from us and is more precious than diamonds or gold. Be filled with joy and thank and praise our loving God for what He has given us.

Our inheritance is the salvation of our souls!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for allowing me to share in the inheritance of your Father. You died for me so that I can be clean and forgiven. Help me to live a life worthy of your love and sacrifice. Amen.

Through the Blood

38th Day in Lent (Maundy Thursday)

Read: 1 Peter 1:18-25

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed for the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, so your faith and hope are in God." 1 Peter 1:18-21 (NIV)

In the Old Testament we read much about sacrificing animals on altars built to God. It was through this act that God would forgive, and the people's sin could be atoned (apologised for/forgiven). The ritual of sacrificing the life blood of an animal demonstrated that a life was being given in exchange for the sinner's life to temporarily satisfy God's judgement. Blood was also used to seal promises between God and His people, and we read about His promise to Abraham (Genesis 12, 15 & 17) and Moses (Exodus 19 & 20). In each of the stories God's promise was sealed with the blood sacrifice of animals.

But then in the New Testament, the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross is seen as the final and perfect sacrifice once and for all time. It makes the Old Testament sacrifices obsolete (we are not expected to do this anymore). Jesus' blood provides a way for us to be freed (not just temporarily) from sin, which then secures for us forgiveness and redemption (restoration). This was the payment that was required to buy us all back from the slavery of sin and the eternal separation from God. It is through the blood of Jesus that we can have confidence to enter into the presence of God.

Today is Maundy Thursday where we also remember Jesus' blood being given in the Last Supper. Jesus instituted this as a way for us to receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. It is our spiritual nourishment to give us strength to get through each day. The benefits of Holy Communion for us are receiving the 'real presence' of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine. It is there to strengthen our faith, provide comfort and receive the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Holy Communion is a 'means of grace' where God helps us in all our struggles and we can commit ourselves to putting our faith and trust in Him.

Our Hope lies in Jesus' blood shed for us on the cross!

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for remembering me. You ordained Holy Communion to help and encourage me in my faith, and You sent your Son to take my place. Thank you for forgiving me. Amen.



Suffering

39th Day in Lent (Good Friday)

Read: 1 Peter 5:6-11

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” 1 Peter 5:10 (NIV)

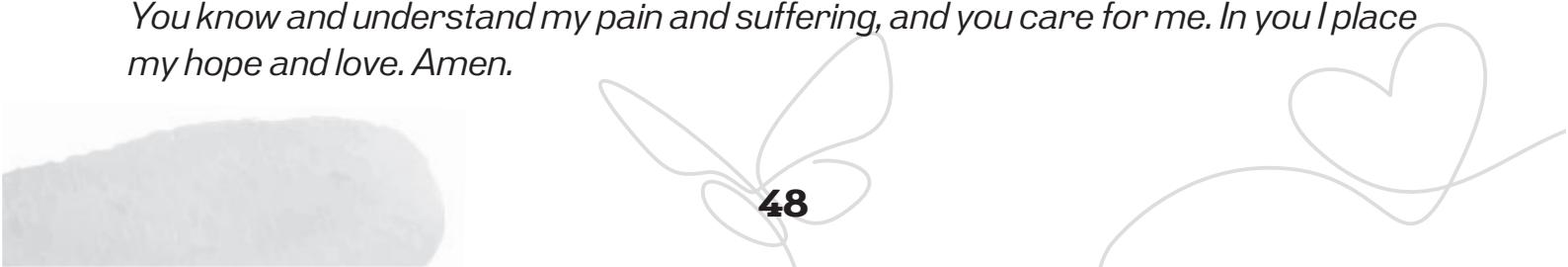
It was around the time of COVID that I suffered horrific pain resulting in the removal of my gall bladder. The sharp pains, the cramping and the restlessness of not being able to get comfortable or be rid of the pain led to deep anxiety and fear. If you haven't been through this, maybe you have had the experiences of intense pain through an accident, joint replacement, or childbirth. Going through such pain can make you stronger, knowing that God is there helping to restore you to bring you back to health and being able to cope.

When I think of what I consider pain and suffering, I am in awe of what our Saviour Jesus went through on the cross, which we remember today. The intense beating and scourging of his flesh, the nailing, the emotional pain of friends leaving, and the sense of abandonment when His Father left Jesus to suffer and die; I know nothing to compare to this! The fact that Jesus went through all this, not because of any wrongdoing on His behalf, but because of all the wrongdoing on our behalf. In this Bible reading in verse 7, Peter tells us to, *“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”* Here we are being reminded that even though we cannot understand this type of suffering, we are to rely on God for strength, because He knows what our suffering is about.

Having a Saviour who has experienced deep pain and suffering, can allow us to bring our cares to Him, for He understands. When sharing personal events and stories with people, we tend to choose someone who understands and will sympathise and empathise with our situation. Support groups for those with illnesses and diseases rely on understanding. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are our support group when troubles and suffering occur. You will be understood and listened to. You will be cared for and given support. Our suffering will only be for a little while, we are assured, for God Himself will restore us and make us strong.

Place your hope in the support of a loving Saviour.

Prayer: Our loving Saviour, thank you for being prepared to suffer and die for me. You know and understand my pain and suffering, and you care for me. In you I place my hope and love. Amen.



Eyes to See

40th Day in Lent (Holy Saturday) Read: Luke 24:13-35

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"
Luke 24:31-32 (NIV)

I am sure there is such a thing as 'man eyes'. I looked it up and it is defined as: "a colloquial term for a specific type of inattentiveness, not about male eyesight, but rather for a person unable to find something they are looking for that is in plain sight." [Reddit] I have heard myself saying when talking to my husband or children who are looking for something, "Are you looking with your man eyes?" I am usually able to find the item that has been searched for quite easily.

The disciples saw Jesus die, they saw him taken from the cross and the women saw where Jesus had been buried. They saw all this happen. So, it is only natural that they would say when asked where he was, that he was dead and buried. Today, we as Christians wait with expectation for the resurrection tomorrow morning. We know the story. But for those who were there, their eyes would tell them that Jesus was dead. He had told them many times, that on the third day he would rise again, but they couldn't forget what they had seen. Some disciples had left Jerusalem in fear after the crucifixion, thinking that they would be next to die, and were walking to another town called Emmaus. They were talking about what had happened over the last days trying to make sense of it all, when another man came up asking questions.

This man listened to their fears and tried to explain what they didn't see. What they didn't see, was the hope that what Jesus had said earlier was true. He revealed some of the mysteries and explained what the eyes cannot see or understand. Finally, Jesus revealed Himself having risen and in bodily form and then He disappeared, but their eyes were opened to the truth. Where are you today? Are you looking at this story with 'man eyes'? Or have you the eyes to see the risen Saviour? I pray that you can see and experience the love and forgiveness of our loving risen Lord this Easter.

May your eyes be opened to see a risen Saviour and the hope He brings.

Prayer: Open my eyes, living Lord Jesus, that I may see and know the love you have for me and all of humankind. Open my heart to others around me to help them understand the hope you bring. Amen.



My Future Hope

Easter Sunday

Read: Revelation 21:1-4

“They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
Revelation 21:3b-4 (NIV)

Today is Easter Sunday and our Lord Jesus has beaten death and the devil and has been raised to live in Heaven with our Heavenly Father. *He is risen indeed!* We focus today on all that God has accomplished through Jesus. Through Jesus' death and rising He has brought us life, and life forever with Him. Revelation is a book of the Bible that is hard to know how to interpret. Many have tried, but we have to be careful not to read into what isn't there. It is the last book of the Bible, and it was written by John telling of his visions. This vision of the future is meant to transform the present, by providing hope and motivating Christians to reflect on the character and values that Christ embodied while with us on earth.

It shares the vision of what heaven will be like when God is present among us. I love reading about the perfection of Heaven. It won't be a restored earth, but a totally new reality where there will be no more suffering, all God's promises will be fulfilled, and we will have a perfect relationship with God (no more sin or separation). This future hope, through the vision of John, provides comfort and encourages all believers to live holy lives here and now in the present. This new creation is divine, not built or created by human hands, but entirely a gift of love from a loving Father. This salvation is ours for all time.

Today we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death, through His rising from the grave. God has through this act of love and grace, given us the same victory over sin and death where we can now come to Him directly as His precious children. Our sins have been forgiven, and we are washed clean. We can now live in the hope of our future with God forever in Heaven.

We can live our future hope now in the present, knowing a loving Saviour loves us unconditionally!

Prayer: *My risen Lord and Saviour, thank you for giving me a glimpse of Heaven through the visions of John. Guide me through my life that I may reflect the love you have for me to those around me. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask you to keep me this day too, from all sin and evil, so that in all my thoughts, words and deeds I may please you. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive all my sin and the wrong which I have done, and graciously keep me this night. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen.

Golden Grove Lutheran Church
21-23 Richardson Drive,
Wynn Vale,
SA, 5127

Ph: 08 7200 0090



An outreach
ministry of the LLL

Lutheran Tract Mission

175 Archer Street North Adelaide SA 5006

Phone: (08) 8360 7222

Web: www.ltm.org.au

Written by: Anne Hansen

Edited by: Bethany Jedlicka

Pictures: Shutterstock