



# the new vine

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Blackall Range Uniting Churches

(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

I wonder if this is a good time, or even the right time, to ask everyone – “How was your Easter?”

Has Easter made any difference to your life and the way you choose to live it?

Life seems to demand that we move on quickly to whatever the next challenge is, and doesn't always allow us the opportunity to sit and reflect on what has been happening to us, and for us.

For example, Easter has come and gone; Pentecost has been experienced yet again; and Trinity Sunday for 2019 has already passed into history. What's next? Whatever it may be, I sense it is not - “Let's sit and take a breather while we go back over recent events and think through what they may mean to our lives.”

However, I am very grateful that some of our members have taken the time to sit and think about what Easter has meant to them and I would like to encourage each of us to read what has been written and try to relate it to our own lives. Such reflection may unveil something new for us that will help us face life more confidently and more purposefully. If this is the case, and you'd be prepared to share what comes to you, I'd be very happy to include your musings in a future edition.

Reflection, by its very nature, draws us in to whatever we are looking at and we become intimately engaged with it. The image of mirrors and reflections is never far away – and we realize reflection can show ourselves to ourselves. Reflection can unearth things that we were unaware of within ourselves and that can be a little un-nerving at times, but I feel this to be a good thing as we can be forced to push our own boundaries and challenge the status quo of our lives. And that's when transformation can occur.

So surely that means it is always a good time and a right time to ask:

“How was your Easter?”

We owe it to ourselves, I feel, to ask this question and also to answer it.

Peace and blessings

Graham

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# WHO'S WHO IN THE BLACKALL RANGE CHUCHES

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**One Church Council:** Peter Callaghan (Chair); Marilyn Milton (Secretary); Peter Uhlmann (Treasurer); Bob Eather and Amity Green (Maleny representatives); Duncan Drew and Rev George Woodward (Montville representatives); and Karis Ross and Mele Lolohea-Cameron (Palmwoods representatives).

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

## MESSAGE FROM REV BRUCE JOHNSON

### Faithful Disciples of Jesus

When I arrived in my first congregation I was confronted with many questions and expectations. I found it challenging to negotiate the competing expectations of the two congregations I served, and the many expectations that individuals had of their minister. I was young and confident of my calling and sure that it was my job to help these people be better followers of Jesus.

In Clermont there was a young teacher of an isolated two-teacher school who, every Sunday morning, drove the 60 kms to play the organ for the 7.30am service. Shortly after I arrived he asked if he could shift the little Hammond organ off the raised sanctuary area to nearer the congregation. He felt it would help the congregation's singing if he were closer to them. I said I didn't mind so helped him relocate the organ. No one raised any objection and I didn't think any more about it. Even after that teacher was transferred the organ remained where it was.

I had just concluded my final service at Clermont a couple of years later. As I walked to the door to greet and farewell people for the last time, I heard the Matriarch of the congregation say to her neighbour in a stage whisper, "Now, maybe we can put the organ back where it belongs."

I had been taught in a very clear way that a minister is simply a "bird of passage". We play a small part in God's divine plans for his people. Sometimes we do things that enrich and nurture those we serve and sometimes we do foolish things that cause stumbling blocks and trip people up. What helps some may annoy others. (The organ never did go back to "where it belongs").

As we all wait for the arrival of our new minister we would do well to ponder what God has been doing among us through Catherine's ministry. Are there things that you want to "put back where they belong"? Is there something you had grown comfortable with in your life that needed to be changed or renewed? Are there things that God has done in your life that mean you will never go back to where you were four years ago? How has the church become more effective as the expression of Christ in our communities? What have we learnt through Catherine's ministry that we should not forget?

It is easy for both ministers and congregation members to over emphasise the importance of the minister in the life of the church. When I was 14 years old the minister in my church decided I would be a minister so began to teach me New Testament Greek and other things he thought I would need to know. One thing he told me was, "As a minister it is easy to get people to lean on you, but your job is to help them lean on Christ." We are called to grow, individually and as a community, into the fullness of Jesus Christ. We are to be more faithful disciples of Jesus, not disciples of this or that minister, no matter how good they are.

Our new Church Council is working with each congregation to set out a plan that will grow our discipleship and shape our shared purpose. Each congregation will have its own strategic plan which spells out what that community hopes it can achieve in God's mission over the next few years. As we look at those plans each person can consider the part they might play in fulfilling those dreams.

An incoming minister will also be able to see where we believe we are headed and use their gifts and experience to help us on that journey. Together we will listen for God's leading and respond with faith and obedience.

Many years ago I sat with the Joint Nominating Committee of a congregation in Central Queensland. I talked with them about their last three ministers, all of whom were very different from each other. I then asked what sort of minister they now needed as they looked into the future. Different people offered their opinion before one man, a sugar farmer and a leader in both the church and the wider sugar industry said, "You give us someone who has the call of God on their lives and we will learn whatever God wants to teach us through them."

I felt deeply humbled at those words. We don't need perfect ministers, or perfect congregations. We each need to humble ourselves before God and take responsibility for our own growth in faith. Then we can receive one another as God's gifts who he will use to shape his people individually and as the Body of Christ.

Please continue to pray that the person God knows we need will hear God's call and take up the role of Minister of the Blackall Range Uniting Churches.

## KIDS' RIDS

**Why are basketball players like small babies?**

***They both dribble a lot.***

**What is another name for a flying police officer?**

***A heli-copper.***

**What do you get if you mix your dad's pot of red paint with his white paint?**

***A lot of trouble.***

**Why is a clumsy carpenter like lightning?**

***He never strikes twice in the same place.***

**When is the moon not hungry?**

***When it is full.***

**Which nut sounds like a sneeze?**

***A cashew.***

## AN EASTER REFLECTION

### Producing Fruit in Keeping with our Repentance

The theme for the third Sunday in Lent was repentance. The Maleny congregation was asked to consider the verse “produce fruits in keeping with your repentance”. Jesus alluded to this in the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13. John also used these words in John 3 : 8.

Repentance is very much a Lenten discipline. But these verses suggest that repentance is only “true” when there is an added component – producing “fruits”.

So the congregation was asked to consider what the world would look like when we produce fruits in keeping with our repentance – in our faith community, in the town of Maleny, nationally and world wide.

There was animated discussion! Here are some of the suggestions that arose:

#### Our Church would be:

- Non-judgmental, as we acted kindly to one another, even when we don't agree;
- Welcoming as we make newcomers feel at home;
- Compassionate as we became more aware of members who struggle with health and other problems;
- Accepting as we took time to listen and find ways to support people with their problems;
- Open to change;
- Prayerful as we prayed for one another;
- A place that exhibited unconditional love as it grew to yield fruit through its teaching and evangelism;
- Encouraging growth of all kinds;
- Supportive of our leaders;
- Embracing all ages, colours, and races.

#### Our Maleny Community would benefit by:

- Becoming a more connected and friendly place where people's problems can be more easily identified and addressed;
- Having church people involved in community support groups like Maleny Neighbourhood Centre and community housing (CHASM);
- Greater and wider community involvement in lessening the use of drugs, preventing and combatting domestic violence, and addressing homelessness issues;
- Overt Christian witness to the community with on-going prayer for the community and deeper levels of connection with the unsaved

- Christians making themselves available for involvement in groups that address community issues - e.g. housing, aged care and other elder issues; youth matters - to build a strong, compassionate community that will help the less fortunate.

Our nation and world would experience:

- Less division and a greater openness to acceptance of the other, including refugees;
- A willingness to treat all nations fairly;
- An ability, by and in grace, to live in peace;
- Being governed by sincere politicians exhibiting effective leadership;
- The “Light of the World” - with Christians leading by example - for without light, everything dies
- A desire and willingness to help people cope with loss – homes, belonging, families, land;
- Tolerance, openness and acceptance of morals, values, faith;
- Awareness of the presence of God’s people.

There’s a terrific lot of depth and food for thought and action in these comments: certainly, personally challenging for me, at whatever level I choose to operate at.

As a gardener, there was one comment that really appealed to me: “Manure is seen as waste, but in the right place produces food.”

Particularly challenging when we remember that at Easter, Jesus takes all the worst that we can offer and transforms it, by grace, into new life.

[MURRAY ROBERTSON] (using materials collated from the Maleny congregation)

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### The Women at the Cross

*One of the enduring images of Easter for me, and many others I believe, is that of the women who gathered faithfully, sadly and, I guess, hopelessly at the cross at the crucifixion on what we call Good Friday.*

*And some of them were the first to experience the empty tomb on Easter Day.*

*There is something to ponder in all that, as there is, I believe, in the photo that follows – taken during the Easter Day service at Maleny.*

*What does it say to you?’*





[GRAHAM]

## PARLIAMENTARY CHURCHES

As I wandered around exploring parts of Scotland, I often wondered how these sparsely populated highland areas could possibly, at some stage, have supported all the big churches that were built there. It is almost beyond comprehension – there are so many largish churches and so few people. So, I thought I might try to find out what I could.

My first discovery, of course, was that many things of interest in Scotland are surrounded by the mists of time, myth and legend. There is always a story to be told as I found out one day, sitting with an elderly neighbour around her peat fire, just talking. She is not a church goer, but knows that I am, and she has lived in the district most of her life – so naturally, she thought she should tell me about the local churches.

There are none in our village of Armadale so she talked about Strathy - the closest village to the east - about 4 miles away. Today, its scattered population would be in the low hundreds, yet it has four large church buildings, only two of which are still active. One is what was called a Parliamentary Church and it has now been converted to a private dwelling.

It was this Parliamentary Church she wanted to talk about – and so did I, as I had seen it and wondered what its story was.

According to my host, after the Crimean War [1853 – 1856] the government wanted to find a way of thanking the highlanders for their contribution to the war, so they built a number of churches across the highlands in areas that were thinly populated and had widely scattered parishes.

The story piqued my interest – I wondered just what did happen and the name – Parliamentary Church – was enough to get me looking more deeply at it. Here is a summary of what I found.

An Act of Parliament in Westminster in 1823 [that ruled out the Crimean War] provided for the construction of up to 43 churches and manses in communities in the highlands and islands that did not have church buildings. It was done, according to some commentators, because of government neglect of the areas for some lengthy period. Others say that it was the result of the Clearances that almost totally depopulated the Highlands and decimated communities. A total of £50,000 was provided, and the cost of churches was not to exceed £1500, and manses £750. In all, 32 new churches were built [19 in the highlands and 13 in the islands] and another 11 existing churches were upgraded. Because of their origins, and lack of denominational background, they were called Parliamentary Churches. Ministers were paid by the government – £120 per annum.

The task of designing the churches and manses fell to one of Scotland's most famous architects/civil engineers – Thomas Telford. Because of the financial constraints placed upon the project, he developed one T-shaped plan for all the churches and two plans for manses – a single storey model and a two storey model and because of the tight finances, all are simple, stern and austere. This is the reason so many churches and manses look the same across the Highlands although they did have minor differences. Some of the churches are still standing today and a few are still in use as churches.

In Strathy, the Parliamentary Church and manse were built in 1828; the Free Church in 1845 and its manse in 1862; the Free Presbyterian Church around 1900; and the Church of Scotland



and its manse in 1910 – 1911. A small community was well supplied with churches but please don't ask me what the differences between them are.

So, it appears the Parliamentary Church was the only church in the area for 20 odd years, at which point denominational groups built to the point where they were strong enough to build their own churches and support their own ministers, thus diminishing support for the Parliamentary Church. I could not find when this church finally withdrew from active ministry in the area.

#### FOOTNOTE:

I tried to follow up the reference to the Crimean war without success but I did come across a different war reference that probably helps explain some of the antipathy the Scots have towards their southern neighbours.

A quote from an on line Geograph article:

*"After the Napoleonic Wars, Parliament made available £1,000,000 in 1819, with a further £500,000 in 1824, for the building of churches and chapels for the Church of England, as an expression of gratitude to God for victory. 214 "Commissioners' Churches" were built or refurbished; one of these alone is said to have cost the best part of £77,000 (equivalent to £6 million in 2014), though much of this was not government money.*

*A similar proposal to provide £200,000 for the Church of Scotland was delayed for years by various political difficulties and obstruction, and when an amended Bill was eventually passed in 1824, it provided just £50,000 for the whole of the Highlands. No more than 30 kirks with manses were to be built, and no more than £1,500 (equivalent to £125,000 in 2014) was to be spent on any one site. A similar Bill for the Lowlands failed altogether in 1825. So the whole of Scotland got a Parliamentary grant of less than was spent on one single Church of England; and the majority of parishes, and parishioners, in Scotland got nothing at all."*

[GRAHAM]

## SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

One of the daily meditations I have been using recently tries to stretch the minds and understandings of the readers theologically rather than simply expound on pieces of scripture. Each day's offering ends with the following words:

Gateway to Presence:

*If you want to go deeper with today's meditation, take note of what word or phrase stands out to you. Come back to that word or phrase throughout the day, being present to its impact and invitation.*

I have found this to be useful advice and so share it with the suggestion it is worth trying with whatever daily readings we do.

[GRAHAM]

## I FELT THIS WAS WORTH SHARING

At the spring conference run by the Centre for Action and Contemplation run by Fr Richard Rohr, the following litany of welcome was made by 2,000 attendees and thousands more online. Many found it powerfully moving. So, readers of his daily devotional column were later encouraged to read it aloud to themselves and feel truly welcomed. They were asked [i] if there were pieces of their person named here they would like to recognize and [ii] if they would consider writing and sharing their own inclusive welcome statement written by themselves or in collaboration with others of their faith community.

*We would like to let you know that you belong . . .*

*People on all parts of the continuum of gender identity and expression, including those who are gay, bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, cisgender, queer folks, the sexually active, the celibate, and everyone for whom those labels don't apply. We say, "You belong."*

*People of African descent, of Asian descent, of European descent, of First Nations descent in this land and abroad, and people of mixed and multiple descents and of all the languages spoken here. We say, "You belong."*

*Bodies with all abilities and challenges. Those living with any chronic medical condition, visible or invisible, mental or physical. We say, "You belong."*

*People who identify as activists and those who don't. Mystics, believers, seekers of all kinds. People of all ages. Those who support you to be here. We say, "You belong."*

*Your emotions: joy, fear, grief, contentment, disappointment, surprise, and all else that flows through you. We say, "You belong."*

*Your families, genetic and otherwise. Those dear to us who have died. Our ancestors and the future ones. The ancestors who lived in this land, in this place, where these buildings are now . . . we honor you through this work that we are undertaking. We say, "You belong."*

*People who feel broken, lost, struggling; who suffer from self-doubt and self-judgment. We say, "You belong."*

*All beings that inhabit this earth, human or otherwise: the two-legged, the four-legged, winged and finned, those that walk, fly, and crawl, above the ground and below, in air and water. We say, "You belong."*

[GRAHAM]



## BOOK REVIEW

### *Praying with Process Theology by Bruce Epperly*

Recently I have read a very encouraging book – *Praying with Process Theology* by Bruce Epperly [River Lane Press, Anoka, Minnesota]. Bruce is a church pastor in theology, ministry and spirituality at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. He has written many books and lives on Cape Cod 'where he enjoys beach-combing and playing with his grandchildren'.

This visionary book involves fifty days of devotional reading and spiritual practices.

God is not the enemy of any enemies I might have. I am encouraged to seek 'creative transformation' for us all.

This book seems to me to foster beauty from bleakness; hope from despair, particularly with those young people suffering from long term sickness or those elderly with tiring bodies.

The book encourages us to be thankful for all the beauty in our world and to care for people, animals, birds, trees and plants, for clean water and unpolluted atmosphere – and indeed, provide order from chaos with loving kindness, patience, creativity and joy.

Books can be exciting – this one certainly is!

Its sub-title is *Spiritual Practices for personal and planetary healing*.

[Review by MOYRA JONES]

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### *Drinking from My Saucer*

I've never made a fortune, and it's probably too late now.  
But I don't worry about that much, I'm happy anyhow.  
And, as I go along life's way, I'm reaping better than I sowed.

**I'm drinking from my saucer, 'Cause my cup has overflowed.**

Haven't got a lot of riches, and sometimes the going's tough!  
But, I've got loving ones all around me, and that makes me rich enough.  
I thank GOD for his Blessings, and the Mercies HE's bestowed.

**I'm drinking from my saucer, 'Cause my cup has overflowed.**

I remember times when things went wrong, my faith wore somewhat thin.  
But, all at once the dark clouds broke, and the sun peeped through again.  
So, LORD, help me not to gripe, about the tough rows I have hoed.

**I'm drinking from my saucer, 'Cause my cup has overflowed.**

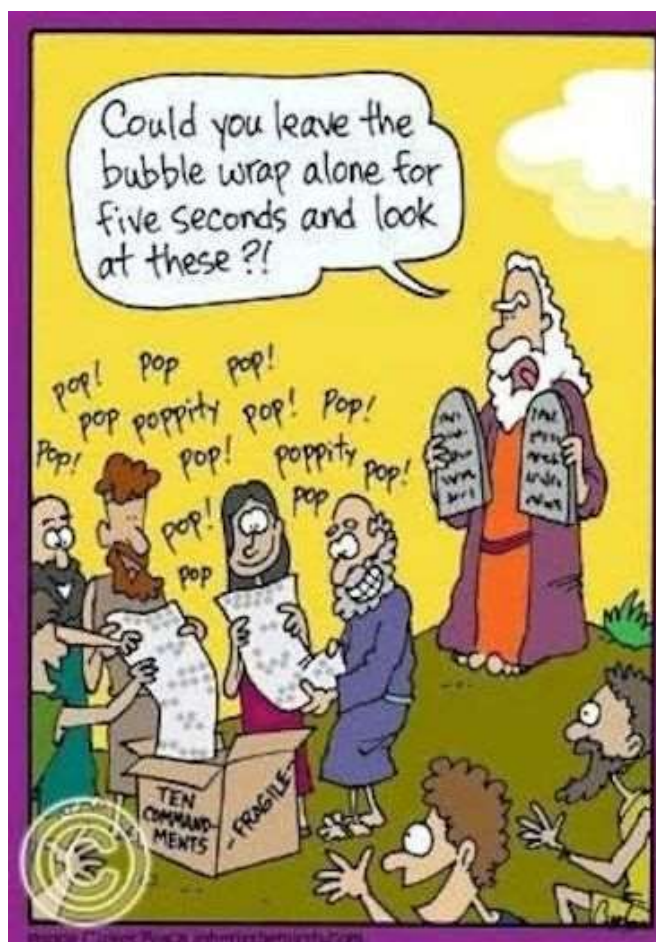
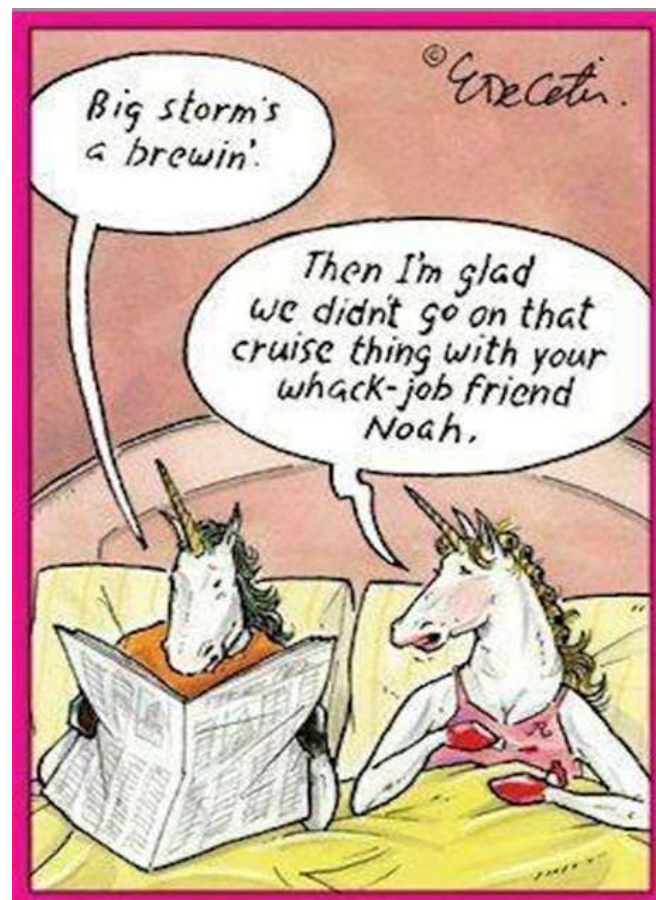
If GOD gives me strength and courage, when the way grows steep and rough.  
I'll not ask for other blessings, I'm already blessed enough.  
And may I never be too busy, to help others bear their loads.

**Then I'll keep drinking from my saucer, 'Cause my cup has overflowed.**

Author unknown – but sent to me 5 years ago as something to cogitate on and share. [GRAHAM]



## THE FUNNIES PAGE



## AS WE LOOK BACK AT LENT AND EASTER

*Our last edition included a poem, Via Dolorosa by Karl Reus. This poem was taken from the daily Lectionary commentary With Love to the World. Much of the poem spoke to me and it was the final stanza that encouraged me to ask, through Our Common Life, and more directly to some by email, if they would be prepared to share an Easter experience. That was all the invitation said and the rest was up to those who responded.*

*Here, again, is that final stanza*

*And thus my Lenten prayer:  
that each road to Calvary  
be a way where pain meets hope  
and where burdens shared  
are burdens eased . . .*

*. . . for pilgrims all.*

*And a big thank you to those who provided the following responses.*

[GRAHAM]

### Easter Experiences

For many years the book titled "The Bible" has been on the best-selling list. I wonder how many of the purchasers actually read the words in it, and if they do, is it apparent what the words mean. Most people in the Western Hemisphere who attend a Christian service hear a couple of verses read, so the day's preacher can expound her (his) knowledge on what the verses mean.

What a great time is Easter. Hot cross buns - Easter eggs - particularly those chocolate ones that pay for them to be exported to a Muslim Country. I have seen various ads for eggs and buns (buy more, buy more) but I have not seen an ad for a discounted Bible sale.

Should we concentrate on the death of a person who tried to change the administration of a country, or should we concentrate on the thoughts He left behind. Surely we do not need to answer that.

So, what does Easter mean to me?

A number of years ago Olive and I were in Waterloo. On Friday we attended a service where a large chicken wire Cross was displayed (empty). On Sunday, as each person came into the church, they were given a red rose to place in the empty Cross. Was this an effort to brighten up the church, or was this an effort to bring people's understanding of a new thought process within our knowledge?

I find reading that book that is on the best sellers list is pretty easy. It says "Love one another as I have loved you".

COLIN HARDING



How to catch the celebratory nature of worship on Easter Day? This year at Montville we, first of all, had the Community Sunrise Service organized by the ministers of the Anglican, Uniting and INC Christian Outreach churches with the Nambour Salvation Army band providing music. Then, at 7.30 am, we held our Easter Service in the Uniting Church. The building was alive with colour provided by the church banners on display by the Reflection Gallery. We started in the church singing Easter hymns, reading and reflecting on the Resurrection and prayer, then we moved through into the hall. Here we sat around a long table to enjoy hot cross buns and chocolate easter eggs and to engage in small group discussions on the theme: *Resurrection – It Changes Everything*. Visitors and regulars alike appreciated this approach.

RON POTTER

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Maundy Thursday For many years Maundy Thursday Service has always been a very special time for me to reflect on the Easter experience of Jesus. It is usually a quiet meditation of Bible readings often with the symbolic washing of feet by kneeling at your neighbour to wipe the shoes in a purposeful way. It was helpful to understand the humility of Jesus. It concludes with the communion meal together and departing with lights dimmed and in silence. I felt Jesus' Spirit with me as I walked into the darkness of night.

RUTH POTTER

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I was excited at the prospect of being in Scotland over the Easter period as I had never previously experienced Easter in Spring - a time when the whole concept of new life and the



resurrection seemed to be appropriately experienced concurrently. To arrive when the daffodils in our yard were in full bloom was an added bonus in all this excitement. But I found the winds of winter persisted, and were quite vigorous, and they wreaked havoc among the flowers, causing many to break off and start to decay. I cut them off, picked them up, and put them in a vase thus transferring some of the beauty indoors. As I gazed upon them it struck me that here was an Easter story. The cut flowers were originally part of the beautiful display of golden colour within an otherwise sombre landscape but they had been condemned to die by the wind. By being placed in a vase, they had been resurrected and continued to bring beauty and joy in another way. And further thought brought me to the point that I realised there is a life lesson in this - the broken, the terminally afflicted, the rejects, when given an opportunity can become a

thing of radiance and meaning. Easter came early for me this year.

GRAHAM DEMPSTER

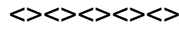
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Prior to Easter we pondered in our Connect Group on the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus who died the most horrible of deaths, for us, by crucifixion. But then we have the Resurrection – new life!

Contemplating on new life, my thoughts turned to the Northern Hemisphere where there are abundant signs of new life at this time of year, spring time, with an abundance of spring flowers, trees coming into bud, the birth of baby lambs, and so on.

I would like to tell you about my “new life” experience this year. On Easter Saturday we were invited to meet our dear friends’ new grandson whose birth is so special, and who is so cherished and loved and wanted. As I held this child I knew that I was indeed experiencing new life in the here and now, and that God is good.

MURIEL WILSON



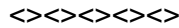
“What is your goal in life?”

This was a question our home group looked at recently. It seemed an easier question to answer than “What have you meditated on and learnt this Lent?” After a little thinking, I said my goal was to try to leave the world a better place than when I came into it - perhaps an impossible dream, but one that gives me hope, joy and a sense of purpose. So, I plant trees on ‘Dilkusha’, restoring one tiny part of the Blackall Range rainforest habitat.

I notice the intricate interrelationships of the scrambling orchid, its pollinating wasp and dependency on the recycling fungi that are deconstructing an old log, and I share my wonder with any who will listen. I find a mushroom, look down my microscope and discover it is a new species, and am amazed that there is still so much to learn about this precious planet.

I want to awaken in others a sense of wonderment that sees us as a part of creation, dependent on every other part, capable of nurturing and restoring life, though often we destroy that which sustains us. I am humbled by the enormity of the task, but encouraged by the knowledge that I am not in this alone, and that I meet God in others on the journey, and in the very essence of Nature itself.

FRANCES GUARD



This was the first Easter for many years when the extended Grice clan did not gather at the farm to celebrate Jesus’ death and resurrection and to enjoy our unity in Christ. This was because I was with our youngest daughter and her family in Japan. We had a wonderful time together in Japan seeing new things, experiencing a different culture and making memories - but we missed our Easter on the farm. This was especially so as, although I understand about 1% of Japanese are Christian, we did not experience any recognition of Easter at all – not even an Easter egg.

We, six of us, celebrated Easter Sunday in our hotel room but our experience brought home to me how central the Easter message is to my faith and how meaningless my walk with God would be without it.

However I did not miss the gross commercialism that pervades Easter here at home. Just like the hundreds of shrines scattered throughout Japan, the trappings of Easter that permeate our Australian culture do nothing to answer the big questions of life or to address our deepest needs. I was very happy to hear that our services at Maleny were vibrant times of worship and celebration, but for how many in our community was that the experience?

The events of that first Easter and the message of salvation Easter brings has always been at the heart of my life as a Christian, and my experience this year in Japan has only reinforced this – that on the cross Jesus won the victory over sin and death for all who would put our trust in Him so that we can have the certainty of Salvation, both in this world and for Eternity.

May God help us to proclaim these truths not just at Easter but faithfully every day He gives us breath.”

BOB GRICE

Giving up something for Lent has never been part of my upbringing or Christian DNA. In many ways it never quite resonated in my preparation towards Easter. A family friend proclaimed on Facebook just before Ash Wednesday that she was giving up Facebook for Lent ... for some people that is a big commitment. But for me the Lent experience/preparation for Easter has not been about giving up something but adding something extra in. A conscious choice to be more focused on the Christ who walked this path for me. And so, as my focus changed, over time other things in my life became not so important, not relevant. I really gave them up without a conscious decision to do so – their importance and necessity faded away.

In late 2017, we were on a cruise ship off the coast of Canada when Murray's mother died. We were prepared for this, many Christians on the ship had prayed for us, but nevertheless we were still thrown into a different mindset when we got the news. That same day we departed our cruise ship in Quebec into a temporary terminal filled with long lines of people, luggage, noise and confusion and we struggled with the practicalities of how to get to the Railway station (all our plans had now changed). How far away was it? Lines for taxis were longer than we had patience for. We asked a few questions, how far and where was the Station? Someone asked someone else who pointed to a man who would be able to give us directions.

"Of course I can show you the way" he said and pointed (vaguely it seemed) to somewhere in the distance. We must have looked totally blank. "No problems, I'll take you myself" he said. And so we followed this total stranger who at some stage that I don't recall, took my large suitcase from me and who then walked and talked with us. He took us all the way to our destination; around goods trains, old buildings and many blind alleys it seemed. A lightening awareness surrounded me – in a foreign country, where language was different and we were confused and lost – God surrounded us with his love and said to us "Don't stress out, I'm looking after you". An Emmaus walk with a difference.....

ROBYN ROBERTSON

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Three Memories of Easter - My earliest memory is as a child in Sunday school always choosing "There is a green hill far away", when ever asked to choose my favourite hymn for all to sing. I didn't know that it was called an Easter hymn but I loved the story told in words that mostly I could understand and certainly could remember.

As a late teenager to early twenties, each year I looked forward to joining the choir formed 3 weeks before, specially, to sing Handel's "Messiah" on Easter Sunday afternoon. Held in the Brisbane City Hall along with a well-known conductor and 4 excellent local soloists accompanied by the organist on the huge pipe organ plus a trumpet player. What a thrilling experience each year, from pathos to triumph, shared with the large audience and choir members from near and far!

In recent years, I have been uplifted by hymns and songs, old and new, at the Mt Tamborine Easter Convention. Several hundred men, women and children from most denominations are welcome under the banner of "All one in Christ Jesus". To me, the most moving and exhilarating old hymn is sung by the congregation on Easter Sunday. "Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Saviour" sung softly then "up from the grave He arose" at full volume by the congregation, accompanied by a modern large organ with the organist from Sydney plus a piano. This makes me think of how wonderful the celebration of praise will be when the Church thru the ages is gathered before Christ to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb.

PAM DREW

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Inspired by the possibilities of 'New Life' – I had the wonderful opportunity to be a guest speaker at the Uniting Church Pioneering Ministry Conference in Perth at the end of March. Apart from the thrill of being able to share my experiences of establishing a Community Garden, I was able to be encouraged by the many representatives of the church from around Australia who are seeking new ways to share the ancient, but still life changing, experience of having a relationship with our Creator.

We may at times feel despondent when we see fewer numbers in church and ageing congregations who often lament the loss of the days of big Sunday Schools and church being a fundamental part of everyday life. Yet I left this conference feeling enriched by the creativity, bravery and enthusiasm of those involved in pioneering ministry in a variety of forms.

There were people running cafes and op shops as places to connect to their community by meeting the needs of those struggling either financially or due to loneliness. I heard of a minister running a Listening Lounge in a Shopping Centre where people could just come in for a chat and, if necessary, be directed to other services. I heard of newly planted churches in new growth areas or developments where a minister and his family were placed to start at the grass roots level to grow disciples over shared meals and worship in a school hall.

Between these stories there were reflective times where through imagery we were able to ponder on the message of the gospel being a journey from despair to hope. By contemplating images of dried and barren earth with a single shoot rising up or scorched landscapes after a bushfire showing bright new bursts of green after seeds were triggered into ignition. We were reminded of the New Life that Jesus offered by his sacrifice on the cross and that even in the most heart breaking of situations, even death itself, he can offer hope and new opportunities to help to bring about his kingdom.

KAY NIXON

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## THE POETRY PAGE

This poem, written by Ron Potter some years ago and used again at Montville's Easter service is another way of expressing an Easter experience.

### A MEDITATION ON THE CROSS

based on a reading of Matthew 16:24-26

*Olivewood or coconut, ebony or fir,  
crosses spring up everywhere  
like wildflowers after rain  
carrying on the strain hybridised at Calvary.*

*Beneath a eucalyptus cross I feel  
tear drops—or is it blood? Love-sap  
soaking me, as others have been soaked  
in other places, other times.*

*But there's another kind of cross  
growing on the hillside of my soul,  
and sometimes I feel its gentle stirring  
prompting me to die, and dying, live.*

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Another poem, author unknown, worth sharing was sent in by Jan Trendle.

### ONE SOLITARY LIFE

*He was born in an obscure village ...  
He worked in a carpenter's shop until he was thirty ...  
He then became an itinerant preacher.*

*He never held an office ...  
He never had a family or owned a house ...  
He didn't go to college ...  
He had no credentials but himself.*

*Nineteen centuries have come and gone,  
and today he is the central figure of the human race.*

*All the armies that ever marched,  
all the navies that ever sailed,  
all the parliaments that ever sat,  
and all the kings that have ever reigned have not  
affected the life of man on this earth  
as much as that ...  
One solitary life.*



## KARL'S KORNER

### Two Deities?

When I read my Bible I get the impression that, particularly in the Old Testament, it refers to two deities – a Jewish tribal god who demands obedience and obeisance; and a loving Creator who offers us the ability to become his "off-spring".

Many unchurched people have real problems with the former who seems uninterested in the individual and, so it seems to me, the deity with this characteristic has formed the basis for the appropriation of powers in this deity's name to develop church hierarchies, the divine right of kings, and the authority for 'holy wars'.

I suggest this is so because such a deity is fashioned in our own image – one of competition with others whom we seek to out-rank in order to hold power over them or out-do in status. Yet both images are there in the Bible we hold so dear.

How do we reconcile these two images?

I suggest they appear because God is in many ways constrained by the physicality of our existence. He can only speak to us in our context – our physical beings – and yet He needs to convey a spiritual message. Then we humans impose our framework on His message. And so 'law' becomes what we call 'black-letter law' – like the 'law of the Medes and Persians' in the Old Testament (Daniel 6:8) – rather than a guide to how we should interact with one another. And we focus on rules rather than motivations; so the "rich young ruler" (Matthew 19) focuses on what I have heard called "Tablet B" (Exodus 24) which contains the civil 'laws' and not "Tablet A" about having God first, etc.

Indeed, in *"Israel: A History of the Jewish People"* by Rufus Lears the author claims that Jesus' version of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) is impractical and replaces it with 'Don't do unto others as you would not have done to yourself' which allows what I might call 'the sin of omission' while being easier to 'legalise'. I believe that God doesn't require us to obey laws for His sake, since his focus is not on what we do, but who we are. If we aspire to be His offspring, we will want to do His will and we won't be worrying about laws since they would be superfluous.

What do you think?



## A BIBLE QUIZ [with a difference]

Several years ago, Stan Collard sent me the following email with the annotation:

*It doesn't hurt to have a little Biblical humour, whether it brightens your day, or just causes you to shake your head -----??* SJC

I filed it way for future use and now its time has come!!

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Q. What kind of man was Boaz before he married Ruth?

A. Ruthless.

Q. What do they call pastors in Germany?

A. German Shepherds.

Q. Who was the greatest financier in the Bible?

A. Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.

Q. Who was the greatest female financier in the Bible?

A. Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

Q. What kind of motor vehicles are in the Bible?

A. Jehovah drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden in a Fury. David's Triumph was heard throughout the land. Also, probably a Honda, because the apostles were all in one Accord.

Q. Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible?

A. Samson. He brought the house down.

Q. What excuse did Adam give to his children as to why he no longer lived in Eden?

A. Your mother ate us out of house and home.

Q. Which servant of God was the most flagrant lawbreaker in the Bible?

A. Moses. He broke all 10 commandments at once.

Q. Which area of the Middle East was especially wealthy?

A. The area around Jordan. The banks were always overflowing.

Q. Who is the greatest babysitter mentioned in the Bible?

A. David. He rocked Goliath to a very deep sleep.

Q. Which Bible character had no parents?

A. Joshua, son of Nun.

Q. Why didn't they play cards on the Ark?

A. Because Noah was standing on the deck.

Q. Why is it a sin for a woman to make coffee?

A. The Bible says. 'He-brews'

**KEEP SMILING!!!! GOD LOVES YOU BUNCHES AND BUNCHES!!!!**  
Friends are God's way of taking care of us.

Thanks Stan!