

Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Aberfoyle Park

Home Worship Service

Led by Pastor Jon Goessling

September 19, 2021

Welcome & Introduction

I want you to reach up and feel your ears. Feel the shape of them, the curved top, and then the sloping down towards your neck.

Now imagine that your head was only made up of your ears. No eyes to look at wherever you want to go and see what you want to see, no mouth to tell people what you want to say, no mind to think about yourself and what you want... just ears.

It would be strange wouldn't it?

And that is not the way that God made us, is it?

God made us with our minds, eyes, mouth, nose AND ears to be in God's image. They all have their value.

But the ears are particularly valuable because when we listen really well, it draws us close to other people.

While our spoken words and our thinking mind can bring us close to people, unfortunately often they also pull us away from people, or cause trouble for other people.

But the **ears** allow us to **hear** the other person's **heart**, hear their story, hear their thoughts, hear their sad experiences and hear their happy experiences.

And when we do that... somehow our hearts become closer with that person.

In fact, if you put two ears together they make the shape of a human heart. The word EAR is even found inside the word 'heart'.

In a way, our bible reading today is about being great versus being humble. Sometimes people call this the way of glory versus 'the way of the cross'. But more accurately this particular bible reading is about being far from God or being close to God.

So much of Jesus' time teaching and healing was the attempt to connect people with God *beyond* their usual religious ways.

And strangely, the way to closeness with God was not in what people did... but in the humble place they took among others, in what they could not do, or in their sickness, or in what they did not have.

Essentially the teaching is Jesus' words: 'Anyone who wants to be first, that is a great goal! But the trick is, you have to be last, humble, and servant of all.' Amen

Song

[Blessed Be Your Name](#) CCLI#3798438

[How Great Is Our God](#) CCLI#4348399

Bible Reading

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." ³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Message

In our Gospel reading in Mark 9 we find Jesus heading in a reverse resurrection pattern.

For the chapters up until this point Jesus had been in the north of the country in Galilee and around the sea of Galilee with

- much healing,
- many miracles,
- and a great deal of teaching.

And this peaks early in chapter 9 with what is known as the **transfiguration** moment, in the North, on a Mountain, with the most wonderful transcendent experience for a God-fearing Jew that could possibly happen.

But then after chapter 9 Jesus and his disciples head down, towards the DEAD SEA.

Not only was the travel trajectory downwards, but the exciting miracles of the early days such as the feeding of the thousands had petered away.

And Jerusalem, the most south of Jesus' travel, under the ground, became the most significant of his destinations.

This journey and its imagery remain as one of the most unusual and captivating of stories of all time.

We pray,

God bless our time together and these words. We are tired. May you bless my very human words, and our very human hearts, with something that might bear witness to your power for transformation. Amen.

Earlier this year Terry and I went ballooning over the Barossa Valley. It started at 5am in the morning with climbing aboard several 4wd's towing trailers which held the uninflated balloon and passenger basket, and then driving off into the darkness.

There is no set launchpad as where they launch the balloon depends on the speed and direction of the wind. One launches with the end landing area in mind. So, one launches the balloon from a place that according to the wind direction will land back somewhere near the ballooning business headquarters.

Several times as we drove the pilot would launch a tiny helium balloon called a Pi Balloon, that would determine any changes in wind direction and speed.

Eventually a field suitable for launch was determined and the balloon was unpacked and inflated using a massive propane powered gas burner and a very large fan.

Over the next half hour the enormity of the balloon was realised against the beautiful moon-lit dawn.

The launch itself was somewhat surreal. We literally just floated away.

To the onlooker, ballooning appears like the ultimate serenity. The ballooning brochures and websites promote the image of ballooning as an unparalleled experience. For some religious types the experience may appear as a way to get closer to God in the clouds. While some others might consider it as God-like experience, where the plebs are below scuttling around with their worldly problems while there are no cares in the world up there. Just serenity... sweet, sweet, serenity.

But while it appears that way... having experienced it I would say that either outcome was only partially accurate.

While it is true that in a hot air balloon there are moments, maybe minutes, of serenity and still. But the quiet is interrupted by loud blasts of the powerful burners keeping the balloon moving upwards, not to mention the scorching heat upon your head with each burst.

Yet that unpleasantness only partly distracts one from the terrifying feeling of lofting endlessly upwards in what is little more than a souped up picnic basket with no harnesses and no parachutes.

So, to me, ballooning more accurately, could be described as

- serenity,
- scorching heat,
- serenity,
- blast,

- serenity,
- terrifying glances below as we peak 1000ft supported by nothing but a giant picnic basket,
- serenity,
- beautiful views,
- blast,
- serenity.

But the most disquieting part of ballooning, for me, was the bald faced reality that one was at the whim of forces beyond one's control.

We were headed upwards, yes, but where and how we would land we didn't know, the inconsistencies and vagaries of wind decided that. Below we could see the support 4wds frantically finding ways to follow us along country roads, and eventually we met in a paddock beside an orchard and a private house. But for several minutes we hovered above a forest of gums, helpless, waiting either for some wind to blow us further towards a clearing, or for one of the crew in the 4wd to grab the rope and pull us somewhere suitable to land and lay out the balloon. Eventually, the latter happened.

While my wife will probably tell a different story about our ballooning experience... I have to say that my encounter of going to the heights was not as glorious as I thought it might be.

Going high may offer much, but it is way too easy to lose direction up there and not end up where you really want to go.

To seek the highest things in life, and I'm not talking about ballooning anymore, is hardwired into the human DNA. It is our natural inclination to want to go upwards and to do well in all facets of being human.

Why do we climb high mountains? mountaineer George Malory was asked before attempting his fateful climb of Everest. "Because they're there!" he said.

Malory's words were not a good answer, but somehow those words capture something of our innate and often impractical and nonsensical desire to do better, to achieve more, to climb to higher jobs, to learn greater knowledge, we want to play better music, win more games in sport, achieve our best in our occupation, we want to find the best life partner, husband, wife, or circle of friends we can find. In western culture at least, it goes without saying that we want to gather more money.

We even want our children to do better than us.

Time and time again we hear the stories, particularly in migrant families, of parents investing EVERYTHING in order for their child to be more successful than they.

Whether we believe this upward desire to be an evolutionary feature or simply a phenomenon of human nature... it is clear that we sense much good can come from seeking high, from finding more, and from building the better.

But if that is the case - and it is - then why does Jesus teach the imperative of the *downward* journey?

It is clear that Jesus' imperative to have less and to live simply and to live humble is not because he sees anything romantic or fun about being on the bottom of the pack.

In fact, much of Jesus' ministry is dedicated to lifting up the poor, to bringing healing to the sick, to bringing food to the hungry. Clearly he himself sought the better for other people.

Jesus also had invested much time in his own education, he was literate, and was well versed in the scriptures which evidenced dedication in his theology craft
He was not anti-intellectual, anti-education, or anti-development
His teaching clearly acknowledged that life had a material and social side to it that was important to acknowledge and value that.

Yet there is this other side of Jesus that sees that there is an even more important seeking in life than getting better, smarter, or having more...

And *this* imperative in life is in the **getter closer to God**.

In fact, one could say that **the whole of scripture seems to take humankind for a journey in that direction - the downward direction**, the humbling direction, the failing direction.... always seems to lead to the greatest clarity about God.

(OT David's fall, Israel wandering, falling of Babel, narrative of Joseph, Job, narrative of St Paul, etc).

Somehow this message of intimacy with God not only seems to coincide with difficulty and low events and experiences of life... it **REQUIRES IT**.

Have you ever reflected that the wild destructive journey of the lost son in the parable was an integral part of his being drawn close to his father? Jesus even tries to normalise this movement when he tells the parable of the seed where the seed has to die in order to multiply.

Indeed, the downward journey of pain is required for our own birth, is required for teens emerging into adult life, is required in the giving up of life before death. All, notably we resist, yet we cannot by pass them.

Perhaps some here today, maybe all of us have experienced some downward journeying in our lives.

Somehow as the air is let out of ambition as we let go of our pride, our goals, our money... somehow we find a type of freedom that cannot be found in other ways. One might even say that while success and wealth and high achievements are intoxicating, the downward journey to intimacy with God has a different, calming, contenting, peace-giving property.

So when Jesus hears his disciples arguing about greatness he does not just hear it as young bloke bravado... he hears that is as a fundamental misunderstanding of what God is and what he is on about.

Christian writer Henri Nouwen writes about this downward movement a great deal. In his book "The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life", he writes this:

From the beginning of my life, two voices have been speaking to me: one saying, Henri, be sure you make it on your own. Be sure you become an independent person. Be sure I can be proud of you,

and another voice saying, Henri, whatever you are going to do, even if you don't do anything very interesting in the eyes of the world, be sure you stay close to the heart of Jesus; be sure you stay close to the love of God.

Jesus took the liberty of using a small child to teach his disciples about the folly of greatness as a life goal.

So far in the journey none of his parables or teachings had seemed to make a dent on the disciples' inability to grasp the connection of humility and simplicity with the intimate God.

I imagine Jesus, probably frustrated, asks a mother whether he can use her baby in an object lesson (a reverse kids address), and then shows the child to the disciples to see whether they get it.

So, I too am going to take the liberty of putting a child before you and seeing what happens. Our first grandchild Noa was born a few weeks ago. On her second day of life, she was still recovering from a drawn-out forceps birth, and was no doubt still recovering from the headache but we have a beautiful photo of her on day 2, with a smile which stretches from ear to ear.

Without any words, without any understanding of what life is meant to be, without any developed sense of self or identity or any life goals, without any comparison to anyone else... Noa's face in the photo says to me **"I am alive and I like it. I am loved. As I am close to my mother, so am I close to God. I don't try to or need to understand it. I simply celebrate God's goodness."**
The UNSPOKEN and INTUITIVE way is more important than any description with words.

And with Jesus stating "Whoever welcomes one of these babies in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me" Jesus is not talking about people who happen to find joy in children are therefore the Jesus group - No.

What he is saying is that those who welcome that simple joy, that simple connection, peace, and ease of the child, the lack of comparison, the freedom in just BEING... then those people KNOW GOD.

May you find the courage to let go. May you be so fed up with comparisons, bucket lists, and ambition towards things that don't really matter, that you find a peace with surpasses all human understanding.

And may that freedom, that deepening consciousness of faith, keep your hearts and minds in the Christ, and Jesus the human expression of God.
Amen

Song

[King of Kings](#) CCLI#712647

Confession and Absolution

Quietly reflect on the times your journey in life has taken you upward, seeking to go bigger, be better or have more; for turning to physical things and allowing pride and success become the things to strive for. Reflect on how God offers and seeks a different path for you, one that is characterised by calmness, contentment and peace and one that draws us into intimacy with Him.

You have a Loving Heavenly Father. Nothing can separate you from the love of God your Father, through Jesus Christ your Lord and Saviour. Through the blood of Jesus you are forgiven for all past, present and future sins. Through the Holy Spirit you are empowered to live a new life of love, joy and peace in your family, in your community and in your workplace. God will give you the courage to let go of the things that don't matter and to find a peace with Him that surpasses all understanding. Go on your way in freedom. **AMEN.**

Prayers

Prayer points to ponder:

- Thank you Heavenly Father for reminding us that only you can provide the peace, freedom and fulfilment that we seek in physical things. Thank you that you love us so much you yearn for a deeper relationship with us.
- Help us to let go of the things that prevent us from growing closer to you. Help us celebrate your goodness and experience the true joy, peace and freedom that can only be found as we turn away from worldly things and seek to know you more.
- We lift up our Call process to you. We ask for your wisdom and guidance on our Call Committee and for the Pastor you are preparing for a call to Our Saviour.
- We join churches across Australia as we pray for our nation to seek God. We pray for spiritual renewal and revival and for an end to the pandemic. We pray that people will repent and turn towards God.
- We pray for the situation in Afghanistan, the Afghan people and the Afghan Church, one of the fastest growing churches in the world, now facing terrible persecution and hardship. We pray for God's miraculous protection over his people, for justice and for the fall of the Taliban.
- We think of those countries and people also struggling with the added burden of civil unrest and natural disasters – flooding, fire, drought, earthquakes. We pray for God's mercies for them.

- Be with those struggling with loneliness, depression, financial or health concerns. We pray especially for people in our own community. Remind them of your love and care for them and prompt each of us to reach out to those who need our support and friendship.

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 forever. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

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 there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour, and give you peace. Amen.

Song

[Let Go and Let God](#) CCLI#5136418