



Easter 2014

Coolangatta Q 4225

## Week 7 : Salvation

The purpose of God's activity throughout the ages has been to bring salvation to his people. In spite of a long history of unfaithfulness, disobedience and rebellion on the part of God's people, God remains faithful. Nothing we do can separate us from God's love. Jesus demonstrated that love in its fullness, even to death on a cross. It is a love that even the grave cannot overcome. Our salvation history is, above all, a story of God's love, a gift of grace. Grace is never cheap. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote "*cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*" (The Cost of Discipleship) Salvation is the free gift of God and cannot be earned, even by the most righteous person, because God is never in our debt. Everything we do is in response to what God has first done for us.

**Sunday:** 1 Corinthians 15.1-11 *Paul proclaims the resurrection of Christ*

**Monday:** Luke 19.1-10 *Salvation comes to Zacchaeus' house*

**Tuesday:** Philippians 2.1-11 *Be imitators of Christ*

**Wednesday:** Ephesians 1.3-14 *The blessings we have received from God*

**Thursday:** Romans 3.21-26 *The gift of grace through Christ's redemption*

**Friday:** 2 Corinthians 5.16-21 *A new creation, reconciled to God*

**Saturday:** Revelation 21.1-7 *A new heaven and a new earth*

**Pray** • Give thanks for God's salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection

• That all people may turn to God and be saved

Prayer of the week

**Action: This is a week for rejoicing. Tell someone about God's love.**

Dear Friends,

An important word in theology is *Heilsgechichte*. It is a German word which literally means "salvation history". It refers to God's saving acts in history as catalogued in both testaments of the Bible. As Lent and Easter approach, I thought it would be good to look at *heilsgechichte*, because what we are doing during this season is living the story of salvation history. We begin with an acknowledgement of our mortality on Ash Wednesday, knowing that one day we will all die – a knowledge that came to the first people as they were banished from the garden at the beginning of the story and cut off from the tree of life. The season ends on Easter day with the promise that death has been turned into new life, a life into eternity that we may all share. A new phase in the history of our salvation has begun.

This Easter prayer leaflet covers seven weeks and each week we will look at a stage in our salvation history. We begin on week 1 with our mortality – who we are as human beings. In weeks 2 and 3 we will look at who God is and the covenant relationship God establishes. Weeks 4 and 5 consider God's requirements of his people and our failure to comply. The final weeks consider God's forgiveness and salvation. There is a reading for each day, plus a reflection, prayer and action for the week. I pray that we will all experience afresh and with joy the wonder of the story of God's salvation.

Love and blessings, Sue

### ***Daily Prayer for Lent***

O Lord, look with favour on us, your people, and impart your love to us – not as a concept, but as a lived experience. Let these weeks become an opportunity for us to let go of all our resistances to your love, and an occasion for you to call us closer to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[from Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Show Me The Way*]

### **Week 1 : *Who are we, that you should care for us?***

We all know that we are far from perfect human beings. I guess that is where our journey begins: with our failures, our frailties, our *human-ness*. The ash that is applied to our foreheads on Ash Wednesday reinforces this understanding, and yet it is also a symbol of hope because the ash is formed into the shape of a cross. Even though we are mortal, we are made in the image of God. We belong to God; we are part of God's people. In spite of our failings, we know that we can always turn back to God in genuine repentance, secure in the knowledge that God we are loved and forgiven. God wants us to turn to him and live.

**Sunday:** Genesis 1.26-31 *What does it mean to be created in God's image?*

**Monday:** Psalm 8.3-9 *See the high esteem in which God holds us*

**Tuesday:** 1 Corinthians 12.4-11 *Gifted by God's Spirit to do God's work*

**Wednesday:** Isaiah 43.1-4a *We belong to God, and he loves us*

**Thursday:** John 3.16-17 *Jesus did not come to condemn but to save us*

**Friday:** Romans 8.14-17 *We are members of God's family: his children*

**Saturday:** Genesis 3.22-24 *And yet we are mortal, fallible people*

**Pray** • Give thanks that we are loved and valued children of God

• That we might trust in God in times of difficulty and distress

Prayer of the Week

**Action: Give something of yourself to someone else this week.**

### **Week 6 : Forgiveness**

Fortunately, failure is not the end of the story. The story of our salvation is, above all, the story of forgiveness. The warnings and condemnation of the prophets are interspersed with oracles of salvation. It is as if God is saying "It will not always be like this." John proclaimed a repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins; Jesus never condemned the sinner – only those who thought they had no sin. On the cross he forgave the repentant criminal. He forgave Peter and all who had failed him at the end. He would have forgiven Judas. He forgave Paul who persecuted him. As he hung on the cross he prayed for forgiveness for those who had put him there: "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*". Jesus makes the same prayer for us. And God will also forgive us.

**Sunday:** Jeremiah 33.1-9 *God promises to heal, cleanse, restore and forgive*

**Monday:** Psalm 103.8-12 *As far as the east is from the west*

**Tuesday:** 1 John 1.5-10 *Everyone has sinned, but all will be forgiven*

**Wednesday:** Romans 5.6-11 *God's great love, even for sinners like us*

**Thursday:** John 8.1-11 *In Christ there is no condemnation*

**Friday:** Luke 23.39-43 *The gates of Paradise are opened to a convicted criminal*

**Saturday:** 2 Corinthians 5.16-21 *Now forgiveness is up to us!*

**Pray** • Give thanks that God renews us through His love and forgiveness

• That we too might be loving and forgiving people

Prayer of the week

**Action: Practice forgiveness – for every harsh word and anything that hurts you this week, for this is what God does and requires of us.**

## **Week 5 : Failure**

Failure is a recurrent theme in the history of our salvation. Even St Paul recognised that it is one thing to know what we should do but quite another to actually do it. As Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist anything but temptation." The first people failed to resist the seducing voice of the tempter. After being freed from Egypt, the congregation of the Israelites failed in covenant faithfulness and worshipped idols. The prophets pointed out the people's failure and saw it as the reason for exile, first in Assyria and then in Babylon. Only Jesus resisted the temptation to turn away from God. Despite our best intentions, we also often fail to be the people God wants us to be.

**Sunday:** Genesis 3.1-7 *The first failure leads to shame, banishment and death*

**Monday:** Exodus 32.1-8 *God's deliverance from Egypt is forgotten*

**Tuesday:** Jeremiah 2.1-8, 12-13 *God's laments the apostasy of the people*

**Wednesday:** Matthew 4.1-11 *Jesus is tempted in the wilderness*

**Thursday:** Romans 7.14-24 *Paul recognises the conflict within us*

**Friday:** Hebrews 4.14-16 *Jesus also recognises the difficulties we encounter*

**Saturday:** James 1.12-16 *Hold fast through trial and temptation*

**Pray** • Give thanks for those times when we have the strength to resist temptation

• Pray to be forgiven when we fail and strengthened to do better

Prayer of the week

**Action: Is failure in the past holding you back? Let it go and move on.**

## **Week 2 : Who shall I say you are?**

There is a hymn in TiS called "God of Many Names". And yet when Moses asked God his name the answer he got was simply "I Am". God is supreme Being and cannot be defined by human language. God can only be known by his character: almighty, holy, eternal and by his deeds: Redeemer, Saviour, Lord. For the Jews God was Deliverer, the One who with mighty hand and outstretched arm brought them out of slavery in Egypt, out on bondage in Babylon. For Christians God is revealed in Jesus Christ – through signs and wonders, through his teaching and ministry, but above all in his death and resurrection. Jesus himself said, "I am the Father are one". We can only know who God is because God chooses to reveal himself to us: in the Scriptures, in Jesus and in each other. It has been said that Thomas Aquinas, a great 13<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, theologian and scholar of the Church, left his great written work unfinished after an experience during the Eucharist because "All I have written seems to me like so much straw compared with what I have seen and what has been revealed to me."

**Sunday:** Genesis 1.1-3 and John 1.1-5 *God's Word has creative power*

**Monday:** Exodus 3.1-15 *God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush*

**Tuesday:** Deuteronomy 4.32-40 *There is no god like our God*

**Wednesday:** John 14.8-14 *Whoever has seen Jesus has seen God*

**Thursday:** 1 John 4.7-16 *God is perfect love*

**Friday:** Acts 2.22-24 *The God of power, who raised Jesus from the dead*

**Saturday:** Ephesians 1.3-14 *The God who blesses his people*

**Pray** • Give thanks for all we know of God and what has been revealed to us

• That we might love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength

Prayer of the week

**Action: Praise God every day this week for all of God's blessings.**

### **Week 3 : Covenant relationship**

The history of our salvation is the history of God establishing a relationship with his people. At the beginning of creation, God walks with his people in the garden in the cool of day, calling out to them. It is their disobedience and rebellion that causes them to be cut off from God, and this pattern continues throughout the pages of Scripture. God makes a covenant with Abraham, Noah and David, seeking to establish a relationship which will be a source of blessing to them throughout the generations. Time and again God promises, "You will be my people and I will be your God". God is faithful to the covenant, but God's people are not. Disobedience and rebellion continue to sever their relationship with God. God calls to them through the prophets to "Return to me". The New Testament opens with John the Baptist proclaiming God's rule and calling the people to repentance and a return to God. Jesus' death and resurrection established the basis for a new relationship with God. The promised blessings of the covenant are now available for all who believe in him. Our relationship with God has been restored. His blood shed is the blood of the new covenant.

**Sunday:** Genesis 3.8-12 *Disobedience and rebellion destroy a close relationship with God*

**Monday:** Genesis 17.1-8 *God's promise of covenant blessing to Abraham*

**Tuesday:** Exodus 24.1-8 *The people promise to obey the covenant*

**Wednesday:** Jeremiah 31.31-34 *The promise of a new covenant*

**Thursday:** Ezekiel 16.59-63 *An everlasting covenant*

**Friday:** Matthew 26.26-29 *The institution of the new covenant*

**Saturday:** Hebrews 8.6-7, 9.11-15 *Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant*

**Pray** · Give thanks that God remains faithful to the covenant promises  
· Pray for renewed determination to develop our relationship with God

Prayer of the week

**Action: Renew a relationship that you have neglected.**

### **Week 4 : What does the Lord require of us?**

This question echoes through the pages of Scripture. To be in a covenant relationship with God means that we will seek to be faithful to God and obedient to God's commandments. In the beginning this represented a single prohibition. Of all the beautiful trees in the garden, there was only one that was not to be touched. One simple requirement. The Ten Commandments were given to Moses to teach the people how to live in harmony with God and with each other. They were given for the benefit of the people, and were to be obeyed as a loving response to all that God had done. As St Paul was later to emphasise, obedience to the law was never intended to be the means by which salvation was earned or merited.

**Sunday:** Genesis 2.15-17 *A single prohibition – and a choice to be made!*

**Monday:** Exodus 20.1-17 *The Ten Best Ways to Live with God and each other*

**Tuesday:** Deuteronomy 10.12-21 *The essence of the law*

**Wednesday:** Luke 3.7-14 *What does our baptism mean to us?*

**Thursday:** Luke 18.18-26 *What must we do to inherit eternal life?*

**Friday:** Acts 2.37-41 *The appropriate response to the gospel message*

**Saturday:** John 13.31-35 *The New Commandment*

**Pray** · Give thanks for all who have taught us obedience to God  
commands

- Pray for police, magistrates, and all who enforce our laws
- Pray for law-breakers, those in our prisons and all awaiting trial

Prayer of the week

**Action: Give to a charity that assists those who have transgressed the law**