



THE new vine

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Blackall Range Uniting Churches

(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)

Articles or queries may be emailed to: Rev Graham Dempster,
grandar@bigpond.net.au

Issue No. 6, Autumn 2018



EDITORIAL COMMENT

By the time this edition reaches you I will be in Scotland. As some of you know, this visit was inspired, in large part, by what I would call a “nudge of the Spirit” during my roaming there in 2016. This nudge was something I wrestled with and, in a way, acted upon. I’m looking forward to this next experience and will be surprised if there are not more, similar nudges this time round, as my time will be spent mostly in the one place - I will not be constantly moving on.

Have you ever experienced a “nudge of the Spirit” when you are away from home – either in Australia or overseas? From discussions I’ve had with congregational members, I think many people probably have. Somehow, I think we are more exposed to the holy, the eternal, the ‘other’, the unusual wonders of creation, the spiritual - as we encounter some ‘thin places’ where the human and divine meet. Quite often, this is totally unexpected. I do not know why this is so, but I think it could have to do with our being out of our safe and secure comfort zone of home – away from the normal.

That realization set me to thinking about how, when we leave our familiar surrounds; embrace some new environment; enter some previously unexplored aspect of our world; or experience freedom from the constraints of our daily cycle of life, we become more open, more vulnerable to the extended aspects of our being which allows us to see; hear and experience things quite differently – and we have the time to interact with them.

Have you had this sort of experience?

And now, of course, comes the big question. Would you be prepared to write about it – just a paragraph – that tells of an encounter with the holy while holidaying?

I would very much like to have such stories brought together for the Winter edition and look forward to hearing from you. It doesn’t have to be a story from overseas – it could be from the coast, a bushwalk or a Caravan park. My hope would be that we’ll have a wide variety of experiences to share about the wonderful work of the Spirit in our lives and the unpredictability and joy of life in all its fullness.

Could re-living that experience by thinking and writing about it, be part of our Lenten spiritual exercises perhaps?

Whatever you decide I wish you all a happy Easter and a resurrection life full of the promises of God.

Peace and blessings

Graham

(N.B. Editor’s comments throughout the journal are in black, in this font, and have been placed in text boxes).

INDEX

Editorial Comment	Page 1
Who's Who in the Blackall Range Churches	2
O'Catherine Says.....	3
Easter Prayer	3
Christmas Leftovers	
Christmas Where I Grew Up by Merle Duggan	4
Christmas Where I Grew Up by Bob Philpot.....	5
A Post Easter Challenge	6
Book Review	6
New Year's Resolutions for 2018	7
Prayer Through Lent	8-9
Kids' Rids	9
Lent	10
Envisioning the Resurrection	11-12
Karl's Korner	13
Palm Leaf Crosses	10
The Funnies Page.....	15
Blackall Range Churches – Congregational Activities	16



WHO'S WHO IN THE BLACKALL RANGE CHURCHES

Parish Minister: Rev Catherine Solomon: Phone: 0438 557 677, 5494 3119,
minister@malenyuniting.com.au

Palmwoods: Pastor Kay Nixon: Phone: 0412 539 020, 5478 9209, kayn43@gmail.com

Treasurer: Mr Roger Smith: Phone: 5494 3784, Email: phelan.smith@i.net.com.au

Church Office: 1290 Maleny-Landsborough Road, PO Box 297, Maleny

Hours: Tuesday from 9am – 3pm

Thursday from 9am – 3pm

Phone 5429 6995, Email: admin@malenyuniting.com.au

Internet: www.malenyuniting.com.au

Joint Management Committee: John Benn, Peter Callaghan, John Daniells, Duncan Drew, Ian Gleadall, Naua Lolohea, Pastor Kay Nixon, Karis Ross, Roger Smith, Rev Catherine Solomon (Chair), Rev George Woodward

Maleny Church Council: John Benn, Peter Callaghan (Chair), Sue Callaghan (Minute Secretary), Joseph Cho, Bob Eather, Marilyn Milton (Secretary), Murray Robertson, Rev Catherine Solomon, Peter Uhlmann

Maleny Congregational Meetings: Peter Callaghan (Chair), Karl Tietze (Secretary)

Montville Church Council: The whole congregation with:

Daryll Koch and Brian Jonsson (Co-Chairs) Sue Jonsson (Secretary)

Palmwoods Mission Council: Mele Cameron, Greg Harriman, Naua Lolohea, Siale Lolohea, Pastor Kay Nixon, Rev Catherine Solomon (Chair), Cynthia Zaverdinos (Secretary),

Retired Ministers: Rev Graham Dempster, Rev Bob Philpot, Rev Ron Potter, Rev Brian Richards, Rev George Woodward.

O'CATHERINE SAYS

“Survival in the Wilderness” is our theme during Lent this year.

What comes to mind for you when you read the word ‘wilderness’?

Here are some definitions:

1. a tract or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings
2. an empty or pathless area or region
3. a part of a garden devoted to wild growth.

Mark tells us that after Jesus’ baptism, *“the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness for forty days being tempted by Satan. He was with wild animals and angels attended him.”* Mark 1:12-13 NIV.

Going into the wilderness – the untracked regions of life – can be scary, daunting, overwhelming and perhaps even heart wrenching. It can also be where a person grows the most in understanding one’s self; a revelation of one’s place in the world; and experiencing and embracing the Living Jesus.

Our Lenten theme considers how we survive in these wilderness times of our lives - when we don’t know which direction to travel; when we might be lost and confused, fearful about the next step; when we are in a dark valley and everything is looming around; or when we are on the ridge and can see where we need to get to, but there are still more valleys, water courses, and cliff edges to navigate past. How do we get through these aspects of the wilderness? Where is God in the journey?

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to an all-knowing God.” Corrie Ten Boom

As we engage in self-examination during Lent, may we embrace unfailing love, receive the grace of Jesus Christ and a “nudge from the Spirit bringing joy of life in all its fullness” (to quote our Editor).

May we view our wilderness times, not as a curse, but as an adventure in discovering the depth of love God has for each of us.

God bless you all in this Christian season.

Rev Catherine Solomon

Thinking of lent and Easter often leads me to this prayer.
It is, in a way, a precise summary of the Easter story for me.

God help us to change.

To change ourselves and to change our world.

To know the need for it.

To deal with the pain of it.

To feel the joy of it.

To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.

The art of gentle revolution.

Taken from *A Common Prayer* by Michael Leunig

CHRISTMAS LEFTOVERS

I am sure we're all conscious of the meals we've had arising from the leftovers after Christmas dinner. The seafood had to go first, then the ham and so on. They were always enjoyable, even though a little after the actual event. All good stuff but too much to be eaten with everything else.

And that's exactly what happened to the leftovers that follow – a bit too much for an already full plate at Christmas. So, sit back and enjoy stories we simply couldn't fit in in their entirety at Christmas.

Christmas Where I Grew Up by Merle Duggan

I remember little that was remarkable about my childhood – even Christmas. In fact, apart from being aware of its being part of our Christian heritage (celebrating Jesus' birth), Christmas Day was not remarkably different from any Sunday. The cows still had to be milked by hand twice a day, the cream separated and stored, the calves and pigs fed.

In the lead up to Christmas, the usual routine house-keeping duties were attended to by the children in accordance with their capabilities. The only difference was at Christmas they were undertaken with extra zeal. With no electricity, the linoleum floors were mopped, and then on hands and knees, polish was applied with a cloth, and the floors then buffed to a high sheen. All unpainted timber furniture saw a fresh coat of oil and the silverware and cutlery was always polished. The sitting room was decorated with twisted streamers.

On Christmas Eve, in the cool of the morning before milking, Dad would have dispatched the selected rooster and hung it in a high, cool, safe place. After milking, he'd have gone to the melon patch. (Each August, with Christmas in mind, Dad would have planted a melon plot within an enclosure near the creek. This position meant it was possible for the children to carry the creek water up to the plants to meet their water needs. It was hoped that on Christmas Eve, one melon would make the right sound when tapped.) The selected melon would be conveyed carefully to a cool, breezy spot under the house, covered with water soaked hessian which were kept moist, in order to chill it ready for Christmas day. The rooster would be dunked in hot water and the children assigned to help with the plucking. The kitchen would be a hive of industry all day – Plum Pudding and Christmas cake to be stirred, patty cakes to made, iced, and decorated with silver cachous and hundreds and thousands, and biscuits to be cut out or pressed flat before baking. We children enjoyed doing what we could there.

Usually on Christmas Eve, when we were still young, we would put a pillow case in a convenient place for Santa to put a present in. Each child would receive one present – it may have been a rag doll, book, or pretty new item of clothing. It could have been a pair of shoes, socks, or even handkerchiefs. One year I received a toy piano, and my brother a toy violin. He was not very musically aware, and unfortunately used it as a cricket bat. It failed to survive the first strike. I recall one special Christmas Eve in the late thirties, just prior to when the war started, Dad drove our newly-acquired utility to Nambour and we went to see the beautifully decorated shop windows.

On Christmas day, in order to be able to sit down to a hot meal in the middle of the day, we would have risen earlier than normal for the first milking. The extra work involved must have discounted the possibility of going to church, which when possible was normally undertaken by horse and sulky. I don't recall attending church on any Christmas morning in the early days.

The Christmas lunch was special in that it was usually a roasted rooster. If not a rooster, it would have been a loin of pork served with mainly home grown vegetables. There was always the boiled Plum Pudding, in which were hidden threepenny pieces (coins) which had been carefully cleaned and boiled before being added. I suspect they were added once the portions were allocated as I don't remember anyone being disappointed. The risk of choking was minimal, as every spoonful was carefully broken down (and searched with such eager anticipation), before it reached our mouths.

After lunch we were usually joined by relatives and neighbours from nearby who helped us dispose of the home grown watermelon (they were considerably larger than then ones we see in stores today). Once the routine afternoon milking was complete and tea-time over, our usual Sunday evening routine was followed. On Christmas evening we would all gather in the sitting room. There we sang appropriate Christmas hymns from Sankey's Hymnal, accompanied by my aunt on the organ. Then to bed...

Christmas Where I Grew Up by Bob Philpot

Many of my early years were spent in the South Gippsland area of the state of Victoria, a countryside that was verdant and where the land presented as a series of steep hills, much like Maleny.

Christmas usually meant that the green grass was giving away to paddocks that gradually yellowed, as fields that had been mown for hay felt the hot breath of summer.

Celebrations of the Saviour's birth were limited to some reference to the nativity in the agenda of the one teacher school we attended, though this lack was filled out a little by reference to the Biblical account in stories read by my mother. Hurblets stories of the Bible featured here.

Food, presents, decorations and catching up with relatives and friends were other noteworthy events of this time. Uncle Joe, a person who had gained that title when he became connected to the family during the depression years, had some influence here.

Kentucky Fried Chicken may be well known now, but the only time we generally caught up with chicken, (figuratively and literally) was Christmas time, when one or more specially bred Rhode Island Red cockerels exposed their necks to the axe and became the main bill of fare for lunch. Home grown new season potatoes and green peas accompanied the well-seasoned roast fowl as generous servings found their way to our plates. Pumpkin, parsnip and carrot with gravy and stuffing completed the savoury course.

To round this off came large helpings of home-made plum puddings which, held in pudding cloths, had been boiled in the copper some days before and reheated prior to serving. Slices when served were each to receive an inserted silver coin: threepences, sixpences, shillings or florins were chosen. Anxious parents would make sure that younger children did find the allotted coin or there would be serious search later to make sure the coin had not been ingested.

Not many local trees lent themselves to being a Christmas tree, and our choice was a ti-tree, which was only good for about three days, as any longer and they shed their leaves everywhere, like dog hairs.

To convince Santa Claus that he had better not pass us over, we hung a pillowcase each at the end of our beds on Christmas eve and rejoiced in the morning to find oranges, cherries and apricots had been mixed in with our presents.

Due to the generosity of the aforementioned Uncle Joe, I usually scored an Ezy-built mecano set, with the model number increasing each year as I developed skills in using more complicated parts.

Food and drink was left out for the nocturnal visitor and a letter written with the pollen of the flowers of the tiger lily. A reply would be waiting in the morning written in invisible ink (onion juice I think) and once heated could be read to gain the message from our visitor.

Having risen at the crack of dawn on Christmas day, pyjamas were often not shed until a much later hour than usual when the visit of relatives and friends demanded much more suitable clothes. With the arrival of visitors the day then gave way to trying out any new toys such as bikes, or a game of tip and run cricket.

As more people came, more food appeared in the form of watermelons, cantaloupes and grapes if we were lucky. Large quantities of cordial, home made ginger beer and some soft drinks were used to wash down servings of local stewed fruits, custard and red and green jellies. Adults usually downed a celebratory round or two of something alcoholic. Cups of tea and home made Christmas cake along with biscuits and small cakes brought to an end this part of Christmas day where I grew up.



A POST EASTER CHALLENGE

The summer edition of our journal included a host of stories written by readers who chose to share something of Christmas when they grew up. This was warmly received by readers, and so, given we've had some good book reviews in the past; this edition offers a new Challenge for 2018.

It is important to our spiritual growth that, from time to time, we read, view, or hear something new, different and challenging to our faith understanding that might have us see our discipleship expand and mature in some way, or perhaps it may simply feed our spirit. So, the challenge is – and it isn't meant to be easy – could we all try to experience something that challenges us this year and then write a short review for our next summer edition. That gives us plenty of time [the deadline would be about the end of October], and will ensure we can have some really good Christian resources to take into our Christmas break.

Each piece does not have to be too long – say no more than 2 - 300 words – but it will provide each of us with another way of sharing our faith journey. They say you should never ask anyone to do something you're not prepared to do yourself, so here's an early guide. It is about a book, but could have been about a film, video, poem, concert, – whatever!

Please send me contributions as early as you like and I'll keep them safe till printing.



THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON – A meditation on fathers, brothers and sons by Henri J Nouwen

This is not a new book – first published in 1992 – but, in my view, a real gem worth reading again and again. Nouwen stumbled across Rembrandt's painting – The return of the Prodigal son – and meditated on it at length, and in great depth, and in so doing measured his own life against it with quite profound results. He soon after left the life of an internationally renowned academic, speaker and teacher to work in an institution for intellectually disabled people in France. In the painting, in the hands of the father that were clasping his son, Nouwen saw the hands of God [one was male and one was female]. These hands spoke to him of grief, forgiveness and generosity as well as safety and security – all things he was searching for in his life. He longed for that embrace and which, as he examined the roles of the younger son, the older son and the father, led him to the view that there were parts of them all in each of us that we need to be aware of, and respond to, appropriately. A wonderfully challenging book that does not allow the reader to escape easily.



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FOR 2018

I am not usually one for dreaming up New Year's resolutions but over the holiday period I came across an article in the American journal *SOJOURNERS*, written by their CEO Jim Wallis, which I found challenging and thought provoking. So, I mused – given some similarity Between USA and Australia, might readers be interested?

Jim Wallis said: *"While it's not always easy to come up with multiple thoughtful, practical resolutions to keep through the year, I recommend the practice — especially in a time like this. 2017 required a deeper attention and commitment to our nation's public life, in the face of unexpected political leadership that some are trying to "normalize." The shocks, dangers, worries, anger, and vulnerability for so many people this year have indeed required us to go to a deeper place. 2018 looks very uncertain, and things could get worse before getting better. So, I'll be praying and working through these resolutions as we head into 2018."*

Can we relate to these thoughts?

A précis of his 10 resolutions for 2018 follows:

1. To start each day with a "yes!" to my faith — and to my personal and public morality. I want to start by saying yes to God's love, yes to my allegiance to Jesus Christ, yes to my discipleship, which means that Jesus is Lord. I want to say yes to engaged citizenship, civil discourse, service to what is right, and courageous resistance to what is wrong. I want my "no" to begin with a deeper "yes!"
2. To have the courage to say "no!" when that is required, wherever it is required. This includes the public arena, the political sphere, in the media and culture, in schools, in workplaces, and even in the church. I will try to demand conversations in churches about our gospel values, and to hold political discussions in Christian communities accountable to those values.
3. To not wait to say "no," or wait to stand in opposition to wrong and dangerous ideas and actions, until I see how others will respond. To not be among the last to react to breaches of moral and civic behavior, but to count the cost and show my commitment to justice by being one of the first.
4. To hold the Bible in one hand and the news in the other as I go through each day. I will try to hold public decisions and events accountable to what our Scriptures teach and demand of us.
5. To better answer the biggest challenges of 2018 by acting on my faith, rather than reacting from my emotions. To respond to genuine outrages with deeper commitment, instead of cyclical anger; to respond to despair with action, instead of cynicism; to combat hatred with deeper love; and to counter feelings of hopelessness with decisions to act in hope, rather than feelings of optimism, because of my faith.
6. To see crisis as both danger and opportunity. And to always be attentive to both, in every situation.
7. To see evil and injustice as a call to go deeper. Deeper into the disciplines and practices of my faith; deeper into my relationships with allies and friends, especially across racial lines; and deeper into my relationships to those who are most vulnerable and targeted by injustice.
8. To spend even more time with my family. Our children and grandchildren need to know what is going on, and how we, and they, can respond to it. I will try to explain things, and pray over things that happen in the world with them. I will work to protect them by helping them interpret those things, and by assuring them that we will be together through it all.
9. To pray for particular people who will be playing critical roles in the outcomes of political events in this country. I commit to praying for the courage of press — including media reporters, broadcasters, columnists, editors, producers, and owners — that they would search earnestly and endlessly for the truth, and have the courage to tell it. I will pray for the judiciary to face the hardest questions with a commitment to the rule of law, more than the rule of politics. I will pray for the leaders in governments.
10. To work and pray to grow in my trust of God, friends, and community. Even if life in this country continues to spiral morally downward, I will try to trust in faith, hope, and love — to believe the greatest of these is love — and to be ready every day to act, by faith, in hope, upon what I believe.

As I re-read this article, it struck me rather strongly, that for Christians, Easter provides the ideal opportunity for thinking about making resolutions for our newly experienced resurrection life. Perhaps we can forget New Year's resolutions and ponder what might be for each of us, New Life Resolutions. Is this something worth thinking and praying about – and then doing something about. Shall we try? If we do, the above resolutions may speak differently to us.

PRAYING THROUGH LENT

I asked the Maleny Prayer Team leader to share with us some of his thoughts on pray for Lent, and here is his response – just waiting now for our response.

*O the bitter shame and sorrow, that a time could ever be,
When I let the Saviour's pity plead in vain, and proudly answered,
"All of self and none of Thee!"*

I was standing next to him as we watched the scene in the "Jesus Video" in which metal spikes were being driven into Jesus' hands and feet. At every blow I saw my companion, whom I had just met, physically wince, shudder and moan as if he could feel the pain that was being inflicted in this cruel act and then he sobbed and burst into uncontrollable weeping. For this young Pastor from Bougainville, we weren't just viewing a movie on TV, this experience was real and personal. I realised he was so close to Jesus that he could not help but react in this way when he saw his Saviour suffering such extremes of cruelty for our sakes.

I have to confess I was just watching a movie but, to my new friend, it was reality. These different perspectives were evidence to me of the differing depths of our relationships with God! At that moment I understood I had, and I still have, a long way to journey to achieve the intimacy that this young man enjoyed with his Saviour.

*Yet He found me, I beheld Him bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray, "Forgive them, Father!" and my wistful heart said faintly,
"Some of self, and some of Thee!"*

During Lent, believers are encouraged to engage in personal examination of their faith as preparation for our commemoration of the events of Easter. I would encourage us all to do this and to make the focus of the exercise our personal relationship with God. That's what I intend doing and I invite you to join me in your personal devotional time at home if you are of similar mind.

How do we, many of whom have been faithful followers of Jesus and committed members of His Church for many years, manage to deepen our personal relationship with the One we call our Lord and Saviour? I suggest the same way as we would with any other person, through spending more time with Him - specifically, reading the Scriptures intentionally, praying regularly, worshipping gratefully and seeking to discern God's will for our lives and circumstances, being the essentials.

*Day by day His tender mercy, healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and ah! so patient, brought me lower, while I whispered,
"Less of self, and more of Thee!"*

Let me share a few thoughts relating to prayer that may be helpful in being intentional during these forty days of reflection and beyond.

In his book, *"The Ultimate Conversation – Talking to God through Prayer"* Charles Stanley asserts, *"The most powerful thing you can do – the most awesome privilege you have in this life- is to talk to the Heavenly Father about anything in your heart."* He suggests there are three Foundational Principles that guide our "Intimate dialogue with the One who cares about us most" -

1. God desires to communicate with us.
2. Prayer is rooted in a personal relationship with God. It's purpose is to strengthen and deepen our intimacy with Him.
3. The ultimate conversation is not just about talking to God. To truly interact with Him, we must listen to Him as well. Prayer reveals God's agenda to us when we listen intently for His response.

The relevance of prayer during Lent is that it offers us the opportunity to focus on the events recorded in Scripture leading up to Easter and to talk openly and authentically about them with God: confessing our shortcomings and failures; sharing our difficulties and doubts; expressing our desire to understand more clearly and personally their significance; identifying with His closest followers in the lead up to,

and the aftermath of, His Crucifixion; empathising with Jesus' agony, sense of abandonment and despair up to and during His Crucifixion; celebrating the ultimate victory of His Resurrection; and our thankfulness that through His sacrifice we have been redeemed and reconciled with God.

To assist in being intentional I would suggest that each day we set aside as much time as we can manage to read the Scriptures and pray, preferably in a quiet spot where we can talk out loud freely as we communicate with God and listen and search for His responses. It may be that we prefer to walk and talk with the Lord as the two followers of Jesus experienced on the Road to Emmaus when *"Their hearts burnt within them as He talked with them and opened the Scriptures to them."* (Luke 24 : 13 – 35)

If we break up our reading into passages on specific events e.g. Jesus Triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper; Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and His arrest; His Trial and Sentencing; His Crucifixion; His Resurrection and following events - and read one Gospel account of each of these events over one or two days (and covering all four Gospel accounts) we will spend a lot of time in reflection and discussion with God.

We may well ponder over different emphases in the Gospel accounts and notice that some events e.g. Jesus washing the disciples' feet are only mentioned in one Gospel. Ask God to reveal portions of Scripture that you have never noticed before on previous reading. These may well help to shape our reflection and conversation, remembering that our main focus is to deepen our relationship with God into one that becomes more intimate and personal. May we be able to proclaim aloud the reality expressed by Isaac Watts,

*"When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride."*

I will prepare a list of suggested readings from the various Gospels to assist anybody who is interested in following through this suggested routine with me. May God bless you in your journey of surrendering more of yourself to Him day by day.

*Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord Thy love at last has conquered: Grant me now my supplication,
"None of self, and all of Thee!"*

Ray Jones

Acknowledgements : "O The Bitter Shame and Sorrow" : Theodore Monod 1874
" The Ultimate Conversation" : Charles Stanley (Howard Books 2012)
" When I survey the Wondrous Cross" : Isaac Watts 1674 - 1748

KIDS' RIDS

How can you make a cream puff?

Make it run round the block really, really fast.

How can you be sure to get breakfast in bed?

Always sleep in the kitchen.

What can you do to fix a broken pizza?

Stick it together again with tomato paste.

What do you get if you cross a cow and a lawnmower?

A lawn mooer.

What are pessimists?

People who are never happy unless they are miserable.

What would you call the most famous Roman emperor when he had a cold?

Julius Sneezer.



We are now into the season of Lent, so I thought a few words about what it is; where it came from; what it might mean for us could be worthwhile as it is not something we may all have observed in a serious way before. However, I find some of the manifestations around this season quite confusing as it is recognized in various Orthodox, Roman Catholic and many Protestant churches many of whom calculate the 40 days of Lent differently and their practices and traditions also differ widely. So I will generalize it to some degree.

In summary, Lent is the period of around six weeks - 40 days (not including Sundays) - leading up to Easter, the most important festival in the Christian calendar. It starts on Ash Wednesday and ends during Holy Week, sometime before Easter Sunday. During those 40 days, we remember Jesus' time in the desert, fasting and praying, and being tempted by Satan, before beginning his ministry.

In response, many Christians commit to fasting, as well as "giving up" certain luxuries to replicate Jesus' sacrifice at this time. Some also add a Lenten spiritual discipline - reading a daily devotional, joining a study group, or praying through a Lenten Calendar - all to draw nearer to God. The Stations of the Cross, a devotional commemoration of Christ carrying the cross to his crucifixion, are often observed, particularly within the Roman Catholic tradition but some might recall the exhibition in the Montville Reflection gallery last year at this time. Many churches remove flowers from the sanctuary; for some, religious symbols are often veiled in violet fabric or removed to reflect the solemnity of the season; some worship practices are also influenced in that Glorias, Alleluiahs and other forms of celebration are done away with for the period.

Lent is one of the oldest observances in the Christian calendar and it has changed over the years, but its purpose has always been the same: fasting, self-examination and penitence, demonstrated by self-denial, in preparation for Easter. Early church father Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130-c.200) wrote of such a season which lasted only two or three days, not the 40 observed today. That came in 325, when the Council of Nicea discussed a 40-day Lenten season of fasting, possibly just for new Christians preparing for Baptism. However, it introduced two elements that remain today - fasting and individual self-examination - as Christians focus on their relationship to God.

Other interesting traditions and terms associated with Lent include:

- **Pre-Lenten Festivals** – Colourful festivities are held in many countries to signify the last opportunity for celebration before Lent begins e.g. New Orleans Mardi Gras, Carnival of Venice, Cologne Carnival and Rio de Janeiro Carnivale.
- **Shrove Tuesday** – In many Western Christian churches, the day before Ash Wednesday is known, to many, as Pancake Day. This was traditionally the last chance to use up all the foods Christians would not be eating during Lent as they fasted seriously for the whole period.
- **Ash Wednesday** – The first day of Lent when some churches hold services during which worshippers are marked on the forehead with a cross of ashes as a sign of repentance for wrongs done. The ashes come from burning the palm leaves from Palm Sunday the previous year.
- **Maundy Thursday** – The day before Good Friday. Some churches commemorate the last supper Jesus had with his disciples over an Eastern type meal, little speaking and gradual extinguishing of candles – called a Tenebrae service.
- **Holy Week** – This is the last week of Lent; the period between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday.
- **Palm Sunday** – the Sunday before Good Friday that commemorates Jesus entry into Jerusalem, often referred to as 'the triumphal entry'. It is often celebrated with palm branches and parades in recognition of the story that appears in all four gospels.
- **Passion Sunday** – was usually the fifth Sunday in Lent but in more recent years has become integrated with Palm Sunday and is often referred to as Palm[Passion] Sunday
- **Fasting** – Fasting is an integral part of Lent as it reflects Jesus' fasting in the desert and is a test of self-discipline. In early times, meals were restricted to one a day and certain foods were also not eaten. The practice varied greatly among denominations and while still practised in some churches, nowadays it is often simply that people choose to give up something they really like – chocolate, coffee etc. – while others volunteer to serve others in need. Fasting did not occur on Sundays as these were considered Feast days and that is why they are excluded from the counting of 40 days – only fast days were counted.
- **Baptism** – In the early church, Lent was a period of preparation of new converts for Baptism on Easter Eve. This practice has waxed and waned over the years but is still found in some churches today.

ENVISIONING THE RESURRECTION

This year the World Day of Prayer is focusing on Suriname – a country in Northern South America. When I heard this, my mind went to a trip to Peru some years ago where I learnt something, both simple and yet profound, that has influenced my thinking ever since.

Various shops had small, carved nativity sets for sale. The striking thing about them was that the figures were all dressed in local costumes. As we went further afield, we found that the different regions also dressed their figures in their local traditional costume. All were different. The whole Christmas story belonged to these people – Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men were all locals. And there were no donkeys or sheep – just llamas. The people had re-envisioned the Incarnation as though it happened right there among them. How wonderful is that, I thought.



I can't say I've seen the same thing in Australia, but perhaps it happens somewhere. Quite easy, really – lots of denim, checked shirts/blouses, akubras, R M Williams gear etc. gathered at an outback pub or caravan park. Or even bikinis and budgie smugglers on a beach somewhere. You get the idea, I'm sure.

But it made me think – have we as a nation really appropriated this, and other similar, world shattering faith events into our psyche, our national consciousness? Do we really believe the Incarnation, the birth of Christ, is really an integral part of our lives in Australia today?

I find it hard to imagine that Australia will ever go there. We're much more likely to try to show kangaroos or koalas with shepherd's crooks and gifts. Perhaps I'm just too cynical.

However, could we as a gathered people of God, try to spend a little while wondering how we might make the resurrection our own? After all, we are a resurrection people. But - what does that really mean?

Let's look at the resurrection end of the Easter story as told in Luke's gospel, to see if we can go down that track of ownership a little. Let's try to paint some mental pictures for ourselves and then try to live within them for a while.

Chapter 23 ends with Jesus burial. His body is *placed in a tomb*. Could this be the end of the story?

But for us, where might this be? We can look physically – a big city cemetery, an overgrown bush cemetery, a niche in a crematorium wall, by the creek among the River Red gums, in the cave under a waterfall? Does it even relate to a swagman by a billabong? All a bit difficult.

Or we can look spiritually and ask – where has Christ died in our society? Where should we look? Where have our political leaders, and at times our religious leaders by their silence, crucified Jesus?

Where did we go looking for him after we stood by and watched him crucified? Was this on Manus Island? Was it in religious spaces where children were sexually abused? Was it in a situation of domestic violence we knew about but did nothing? Was it to do with Aboriginal massacres many years ago? Is it among our own local homeless people? Where has Jesus died?

There are no doubt similar situations that arise in our private lives as well.

It seems that before we might look to the possibility of Christ's resurrection among us, we may need to identify and acknowledge our involvement in his death so we can participate more fully in resurrection.

Chapter 24 [1 – 12] *The resurrection.*

There is much to explore here – women doing the work by going about their normal tasks; surprise at what they find; their very significant role in announcing the resurrection; their being ignored by the men's disbelief; Peter's impetuosity and unilateral action - all sounds very Australian to me.

But the big question put to them is – “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” How does that relate to us and our church? Are there elements of our church life [structures, administration, worship, outreach, relationships, programs etc] parts of which might be described as “dead”? If so, why do we persist in looking for life within them? What will resurrection mean for them? For us?

Chapter 24 [13 – 35] *On the road to Emmaus.*

A couple of blokes yarning together as they travel; happy to include a fellow traveller; they chew the fat without any recognition of who they're talking to; happy to share a meal and afterwards claiming to have had an inkling all the while of how important their guest was. Fairly Australian male too, I suggest.

But for resurrection, when have we last “felt our hearts burning within us?” And when we did, did we go immediately, at some cost to ourselves, to tell others about it? Until we are filled with this sort of zeal, perhaps we are unable to really capture the essence of the resurrection. What might our hearts burning within us this year feel like?

Chapter 23 [36 – 49] *Jesus appears to the disciples.*

Jesus followers stood around talking. Sound like church to you? The disciples did very little here as they were tongue tied and troubled. It was all very challenging and a bit too much really. Yet, Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

For resurrection to be real, perhaps we are required to reach out and touch Jesus' damaged hands and feet too. When did we last do that? Have we ever done it? How might that play out today? And how long is it since we have really had our minds opened to the Scriptures by listening to, or reading, something that is normally way beyond our comfort zone and thinking about it, pulling it apart, discussing it, rather than refusing to pick it up and examining it for the truth it may contain?

Chapter 24 [50 – 53] *The Ascension.*

Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit, led them out and blessed them before he left them to return to his Father.

For their part, the disciples worshipped him and praised him with great joy.

As resurrection people, that is our lot and we can do that, as we do. Christ's blessing is upon us. Praise be to God.

Rev Graham Dempster

KARL'S KORNER

The Idea of God(s)

When my eldest child was a toddler, he would often ask "Why?". I would give an answer, only to be asked again "Why?". It seemed as though he wasn't actually comprehending my answer because each answer resulted in another "Why?". Finally, out of frustration, I simply replied "Because I said so!". This little – perhaps humorous – vignette reveals two aspects of our human condition – we seek a reason for everything, and then we effectively ask "Says who?".

Since the dawn of humanity we have asked these questions whenever something happened for which we had no mechanistic reason. Something fell on us and, although we understood that things fall, we asked "Why did it have to fall just when I was under it?". This led us to posit the existence of beings or entities who had some intentions affecting us. Trees, streams, and even the land itself had unseen entities lurking in them, usually to do us a mischief. (When good things happened we often either didn't consider this attributable to these entities or we attributed it to our own abilities.)

And so eventually we, copying our own propensity for generating hierarchies, superimposed such on the multiplicity of entities we imagined. And we saw them as both a source of authority and nebulous beings to blame for our ills (not to mention existence or creation), and many such entities had very human characteristics. This happened wherever there were humans. The Chinese spoke of a nebulous "heaven" as conferring authority on the emperor; the Hindus came up with an entity called "Brahman" who had what we might call pairs of personified aspects one with positive and the other with negative qualities (a sort of Ying and Yang concept); early Europeans, possibly inheriting a distorted version of their Central-Asian heritage, conceived what were called "gods" responsible for different human aspects and connected them into mostly dis-functional families; American Indians spoke of a "Great Spirit" who oversaw all that went on in the world they knew; and Australian aborigines attributed things to a "Great Serpent" among other entities. Early Persians, perhaps discarding the Hindu's personified aspects, referred to the supreme Zoroastrian entity as Ahura Mazda who, unusually, had qualities which we might call "perfectly good" or positive and yet evil was attributed to a caste of devils.

The Israelites of the Old Testament seem to have been polytheists at times (else why the need for the first commandment?) while, at others, a form of monotheists in which their god is the only true one and those of other tribes either non-existent or impostors. Despite being instructed not to make images of their god, they occasionally fell back into what we called "idol worship". Some say that Judaism is really a pastiche of Zoroastrian and Egyptian beliefs and traditions.

But how do we "modern" humans conceive our gods? Ancient ideas still prevail in much of the world and we all struggle (as did a guy by the name of Plotinus millennia ago) to conceive of what God is. Christians too, despite being aware of the injunction not to make images of Him, have conceived of God as some sort of earthly king or, if our art is any guide, grumpy old man requiring our adulation and subservience. Similarly, Islamists seem to see their Allah in similar terms, requiring obeisance from his subjects. Do these 'images' make sense? But is any imagery helpful, least of all that of an egotistical dictator? Is this not just a god created in our image?

John opens his gospel by saying (as it is given to us in English) "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." The word "word" here has been translated from the Greek "Logos" whose actual meaning is a bit vague despite all the scholarship that can be brought to bear. I have seen it translated as "reason" and "spirit". The fact is that we struggle with this. So allow me to put my own 'spin' on it by retranslating, as it were, John.

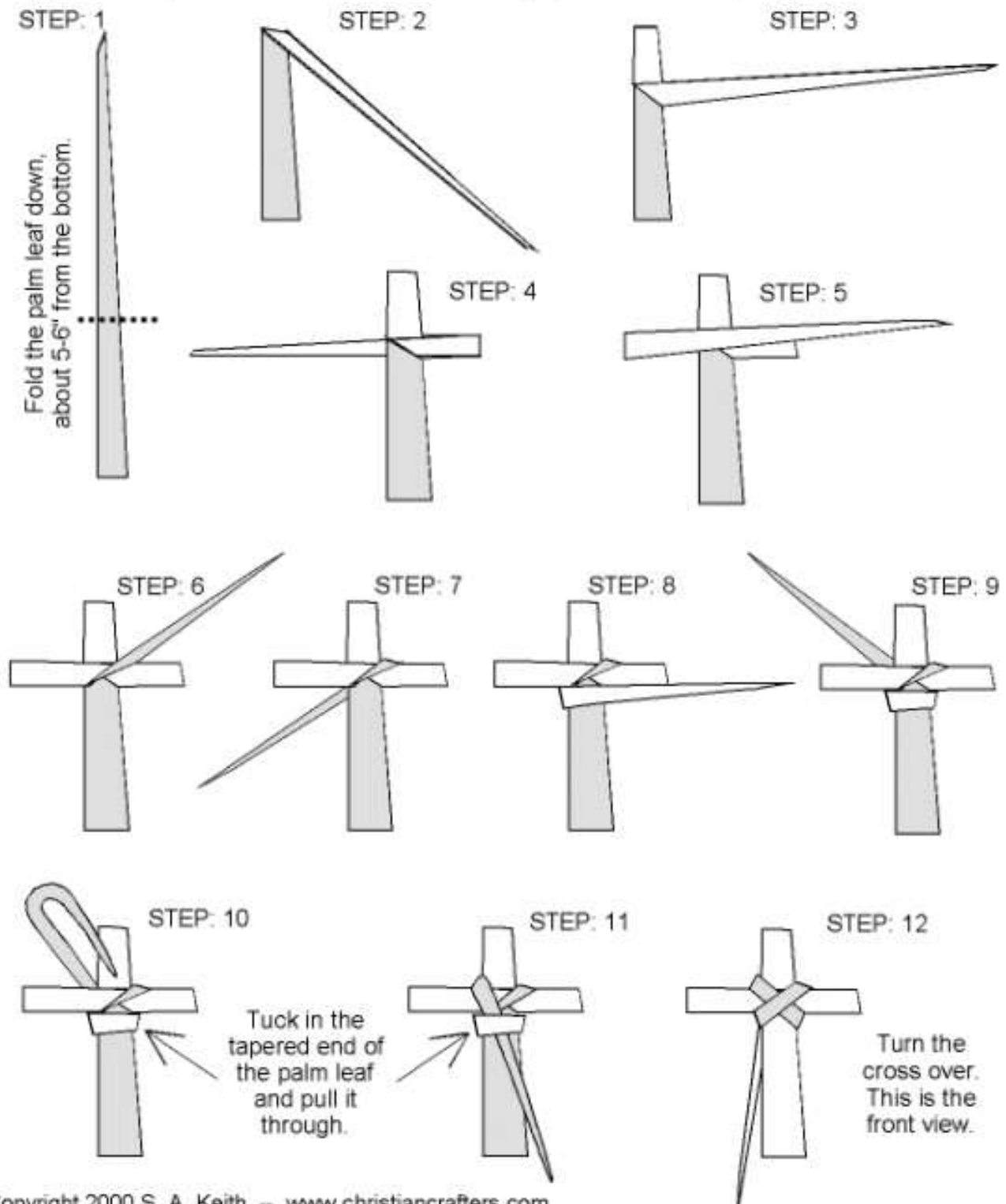
In the beginning was the great creative reason, it was God's reason (for only a thinking being can have reasons in our experience), and for us God and His reason are synonymous.

Karl Tietze

PALM LEAF CROSSES

One Lenten activity I have come across at times is the making of palm leaf crosses on Palm Sunday – but the magic of how to do this always escaped me. But I have found the secret and share it here as something we can all do for our grandchildren or have our grandchildren do for us. And then we might ask ourselves – What does it mean for me to hold the cross in the palm of my hand?

Supplies: One palm leaf strip about 24-26" in length, 1/2" in width, tapering to the end.



THE FUNNIES PAGE



BLACKALL RANGE CHURCHES – CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

MALENY

Sundays

9.45 am Worship Service held weekly; Holy Communion 1st Sunday of month
4.30 pm Worship Service with focus on young people, all ages welcome

Tuesdays

7 am – 8 am Silent Prayer: weekly, Moyra Jones 5494 2661
9 am – 3 pm Church Office Open: weekly, 9.00am to 3.00pm, 5429 6995
..... Band of Brothers: 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, time and venue vary,
 Roger Smith 5494 3784

Wednesdays

8.30 am Christian Meditation: weekly, Rev Graham Dempster 5494 2594

Thursdays

9 am – 3 pm Church Office Open: weekly, 9.00am to 3.00pm, 5429 6995
9.30 am Ladies Friendship Group: 3rd Thursday of month, Nancy Baker 5494 2961
 or Marnie McCallum 5499 9807
10.00 am Ladies' R&R Book Club: 1st Thursday of month, Jocelyn Brooker 5494 3693
10.00 am Ladies' MUCR Book Club: 1st Thursday of month, Karin Ellemor 5494 3379

Fridays

1.30 pm Know Your Bible Group (KYB): weekly, Dorothy Tietze 5494 2486

Saturdays

9.00 am Prayer Meeting: 2nd Saturday of month, Bob Grice 5494 3640

Other Meetings

Pastoral Care Quarterly in February, May, August and November,
 Dorothy Tietze 5494 2486

Church Council Monthly, Marilyn Milton 5435 2595

Home Groups: For details, please phone Stuart and Jan Craig 5494 2990

MONTVILLE

Daily

10 am – 3 pm Reflection Gallery Open

Sundays

8.15 am Worship Service held weekly; Holy Communion 2nd Sunday of month

Tuesdays

9.00 am "Know Your Bible" at Flaxton, Margot Stuart, 5476 3777
 Bible studies and Market Days are conducted throughout the year.
 Details are given in the Church Notices.

PALMWOODS

Sundays

10.00 am English Worship Service held weekly
12 00 pm Tongan Worship Service held weekly
10.00 am Combined Service held on 2nd Sunday of the month with Holy
 Communion
6.00 pm Dinner and chat fortnightly, Pastor Kay Nixon 5445 9035

