

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga**

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**13<sup>th</sup> September, 2020**

**We prepare ourselves for worship 'Every Promise'**

- 1 From the breaking of the dawn  
To the setting of the sun,  
I will stand on every promise of Your word.  
Words of power, strong to save,  
That will never pass away,  
I will stand on every promise of Your word.  
For Your covenant is sure,  
And on this I am secure,  
I can stand on every promise of Your word.**
  
- 2 When I stumble and I sin,  
Condemnation pressing in,  
I will stand on every promise of Your word.  
You are faithful to forgive,  
That in freedom I might live,  
So I stand on every promise of Your word.  
Guilt to innocence restored:  
You remember sins no more!  
So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.**
  
- 3 When I'm faced with anguished choice,  
I will listen for Your voice,  
And I'll stand on every promise of Your word.  
Through this dark and troubled land  
You will guide me with your hand  
As I stand on every promise of Your word.  
And you've promised to complete  
Every work begun in me,**

**So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.**

**4 Hope that lifts me from despair,  
Love that casts out every fear,  
As I stand on every promise of Your word.  
Not forsaken, not alone,  
For the Comforter has come,  
And I stand on every promise of Your word.  
Grace sufficient, grace for me,  
Grace for all who will believe,  
We will stand on every promise of Your word.**

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### **The Triune God meets with us**

If we live, we live to the Lord,  
**and if we die, we die to the Lord;**  
so then, whether we live or whether we die,  
**we are the Lord's.** (Rom 14:7,8 NRSV)  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen**

### **We confess our sins to God the Father...**

Friends in Christ:

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.  
**We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of  
heaven, and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word and  
deed, by our own fault.  
Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to  
eternal life. Amen.**

### **...and God forgives us**

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of  
all our sins.

**Amen.**

**Jesus leads us as we pray**

The Lord be with you

**And also with you.**

Let us pray that we forgive one another. [silence]

Thank you, God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have had mercy on us and have forgiven us through your Son.

**Make us more like him, so that we too forgive one another from the heart. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.**

**Amen.**

**1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets**

**Genesis 50:15-21** *Joseph is reconciled with his brothers*

<sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" <sup>16</sup> So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: <sup>17</sup> 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

<sup>18</sup> His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## **We respond with Psalm 103:1-7, 8-13**

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits—
- <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- <sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

**<sup>6</sup> The Lord works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.**

- <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- <sup>8</sup> The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

**<sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him**

## **2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles**

## **Romans 14:1-12** *The strong and the weak faith*

<sup>1</sup> Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. <sup>2</sup> One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

<sup>5</sup> One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. <sup>6</sup> Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

<sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. <sup>11</sup> It is written:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,  
‘every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## **Gospel Reading – God speaks through Jesus**

**Matthew 18:21-35** *Parable of the unforgiving servant*

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I

forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

<sup>26</sup> "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

<sup>28</sup> "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

<sup>30</sup> "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

<sup>32</sup> "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

<sup>35</sup> "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that God forgives us for your sake.

**Help us to forgive one another.**

**Amen.**

## Children's Message

### We meditate on the song 'In Your Hand My Saviour'

- 1 In your hand, my Saviour,  
there's a home for me.  
It's the safest place on earth to be.  
There you make me welcome,  
give me a new start,  
for your peace has healed my wounded heart.

*When I'm near my Saviour,  
he gives joy to me.  
God alone, he is my sword and shield.  
When I'm near my Saviour,  
he gives peace to me.  
God shines on each flower in his field.*

- 2 In your hand, my Saviour,  
joyful I can be,  
for you offer precious gifts to me:  
mercy and forgiveness,  
even though I stray.  
Life is now worth living, come what may.

*When I'm near my Saviour,  
he gives joy to me.  
God alone, he is my sword and shield.  
When I'm near my Saviour,  
he gives peace to me.  
God shines on each flower in his field.*

Words and music: Anna-Marie Kaskinen

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## God speaks to us

*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

Sermon for Year A, Proper 19 - Text: Genesis 50:20

We throw around the word “luck” quite a bit. We say things like:

“Good luck for the game tomorrow”.

“With a bit of luck I’ll get through this surgery OK”.

“That was a lucky escape”.

“I’ve finally got a lucky break.”

“I haven’t worked all that hard studying for these exams but with a bit of luck I can pull off a pass”, or when we hear of some freak accident and say, “That was just bad luck. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time”.

Often we use the word “luck” without too much thought about what we are saying but the word implies a lot more than we realise. When we say “Good luck” to a sports person are we saying that he/she will need luck to win because their skills aren’t up to scratch? Do we really believe that luck will change that?

Sometimes we use “luck” to explain why something happens that can’t be explained in any other way than to say it was a matter of luck, or chance or fortune either good or bad. Fate and luck were such popular concepts in the ancient world, especially among the Greeks and Romans.

But in the Bible nothing is left to luck or chance. The Bible gives us a picture of a God who cares, listens and acts behind the scenes of human history and of our lives. His divine providence, wisdom, and foresight oversee everything that happens. Nothing happens that is outside his control. He even uses evil events and people to bring about some good end.

It would be an interesting exercise to go through the Bible to see how many times the words “but God” are used in the same way they are used in today’s text from Genesis. Joseph said to his brothers, “You plotted



evil against me, but God turned it into good". The words "but God" involve some kind of human foolishness or disaster that God uses to bring rescue and blessing and goodness.

Even if the words "but God" aren't actually in the text they could be implied anyway. For example, God commanded Jonah to call the people of Nineveh to turn away from their sinful lives. Jonah didn't like this assignment, ran away, was swallowed by a big fish but God rescued him and saved the people of Nineveh. Or Daniel was thrown into a cage of lions but God sent an angel to shut their mouths and Daniel was unharmed. The king and all the people worshipped God. When David killed Goliath it wasn't just a lucky shot that brought down the giant. David made this clear to Goliath, "You might be big and mean but God will put you in my power and I will defeat you".

Today's reading from a story in the Book of Genesis could be read just as a good luck/bad luck kind of story. It's about Joseph, the bratty spoilt kid in the Old Testament who was given a fancy brightly coloured coat by his father, Jacob. Bad luck for his big brothers that this little kid was their father's favourite. His jealous brothers wanted to do away with the lad but it was just good luck that one of the brothers felt bad about murdering him and so Joseph was sold as a slave. Joseph ended up in Egypt and he got a lucky break and ended up in the house of a rich man. Through a stroke of bad luck he ended up in jail on a trumped up charge of rape. Then through a series of events that could be interpreted as just plain good luck ended up as prime minister to the Egyptian Pharaoh.

In the meantime bad luck struck the brothers because famine wiped out all their crops and so they had to go to Egypt to find food. To cut a long story short when the brothers found out that the Egyptian ruler with whom they had been dealing was the brother they had tried to kill, they really believed their luck had run out. This ruler had total control over them and this would be their end.

But Joseph explains to his brothers that he has no intention of getting back at them for what they had done to him. The brothers were

expecting the worst but Joseph saw things differently. Joseph saw the hand of God behind everything that had happened. He explained it like this to his brothers, “God sent me ahead of you to rescue you in this amazing way and to make sure that you and your descendants survive. So it was not really you who sent me here, but God. He has made me the king's highest official” (Genesis 45:7-8).

It was not by chance that Joseph had risen to a position of power and was able to help his brothers and their families. God had used all the hatred his brothers had for him to save them in the end. Joseph explains, “You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good, in order to preserve the lives of many people today because of what happened” (Genesis 50:20).

Joseph must have wondered, as any of us would, “Why is this happening to me?” or even asked, “God, what are you doing to me? Why are you allowing these things to happen?” It is later as he looked into the rear vision mirror on where he had been that he could say “but God”. All these bad things happened to me and God permitted them to happen but God used them to save my family and their children and the generations to come. God was behind the scenes working good into their evil purposes.

I can't go on without referring to one other “but God” story in the Bible. Peter tells it like this on Pentecost Day, “Jesus was handed over to you; and you killed him by letting sinful men crucify him. But God raised him from death, setting him free from its power, because it was impossible that death should hold him prisoner (Acts 2:22-24). Evil was at work that first Good Friday. An innocent man captured, put on trial, whipped, mocked, cruelly treated and nailed through hands and feet to a cross. What could be more atrocious than that? What seemed to be one of the biggest stuff ups in history becomes the very epitome of love; the beginning of the new possibilities and new hope that would come into human lives.

God used the evil on that day to bring forgiveness and eternal life into

the lives of all people. We could even use Joseph's words here, "God turned the evil into good, in order to preserve the lives of many people". Whenever we hear the words "but God" or they are implied as God uses the circumstances in our lives to bring about good things and blessings, we know that God is always in control. There are times when he permits bad things to happen but they don't happen outside of his control. God allows them to happen for a reason and that reason is always bound up with his love for us. Sometimes and perhaps more often than not we can't see the reason why God permits bad things to happen because his ways and thoughts are far beyond ours. We can't think like God and we don't have the wisdom of God but we can trust his love.

To be sure, the story of Jesus, the cross and the tomb, the story about Joseph and his brothers say very loudly that not everything that happens is good. Horrible things happen - babies die, mothers get cancer, parents abuse children; we have Baghdad, Kabul, Tripoli, Chechnya, Auschwitz, we have famine and war in Africa where people are suffering in a way we can hardly begin to imagine. Every day's news has a story. There is no way in the world we can begin to understand why these things happen on such a massive scale. We know that God doesn't cause evil to happen; the people on this planet do a pretty good job at creating evil without any outside help.

To be sure terrible things happen in our lives—some are our own making and others seem to come out of the blue. It's not a matter of good luck or bad luck. In faith we believe that God is always close by as we travel through dark times and along unfamiliar roads. Joseph didn't know why things happened the way they did as they unfolded and he didn't have the advantage of a crystal ball to see that all the events in his life would end up bringing blessings to his family. But one thing he was certain about – God was travelling along with him.

Like Abraham who obeyed God and packed up everything and travelled to an unknown destination, like David who defied the giant Goliath, like Daniel whose obedience to God meant persecution, like Peter and the

other disciples whose loyalty to Jesus made life hard and in the end cost them their lives, like Joseph who must have often wondered where life was taking him, we too are on a journey and we don't know what lies around the corner, but we do know who is travelling with us.

Don't rely on luck to get through but on the sure and certain love of God that we know through Jesus. It's the kind of love that is persistent, committed and never gives up; the kind of love that gives us peace and contentment even when we are totally confused about the events of our lives.

As you leave this worship service, my parting words to you will not be, "Good luck". Rather, I will remind you that as you go out into the world, you do not go alone; you go with each other and God goes with you. No matter what this week may bring, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will remain with you and bless and protect you and give you the peace that comes from knowing that it's not luck that controls your life but the loving hand of almighty God.

### **We confess our faith in the Triune God**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried.**

**He descended into hell.**

**The third day he rose again from the dead.**

**He ascended into heaven,  
and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,  
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,**

the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

*\* 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

### We meditate on the song 'In Thee Is Gladness'

- 1 In thee is gladness, amid all sadness,  
Jesus, sunshine of my heart.  
By thee are given the gifts of heaven,  
thou the true Redeemer art.  
Our souls thou makest, our bonds thou breakest;  
who trusts thee surely hath built securely,  
and stands forever. Alleluia!  
Our hearts are pining to see thy shining;  
dying or living, to thee are cleaving;  
naught can us sever. Alleluia!
- 2 Since He is ours, we fear no powers,  
not of earth nor sin or death.  
He sees and blesses in worst distresses,  
and can change them with a breath.  
Wherefore the story tell of His glory  
with heart and voices; all heaven rejoices,  
singing forever; Alleluia!  
We shout for gladness, triumph o'er sadness,  
loving and praising, and still shall raise Him  
glad hymns forever: Alleluia!

*In dir ist Freude /Johann Lindemann? (1549-1631)  
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### We give of ourselves

Thank you, Lord, for your great mercy in continuing to forgive us.  
**Help us likewise to show mercy to our brothers and sisters and forgive them when they wrong us. Strengthen our faith and our love, and lead**

**us to live in gratitude for all you have done for us, serving you and other people.**

**Amen.**

**We pray for others**

*Since God our Father has compassion on us, let us pray that his mercy may flow through his church and into the whole of his creation.*

Almighty God, heavenly Father: In your mercy you have forgiven us the debt of our sin. Help us to forgive each other in our homes, our families and congregation. Especially help those who have suffered at the hands of others to overcome their pain, to forgive, and to receive healing.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

You have given to your church the keys of the kingdom of heaven: Help your church throughout the world to rightly preach law and gospel, to retain the sins of the unrepentant and forgive those who repent and believe.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Bless the nations of the world. Move the wealthy nations to do justice by cancelling the debts of poorer countries where possible. Be with our country. Guide our Prime Minister and all politicians as they govern our nation.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for the laws of our land which provide safety and order. Bless our justice system and all who work in it, that people may receive their rights and be encouraged to fulfill their responsibilities.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Jesus, be with the people of Victoria as they struggle with strict lockdown measures. We pray that these measures will help bring an end to the suffering of many. Bring comfort and relief to all those who are struggling with sudden changes to their lives, and protect all essential service workers.

Lord, we pray for the families of all those who are mourning the loss of loved ones. Envelope them in your love, and draw them close to you in their pain and loss.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Be with those who are sick or receiving medical treatment: we pray especially for (*insert names here*). Guide the hands of the doctors and nurses and other health professionals who care for them, and grant them healing if it is your will.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for the grace and blessings you have given Phillip & Rebecca Wilson, Bob & Beverley Tye, Kieran & Lauren Mulloy, Darren & Shannon Bahr, and Peter & Bec Franke as they celebrate wedding anniversaries this month. Fill them with love, forgiveness, patience and trust.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for our material blessings. Help us to be good stewards and to give generously towards the work of the church.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Lord, you have compassion on us as a father has compassion on his children. Hear our prayer, and satisfy our needs, and the needs of all for whom we pray. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **We pray the prayer of Jesus**

**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.** Matt 6:9-13

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.**

**Amen.**

### **The Triune God sends us out with blessing**

May Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shine on us and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory.

And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us always.

**Amen.**

### **We meditate on the hymn 'Comfort, Comfort'**

*Comfort, comfort all my people*

*with the comfort of my Word.*

*Speak it tender to my people:*

*All your sins are taken away.*

**1**    **Though your tears be rivers running,  
though your tears be an ocean full,  
though you cry with the hurt of living:  
comfort, comfort.**

**Every valley shall be lifted,  
every mountain shall be low,  
every rough place will be smoother:  
comfort, comfort:**

*Comfort, comfort all my people*

*with the comfort of my Word.*

*Speak it tender to my people:*

*All your sins are taken away.*

**2**    **Though your eyes see only darkness,**



though your eyes can see no light,  
though your eyes see pain and sorrow:  
comfort, comfort.

Every night will have its morning,  
every pain will have an end,  
every burden will be lightened:  
comfort, comfort:

*Comfort, comfort all my people  
with the comfort of my Word.  
Speak it tender to my people:  
All your sins are taken away.*

*Based on Isaiah 40: 1-5  
Robin Mann 1949- (1975)  
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## **Announcements**