

Jesus - our bread for the journey

Beyond the individual experience of God is the group or corporate experience which is also vitally important.

One of the beautiful things about keeping an appointment with God is the corporate expression of our worship together when we gather in this place. If we miss this regular appointment we let ourselves and each other down.

Jesus is the sign of God's intervention among his people. Jesus is the bread of life and the gospel proclaims, "*if anyone eats this bread he will live forever*".

God desires the very best for each of us. He calls us to live on the risky edge of adventure - to be prepared to have a go for him. He's always available and ready to offer his life to us and he calls us in response to love him and serve him and get to know him better and better.

When St Peter at the pearly gates asks us, "*Let's see now, what experience have you had?*" I pray we'll be able to tell him about our whole life.

AMEN! THANKS BE TO GOD!

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A Message from Mark!

THE MAKING OF AN ANGEL

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Scripture: John 6: 35; 41-51

A blustering businessman arrived at the pearly gates. He briskly made his way up to the admissions desk and asked for quick service. Saint Peter asked him what role he would like to play. The question took the busy man by surprise because he had assumed heaven was a place to receive one's rewards and not to be assigned a role.

Although he was a church member, he had not given much thought to the after-life and his preparation for it. But there flashed into his mind the words of a hymn. It was about the only hymn he could remember - he had learned it at Sunday School. So he gave the line of the old hymn as his answer. It was this, "*I want to be an angel and with the angels stand.*"

On hearing this, Saint Peter followed the approach taken by any good personnel officer. He took out a pen and paper, looked at the businessman and asked, "*Let's see now - what experience have you had?*"

Dodgy credentials - we've all got 'em!

Maybe he felt just a bit of a fraud at that moment. And maybe there have been times when you've felt like a fraud or a failure.

If Saint Peter asked you this week, "*Let's see now - what experience have you had?*" you may cringe or twitch a bit. I know I would.

Fortunately for us, the divine intervention of the grace of God is at work in our lives. Our entry into the kingdom doesn't hang on the successes we've notched up on our belt. Many of this world's finest people have been the people the world has judged as failures.

Andrew was an unsuccessful preacher, yet he brought his brother Simon Peter to Christ. It was only the divine intervention of God in the life of Saul on the Damascus Road which turned his life around. Instead of leading the nasty squad for the persecution of Christians, he became one of them, and gave the Jesus cause all he had.

Failure's OK - so long as we have a go!

Sometimes we may attempt things for God and yet appear to fail miserably. Billy Graham has preached to more people than almost any man in history, and over one million converts to Christ have responded under his preaching. Yet it was a relative failure of an evangelist who brought Billy Graham to Christ. Did he fail? I think not.

In spite of our fears and failures, in spite of the times when we're down and despondent and want to run away from life and the people about us - God is always with us and his power and strength and forgiveness is available to us, if only we have an open desire to receive it. We then have a responsibility to have a go. To use what God might do with us and run some risks. Better to have tried and failed than not to try at all!

A bit of my story

It was October 1966 when I made a conscious decision to take Jesus as my Saviour. I was baptised in my home church at Albion in Brisbane. It was a special time for an impressionable 12 year old. I felt I was following God's lead. Yet it wasn't until 10 years later, at the end of '76 - that I had a most significant personal experience of God.

I'd entered Theological College after six years work in the insurance industry. I enjoyed the community life on campus and made lots of new friends around the table tennis table. The idea of study in that first year came as a rude shock after a fairly easy life far removed from the demands of studious application.

Final exams of year one - even more of a shock. I'd failed two out of three of the important external exams I'd sat through the Melbourne College of Divinity. This devastated me - I felt a sense of failure, humiliation and even bitterness towards God - then I discovered I couldn't even hold the one exam I'd passed. All this seriously challenged my calling and preparation for ministry.

I was pretty mixed up. Had I misunderstood God? Yet in the practical heavy work of an industrial laundry over that summer vacation, I felt more convinced than ever - pastoral ministry was where God wanted me.

I put it to God - it had to be a joint effort - he had to intervene in my life! A change was called for. In the next three years I learnt how to apply myself. I was able to catch up on what I'd failed in my first year and complete the normal work load with tremendous support from God's people at College. I attained honours standards from there on.

The five diplomas and degrees that hang in my study now aren't there to show off. They're behind the door but they serve to remind me of the God who intervenes in our individual experience and can turn failure into faithfulness. People who know me recognise that I'm no angel. But by the grace of God I'm being made fit for the kingdom and so are you.