

Sunday 25 October 2026 to
Sunday 1 November 2026

LUTHERAN CHURCH
OF AUSTRALIA

Sunday 25 October 2026

When love starts with Jesus

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:37,39b).

Read Matthew 22:34–46

The Pharisees come to Jesus with what they think is a clever test: 'Which commandment matters most?' Jesus does not dodge the question. He answers simply: 'Love God with everything, and love your neighbour as yourself.' There it is. The whole law, condensed into love.

And if we are honest, that answer should stop us in our tracks. Love God with all your heart? All your soul? All your mind? Love the person next door, the difficult family member, the annoying committee member, the stranger, the enemy, as yourself? That is not a gentle religious suggestion. That is God's law, and it is far deeper than good manners or being basically nice.

But Jesus does not leave us staring at our failure. Jesus turns the conversation to the Messiah: David's son, yet David's Lord. The one who commands love is also the one who fulfils it. Jesus loves the Father perfectly. Jesus loves his neighbours perfectly. Jesus loves sinners all the way to the cross.

That is the good news tucked inside this sharp little exchange. We are not vindicated by our track record of love. We are vindicated by Christ. Because we no longer need to scramble to prove ourselves, we are set free to begin loving properly. Not to earn God's smile, but because in Jesus we already have it.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love. So today, take the command of love seriously, but receive Christ even more seriously. He is not only your teacher. He is your Lord, your righteousness and your life. From him, love begins again.

Lord Jesus, thank you for fulfilling love for us. Free us from proving ourselves, and teach us to love God and our neighbour from the life you give. Amen.

By his own admission, Tim Castle-Schmidt is a broken man. Broken in body, mind and spirit, he says he is learning that God is at work in and through human brokenness. He says that while God has not 'fixed' him, God continues to work through his brokenness to connect with the world. Tim is the pastor of Nunawading–Waverley Lutheran Church in Melbourne. After spending many years as a teacher in Lutheran schools, he finally listened to God's call to the pastoral ministry. Tim is passionate about social justice and engaging the church with contemporary society. Tim shares his life with Fiona, Miranda, and a Jack Russell called Otto.

Monday 26 October 2026

Open eyes, open hands

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness (Isaiah 58:10a).

Read Isaiah 58:7–12

Isaiah gives us a very earthy picture of faith: share your food, shelter the wanderer, clothe the naked, stop pointing fingers, quit the malicious talk, spend yourself for the hungry. It is hard to spiritualise your way out of this reading. God is interested in bodies, bread, homes, wounds, streets and communities.

That can sound exhausting if we hear it as a ladder to climb toward God. Do enough good. Care enough. Give enough. Then maybe your light will break forth. But the gospel tells us something better. God does not send us into mercy so we can manufacture righteousness. He gives righteousness in Christ, and then sends us into the neighbourhood with open eyes and open hands.

Isaiah says God's people will be called 'Repairer of Broken Walls' and 'Restorer of Streets with Dwellings'. What a lovely vocation. Not saviours of the world. Not heroes of our own story. Repairers. Restorers. People who notice what sin, neglect, fear and selfishness have broken, and who step in with practical love because God has first stepped in for us.

And notice the tone of God's promise: 'You will call, and the Lord will answer.' This is not cold duty. It is life with the God who says, 'Here am I.' He is already near. He is already merciful. He has already acted in Christ for the hungry soul and the oppressed conscience.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love. Freed from trying to impress God. Formed to see the person in need. Sent to do ordinary, costly, beautiful works of mercy. That is not a burden laid on the anxious. It is fruit growing from grace.

Merciful God, open our eyes to the needs around us. Make us repairers and restorers who serve freely because you have first served us in Christ. Amen.

Tuesday 27 October 2026

Chosen, loved, sent

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last (John 15:16a).

Read John 15:9–17

Jesus does not begin with, 'Try harder to love me.' He begins with, 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.' That is the order of Christian life. Before there is command, there is gift. Before there is fruit, there is vine. Before we love, we are loved.

That makes all the difference. Jesus does command us to love one another. He is not vague about it. But his command comes wrapped in friendship: 'I no longer call you servants … Instead, I have called you friends.' We are not hired hands nervously waiting for the boss' approval. We are friends of Christ because Christ has chosen us, drawn us close and shared the Father's heart with us.

And what does his love look like? 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' Jesus is already pointing us to the cross. He does not simply define love. He becomes love in action. He gives himself for people who are slow, proud, fearful, confused and sinful. People like us.

So when Jesus says, 'Remain in my love', he is not saying, 'Stay worthy.' He is saying, 'Stay where I have put you. Live from my love. Abide in the mercy that has already claimed you.' Christian love grows as we keep returning to the place where Christ first meets us: his word, his promises, his forgiveness, his table, his body given and blood shed for us.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love. You are not loved because you are fruitful. You bear fruit because you are loved. Relax into that today. Christ has chosen you, called you friend and sent you to love with the love you have already received.

Jesus, keep us resting in your love. Make your joy complete in us, and send us to love others with the love we have received from you. Amen.

Wednesday 28 October 2026

Love without pretence

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 5:2).

Read Acts 5:1–11

This is one of those readings that can make the room go quiet. Ananias and Sapphira sell property, give some of the money and keep some back. The problem is not that they kept some money. Peter is clear: it was theirs to use. The problem is the lie. They wanted the reputation of radical generosity without the truth of an undivided heart.

It is tempting to keep this story at a safe distance. 'Well, I would never do that.' But false righteousness is sneaky. We can perform holiness. We can curate generosity. We can want people to think we are more prayerful, more sacrificial, more loving or more impressive than we really are. We can even use good works to hide from God.

Acts 5 tells us that God takes the truth seriously because he takes his church seriously. Love cannot grow well in the dark. Community cannot thrive on religious pretending. The Holy Spirit forms a people who can tell the truth: about our sin, our fear, our mixed motives and our need for mercy.

The good news is that Christ does not justify our false self; he kills it and raises us new. We do not need to fake righteousness, because Jesus gives us his. We do not need to exaggerate our love, because he has loved us truthfully and completely. That kind of grace is both frightening and freeing. It exposes us, yes, but only to heal us.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love. Freed from performance, freed from image management and freed to be honest before God and one another. And in that honest place, the Spirit starts forming something beautiful: truthful generosity, humble repentance and love without theatre.

Holy Spirit, bring us into the truth. Strip away our pretending, forgive us in Christ and grow in us honest generosity and humble love. Amen.

Thursday 29 October 2026

The grace that gives

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–9

Paul describes something wonderfully strange: churches in severe trial and extreme poverty overflowing in joy and rich generosity. That is not normal accounting. Poverty plus hardship should equal anxiety, self-protection and closed hands. But grace has changed the maths.

The Macedonian Christians do not give because Paul twists their arm. They plead for the privilege of sharing. Their generosity is not a fundraising strategy or a guilt campaign. It is the generous pouring out of people who know Christ has given himself for them. They know they belong to Christ, and that changes what their money is for.

Then Paul brings everything back to Jesus: 'Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' That is the heart of Christian giving. Christ does not donate from a safe distance. He gives himself. He enters our poverty, carries our sin, bears our death and gives us the riches of forgiveness, life and fellowship with God.

Once that gets under our skin, generosity becomes less about 'How much do I have to give?' and more about 'What has Christ made possible here?' Sometimes love gives money. Sometimes time. Sometimes attention. Sometimes hospitality. Sometimes practical help that nobody else notices. But it all begins in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love. Freed from clutching our lives in fear. Formed by the generous poverty of Jesus. Sent to give in ways that are cheerful, honest and human. Not to buy grace, but because grace has already made us rich.

Generous Lord Jesus, you became poor to make us rich in grace. Loosen our grip on fear, and make our giving cheerful, truthful and loving. Amen.

Friday 30 October 2026

Holiness in the ordinary

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7–12

Paul's picture of Christian holiness is surprisingly ordinary. Live a holy life. Love one another. Do so more and more. Lead a quiet life. Mind your own business. Work with your hands. Win the respect of outsiders. It sounds less like a spiritual fireworks display and more like faithful Tuesday-afternoon discipleship.

That is encouraging. Holiness is not only found in dramatic moments, public platforms or heroic sacrifices. It is also found in paying attention to your family, doing your work well, refusing gossip, keeping promises, showing up, forgiving again and loving the people God has actually placed near you.

Paul says the Thessalonians have been 'taught by God to love each other'. That is a beautiful phrase. Christian love is not self-invented. God teaches it. The Holy Spirit keeps tutoring us through the word, repentance, the needs of others, the patience of the church and Christ's steady mercy.

Because holiness is God's work in us, we do not need to turn it into a performance. A quiet life can be deeply Christian. Honest work can be an act of love. Dependability can be a gift to your neighbour. The Spirit forms Christlike people in the small, repeated places where life is actually lived.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love**.** Freed from chasing religious sparkle. Formed for holy, quiet, useful lives. So today, do the next faithful thing. Love the next person. Speak the next true word. God is at work in that too.

Father, teach us to love in ordinary ways. Shape our daily work, words and habits into quiet gifts for our neighbours. Amen.

Saturday 31 October 2026

Vindicated for love

by Tim Castle-Schmidt

Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me (Psalm 43:3a).

Read Psalm 43

Psalm 43 begins with a prayer we cannot finally answer for ourselves: 'Vindicate me, my God.' That is a brave prayer. It asks God to judge, defend, rescue and bring the truth out into the open. It is also a risky prayer, because if God judges us by our own righteousness, what hope do we have?

That is why Psalm 43 fits Reformation Day so well. Martin Luther knew what it was to long for a gracious verdict from God. He loved the psalm's movement from accusation and darkness toward God's light, truth, altar, joy and praise. 'Vindicate me' is not the cry of someone polishing their spiritual résumé. It is the cry of someone who needs God himself to act.

And in Christ, God has acted. The Reformation did not uncover a new trick for becoming impressive Christians. It recovered the old, bright gospel: sinners are justified by grace, through faith, because of Christ. God vindicates the ungodly by joining them to the crucified and risen Jesus. Our hope is not that we have loved enough, given enough, purified ourselves enough or repaired enough walls. Our hope is Christ for us.

But that verdict does not leave us unchanged. Psalm 43 asks God to send light and truth to lead us to worship. Vindication leads somewhere: to the altar, to joy, to praise and then back into the world as people being reshaped by mercy. God's declaration creates a new people. Freed from self-justification, we can stop using others as props in our own holiness project. We can love them instead.

Vindicated by Christ, God's people are freed and formed to love. That is Reformation comfort and Reformation calling. God has judged in favour of sinners in Jesus. So you are freed to put your hope in God. You can now praise him. And, by his Spirit, you are being formed into someone who loves.

God, our Saviour, vindicate us in Christ, send us your light and truth, and form us by your gospel into people who praise you and love our neighbours. Amen.

Sunday 1 November 2026

Vanity vs humility

by Faye Schmidt

For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23:12).

Read Matthew 23:1–12

This passage describes how a skin-deep religiosity exists to give its bearer standing in the community, generating authority, respect and awe. It is there to feed their vanity – 'Look at me!'

It is important to note here who Jesus is speaking to when he raises this issue. 'Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples …' Yes, Jesus speaks to the crowds so they are aware of this matter, but the message's strength is directed at his disciples (us, the church). Jesus is speaking about the behaviour of the Pharisees, the religious leaders.

Their actions include expecting others to do what they themselves are unwilling to do; doing things only so others will observe and take note of them; assuming the place of honour at events, even in the synagogue; being acknowledged as leaders and desiring to be called 'Rabbi'.

The greatest danger to God's kingdom here on earth is the way we, as his followers, represent him. Do we take on the mantle of the Pharisee? Do we puff ourselves up and consider ourselves more worthy than others? Do we seek recognition or praise? Is it all about me?

Or do we, through acknowledging our sin and with praise and gratitude to God for his saving grace through Jesus, live lives of humility and service? Do I look to others and see their need?

The lesson to take from this passage is: How can I be a better servant? How can I love God more deeply and my neighbour more genuinely?

Heavenly Father, help us serve in humility and show the love of Jesus through our actions. This is how the world can see God on earth. Amen!

Faye Schmidt continues her diaconal calling through governance, having served on the Vic–Tas District Church Board, the General Church Board and currently as chair of the Standing Committee on Constitutions and her congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. Having lived and worked in many locations in Australia and overseas, Faye has a heart for the stranger and the newcomer and for being open to new ideas, learning from others and responding to needs.

Matthew 22:34-40 – The Fulfilment of the Law in Christ's Love

Introduction

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Personal Reformation Day

I've got a bit of a personal connection with Reformation Sunday. I reckon God has a pretty good sense of humour!

I was baptised a Catholic on this day in 1964. Then, 21 years later, on the same day in 1985, I was confirmed into the Lutheran Church. You could say I received the keys to the door!

I didn't fully appreciate that coincidence until I began studying theology in Adelaide three years later. Looking back, I wonder whether God had given me my own personal Reformation Day.

Today, we remember Martin Luther and the Reformation. We remember his courage in challenging the church of his day. More importantly, we celebrate the recovery of the good news of Jesus Christ: **God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone.**

That message still matters because we face the same question that troubled Luther: *How can I stand before a holy God when I know I'm not good enough?*

Our Gospel reading from Matthew 22 takes us straight to the heart of that question.

Love God. Love your neighbour.

The Pharisees gather around Jesus. One of their experts in the Law asks him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

Jesus answers: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. Then he adds, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." He says the whole Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.

Simple enough, isn't it? Love God with everything you've got. Love your neighbour as yourself. We hear those words and think, "Yes, that's what Christians should do. That's what I try to do." But do we actually do it?

Do we love God with our whole heart, soul and mind? Or do we sometimes give him the leftovers after work, family, hobbies and all the other things filling our lives? Do we love our neighbours as ourselves, or only when they're agreeable, think like us and don't get in our way?

Jesus doesn't ask for half-hearted love. He calls for wholehearted love, and that's where God's Law starts to uncover the truth about us.

God's Law holds up the Mirror

We live in a beautiful part of God's creation. We see his handiwork in the Barossa hills, the vineyards, the vast Australian sky and those spectacular sunsets that make you stop and stare.

I've watched the Aurora Australis on a late-night beach walk with Lutheran youth campers north of Hobart. I've sat on Mengler Hill looking across the Barossa, and I've gathered around a farmer's bonfire near Tanunda, under a brilliant canopy of stars, listening to praise songs and eating damper.

You can't help but marvel at God's creation. Yet admiring God's handiwork isn't the same as loving him with all your heart, soul and mind.

We can thank God for our blessings and still grumble when life doesn't go our way. We can sing his praises on Sunday and complain about people on Monday. We can admire God's creation while putting ourselves first.

God's Law holds up a mirror. It shows us who we really are. Paul explains in Romans 3 that the Law silences our excuses and leaves the whole world accountable to God.

The Law doesn't just expose other people's sins. It exposes mine and yours. We like the Law when it deals with somebody else's behaviour. We want people to be honest, fair and respectful. We want them to keep their promises and treat us properly. But when God's Law challenges our pride, selfishness, grudges or unwillingness to forgive, we start making excuses. “I had a good reason.” “At least I'm not as bad as them!”

God doesn't judge us by comparing us with the person next door. He shows us his perfect standard of love, and none of us measures up.

Paul puts it plainly in Romans 3:20: “by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.” We can't make ourselves right with God by trying harder, doing more good deeds or convincing ourselves we're decent people. That's the bad news. Thankfully, it's not the end of the story!

The Great Reformation Discovery

Martin Luther knew this struggle personally. He desperately wanted to please God. He prayed, studied, confessed his sins and worked hard to live a holy life. Yet he couldn't escape the question: “Have I done enough? Am I good enough for God?”

The harder Luther tried to establish his own righteousness, the more clearly he saw his sin. Through his study of Scripture, however, Luther rediscovered the wonderful truth of the Gospel.

God doesn't wait for sinners to make themselves righteous. He gives them righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:23–24 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

God justifies sinners by grace as a gift.

Jesus has done what we could never do for ourselves. He loved his Father perfectly and loved his neighbour perfectly. He fulfilled God's Law in every thought, word and action.

Then Jesus took our sin upon himself and carried it to the cross. He suffered the judgement our sin deserves and gave his life for us. On the third day, he rose again, defeating sin, death and the devil.

Because of Christ's death and resurrection, God forgives us and declares us righteous—not because we've earned his favour, but because Jesus has won it for us.

That's what Luther rediscovered. That's the heart of the Reformation. It's also the heart of our faith today.

Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

Faith doesn't earn salvation. Faith receives God's gift. We don't climb a ladder to reach God. In Jesus, God has come down to us. We don't have to prove ourselves worthy or wonder whether we've done enough to deserve his love. Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation. That's freedom! That's grace! That's the good news we celebrate today.

So where does love fit in?

You might be thinking, “If Jesus has done everything for my salvation, does it really matter how I live?”

It absolutely does! But it is important to that we don't love God and our neighbour to earn salvation. We love because God has first loved us. We don't do good works to make God accept us. We do good works because, in Christ, God has already accepted us.

God doesn't need us to earn his love. Our neighbour, however, might need a listening ear, a helping hand, a word of encouragement or someone willing to forgive. They might need us to put aside our own agenda and make time for them. Sometimes our neighbour is the person who irritates us the most!

Here in Australia, we value fairness, mateship and giving someone a hand when they're in trouble. Those are good things. Christian love, though, goes further than helping people who can repay us. Jesus calls us to love people who cannot return the favour, forgive those who hurt us and care for people who might never agree with us.

That includes people from different backgrounds and generations, including our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander neighbours. It includes people struggling with loneliness, grief or hardship, even when they hide their struggles behind a smile.

It starts much closer to home, too—in our families, our congregations and our everyday relationships.

The love Jesus commands isn't simply a warm feeling. It's love that serves, speaks the truth, forgives and gets its hands dirty. It's the love we receive from Christ every day, and the love the Holy Spirit grows in us for others.

God is still reforming us

Let's be honest. We don't always like being reformed!

We like our routines, our possessions, our time and our opinions. We like to think we're in control. When God's Word challenges us, we sometimes resist. We might even use our Christian faith to justify the very attitudes Christ wants to change. God doesn't reform us to make life miserable. He frees us from the things that damage our relationship with him and with one another.

So how does this reformation happen in daily life? It begins with God's promises. At our baptism, God claimed us as his own. He joined us to Christ's death and resurrection, washed away our sins and gave us the promise of new life. Through his Word and the Holy Spirit, he keeps calling us back to that promise.

When we hear the Law, we confess our sin instead of making excuses. When we hear the Gospel, we trust Christ's forgiveness instead of wallowing in guilt. When we receive the Lord's Supper, Christ gives us his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and strengthens our faith. God works through these gifts to renew us.

Luther also urged parents, particularly fathers, to teach God's Word and the Lord’s Prayer, Ten Commandments and the Creed to their children. We can't leave Christian teaching entirely to the church or assume our children will somehow pick it up along the way. We teach them God's Word so they know Jesus, trust his promises and learn what life with him looks like. We teach them as God's good guidance for people Christ has already rescued and forgiven.

As the Holy Spirit renews our faith, he leads us into lives of love and service. Repentance means admitting when we're wrong, seeking forgiveness and making things right where we can. When we stumble, grace means we don't have to hide from God or give up in despair. We return to Christ, who forgives us and lifts us up again.

We don't live this life to win God's love. We live because Christ has already made us his own.

Conclusion: Let love live!

Dear friends, Jesus tells us that the whole Law and the Prophets hang on two commandments: love God and love your neighbour. When we look honestly at our lives, we know we haven't loved as we should.

But Jesus has done what we could never do. He fulfilled God's Law perfectly, carried our sins to the cross and rose again to give us forgiveness and new life. Through faith in Christ, God gives us his righteousness as a free gift.

God's Word continues to reform us today. We don't need to pretend we're perfect or prove we're worthy. We keep returning to Christ, who loves us, forgives us and makes us new. Then we let that love show—in the way we speak to our families, the patience we show our neighbours, the forgiveness we offer when someone lets us down, and the practical help we give to those who need it.

The world doesn't need another group of people who think they're better than everyone else. It needs people who know they're sinners, know they're forgiven, and are ready to share that forgiveness with others.

That's what the Reformation Gospel produces: not pride, but gratitude; not fear, but freedom; not a life spent trying to earn God's love, but a life that shares the love God has already given us in Jesus Christ.

So, let's celebrate that freedom. Let's live in that grace. Let's love our neighbours because Christ first loved us.

Grace alone. Faith alone. Christ alone. Let the love of Christ live in us and through us!

Amen.