



THE new vine

SPECIAL EDITION

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Blackall Range Uniting Churches
(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

This is a SPECIAL EDITION of our church journal – that is, it is outside the normal quarterly cycle. It comes as a response to the unsettling times we are all experiencing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is special in another way – all retired ministers in our church, and our serving minister, were asked to contribute if they so desired – anything at all would do; anything that may bring some comfort, strength and direction to the people who are unable to meet together as ‘church’, especially as we moved towards Easter.

The request reminded me of a quite irreverent story that I heard many years ago in Canberra. The city was growing at a tremendous rate and the churches were having trouble keeping up. So, in our area, we went into co-operation – Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches. It was a wonderful experiment. At one stage we had two Anglican, one Presbyterian and one Methodist minister all serving together. We had two congregations – Anglican and what was known as Joint [before Church Union]. We met in a school and while services were held separately, everything else was done together – Sunday School, Youth Group, a common Purse for offerings and costs etc. In the very early days, we even met in the school hall at much the same time – services overlapped – with just a protractible petition separating us. As it is coming up Easter, I share that the Anglican minister was quite bemused when he could hear us singing “I have a King who rides a donkey” to the tune of ‘What shall we do with the drunken sailor?’ He couldn’t hear the words properly but he certainly heard the music and wondered! But back to my story

On one occasion, when comments were made about having so many ministers, [if you were in hospital for a time you could be visited by them all] it was said – “You know, of course, that ministers are like cow manure – scattered over a paddock they do a good job and encourage growth but when all together, they just smell.” I leave it to you to decide if this edition exhibits the symptoms of their being scattered throughout the journal or whether their work is all just too close together and there is too much in the one place.

Jokes aside, there is quite serious intent in what follows, and it has been prepared with a purpose – a purpose aimed at reassuring us all that in the midst of anguish, God is real. My hope is that, as you take your time going through it all, you will find time to sit and ponder – don’t try to read it all in one or two sittings – but take your time. Let it speak to you. It may lighten; it may even darken for some; but may we all be assured that there is resurrection awaiting.

In the current circumstances I cannot wish you a Happy Easter, but I would wish you all peace, hope and new life.

Blessings

Graham

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LIENA'S LINES

IT IS FRIDAY, BUT SUNDAY IS A COMING

"It is Friday, *BUT* Sunday is a coming". These are well-known words of a sermon by an American preacher, whose true origin is difficult to trace as it has been reused so often. The words remain powerful and true. Trevor Hudson (Day 24 in *Pauses for Lent*) focuses on the word *but* and reflects: "*But* is a very short word, yet it is essential in grasping the hopeful message of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. In fact, it almost sums up what these two days are all about."

Indeed, Easter is a season marked by Friday, and by Sunday. It is a season of light and darkness. It is a season when we need to pause, come to a halt on the Friday. A time of betrayal: Peter's denial of Jesus; a time of mockery A violence: Jesus' being insulted and beaten; a time of trial before various adjudicators, mostly with their own self-interest and agenda: Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, chief priests and rulers and Herod. A time of

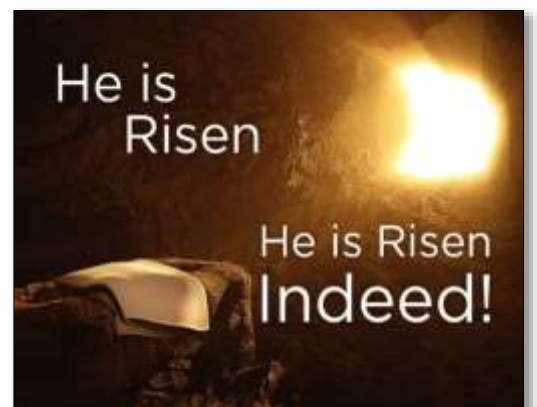


sorrow and deep grief for the disciples, for the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, for Jesus family. A time of broken hope, a time of broken dreams, of unfulfilled promises and empty prophecies.

On Friday we need to pause at the foot of the cross, when the earth became dark. And so, we pause to reflect about darkness: sin, evil, bushfires, floods, pandemics, coronavirus; financial implosions, social upheaval, mental stress. Suffering. Sorrow. Fear. Death. Many things that are beyond our understanding and that cause anxiety and despair. On Friday, we pause and reflect upon, and taste God's love: "This is my body broken for you. Take, eat, and do this in memory of me."

But. But we do not remain at the foot of the cross. We move towards Easter Sunday. We move to an open grave, an empty grave. We step into the Light. The Light of new life. New opportunities. New chances. The Light of restored hope and dreams come true. The Light of unfathomable faith, of immeasurable love and amazing grace. The Light of encouragement, energy and action. Sunday is the triumph of life over death, Light over darkness. Sunday confirms the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Incomprehensible, yet true.

Yes, "It is Friday, *BUT* Sunday is a coming". We cannot get to Sunday without passing through Friday. In Paul's words we are baptised in Christ's crucifixion and baptised in his resurrection. We cannot skip Friday and jump to Sunday. We have to pass through Friday and pause at the cross, pause and experience sorrow, even pause at death. But, neither can we tarry on Friday, we cannot remain in the darkness - we have to move on, we need to move on to Sunday, to the Light, to Life. Yes, at Easter we need to pause at the cross, but we also need to move on to Easter Sunday and proclaim with joy: Christ is Risen! Christ lives! And so do you and I!



We need to keep moving, keep travelling. And then we find that Sunday leads to Monday, Tuesday and many following days. We find ourselves travelling in the era of the Holy Spirit. A time of feeding the flock. The time when we hear the Risen Christ's words: "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?" And we respond: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Then the command: "Feed my lambs"; "take care of my sheep"; and "feed my sheep."

Blessed Easter. Shalom Liena ☺



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MINISTERS

SIGNED WITH THE CROSS

By Ron Potter

As part of the recent newsletter sent out to Friends of the Reflection Gallery, I included the picture of my painting entitled *The Cross* with the comment: *Against the mists of uncertainty, the cross stands out as the sign of hope for the world. In the face of threat and turmoil, know this: this world has been stamped with the Cross. It is God's world. It carries God's insignia. Behind the cross in the painting, in black ink, the early morning light shines through. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!*



In cattle-rearing terms, the world carries the Cross as God's brand. Existence is marked with the stamp of the Cross.

We dream of a world untroubled and at peace, but the reality always evades us. While we can glimpse something of heaven's peace during life in this world, heaven in all its uninterrupted glory lies beyond us.

The biblical story presents us with a fallen, distorted, corrupted world, but not one that God has abandoned. In spite of all the pain and suffering, war, famine, slavery, exile, plague, earthquake, flood, drought, oppression and violence, it is still God's world – God's good world, the world of God's creation, the world that God loves.

While the crucifixion of Jesus stands as a specific historical event, there is a sense in which the sign of the Cross has been stamped over everything that exists. God's realm of peace is

repeatedly being nailed to rough timbers. God's wisdom and goodness is constantly being challenged. God's way of love is being disposed of. And we live in the midst of it.

Yes, we live in the midst of it, but God, too, lives in the midst of it. Not as blustering, pompous power, but as love - love that suffers with the suffering and is humiliated with the humiliated. Wherever generosity, compassion and commitment, forgiveness, reconciliation and self-sacrifice are to be seen, there the Spirit of God is present. God's signature reminding us to whom we rightfully belong.

However, this sign of crucifixion includes resurrection. When we say that the world carries God's insignia of the Cross, we are saying that in the turmoil and torture, the conflict and confusion that we experience as part of human life, it is God's realm of peace and justice, goodness and holiness that survives - even thrives. Beyond the clouds the sun is always shining.

Human existence carries the sign of the cross for it is the place where God's love is forever being poured out, where death proves to be but the prelude to life, where self-giving becomes self-discovery and where surrender turns out to be victory.



LEAVING A LEGACY

By Bob Philpot

Without being too morbid, the pandemic we are in does make us stop and think about vital issues.

In talking to some people, I have been quoted snappy sayings they would like to have engraved on their tombstone when they leave this life. For me, the words that would give me most satisfaction (if I had any say in it) would be to find these words, "He worked with God in planting trees and caring for the forests."

Now, many people I have met over the years could draw on all sorts of legacies they have given themselves to, many of them quite outstanding: Royal Flying Doctor Service; Cancer Care; Life-Line; and St. Vincent de Paul to name a few.

Just as outstanding, but without the same notoriety, are some also worth mentioning. A recent kind act by a young mother was to leave her new neighbours a small parcel even though she had to maintain a distance. Among the things that made up the bundle were some rolls of toilet paper - a very fitting gift.

We could take our courage in both hands and ask others to talk about the legacies they would like to leave behind. (While doing this your own ideas may come to the fore also.)

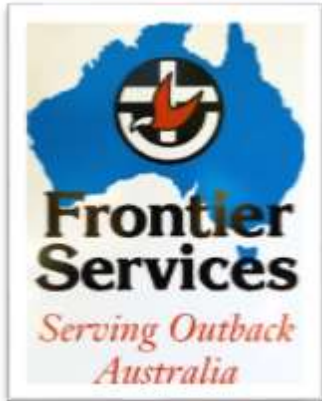
A worthwhile thing to do would be to develop our own ideas further while we have time. When things have moved on, they can include shared meals, and times of really listening to people's stories.

These stories are not written on tomb stones but in the lives of people you have been in contact with over the years.

GOD OF LIFE

By George Woodward

I was to have preached at Montville on Sunday 22 March but found myself in Mackay, so I typed a sermon and e-mailed it to Ron Potter to be read out to the congregation. The sermon was to help people think about the work of Frontier Services whom I worked with for some years in the 90's. On Sunday 29 March, I was to preach at Palmwoods and had begun a sermon titled, "God of the living." As we all face the crisis of the Corona virus with the reality that we cannot worship/fellowship together, maybe I can briefly tie my thoughts from two sermons together and we can find reassurance from the certainty that God is with us and loves us.



In my work with Frontier Services, I met people who lived in what we would regard as very isolated places. Some of these people struggled with issues and there was little support available to help them. I also met people who were faithful Christians. From a denominational point of view, they were from right across the spectrum - Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Uniting Church, Pentecostal and no allegiance to any denomination. These people in very isolated places sought to follow the way of Jesus. They had different ways of keeping their faith alive. They nearly all read their Bibles daily and in one way or another prayed, some used the Rosary, other used other devotional resource, (some of which I was able to provide), and others read Christian books to enrich their faith. These people very rarely, if ever,

went to a church service yet their relationship with God was life giving. I would ask these people if, when they had holidays where there were churches, did they attend. Now some would say yes, but the majority of them would say no, and either say that church was a bit strange or that their relationship with God sustained them.

I once had a man on a very isolated station ask to have his new baby baptized. I listened to some of his story and then decided I had better make sure he was right with God. As I began to talk about God, he interrupted me and fairly bluntly told me, "You don't need to tell me about God. I meet God every day on the station." He then, at length, told me about the many different ways he experienced God and that God was real for him and loved him. We had a lovely baptismal service for the new baby.

We will miss the fellowship we share in worship, Bible study and other activities of our congregation but God has not left us and maybe God is giving us an opportunity to pause and see and hear God in new ways.

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a story that teaches us that it is OK to weep. When we weep, God weeps with us and God is always a life-giving God. Jesus raised Lazarus to life and Jesus rose from the dead to eternal life so we can all live always with God.

I have learnt in life that, whatever is happening, I am to look and see where God is in this. When things seem really bad, I have learnt to see and know God in little things. A pretty flower, the tweet of a little bird, and unexpected smile - the list for me is endless - but all these things help me to be reminded of the reality of God's presence and to be reassured that in the crisis I am facing, God is there and giving life.

Finally, one of the things we would say to our children as they got older, when they saw themselves facing a major crisis was, "Relax God is in charge." This was enough to break the ice and help put things in perspective. Sometimes it even allowed us to ask where is

God in this situation? The questions I am asking myself at this time are, "What is God saying to me? What is God saying to the Church? What is God saying to the world?" There are many things we need to do in the current crisis but in our spirit, we can relax because God is in charge.

Relax God is in Charge.



As I was surfing the internet, I came across this poem which, when I read Brian Richards' article, I thought fitted all the circumstances he mentions, so they appear together [Ed.]:

"BREATHING UNDER WATER"

By The Editor

I built my house by the sea.
Not on the sands, mind you;
not on the shifting sand.
And I built it of rock.
A strong house
By a strong sea.
And we got well acquainted, the sea and I.
Good neighbours.
Not that we spoke much.
We met in silences.
Respectful, keeping our distance,
but looking our thoughts across the fence of sand.
Always, the fence of sand our barrier,
always, the sand between.
And then one day,
— and I still don't know how it happened —
The sea came.

Without warning.
Without welcome, even
Not sudden and swift, but a shifting across
the sand like wine,
less like the flow of water than the flow of blood.
Slow, but coming.
Slow, but flowing like an open wound.
And I thought of flight and I thought of
drowning and I thought of death.
And while I thought the sea crept higher, till
it reached my door.
And I knew then, there was neither flight, nor
death, nor drowning.
When the sea comes calling you stop being
neighbours
Well acquainted, friendly-at-a-distance,
neighbours
And you give your house for a coral castle,
And you learn to breathe underwater.

~ Unpublished poem by Sr. Carol Bieleck, RSCJ

BREATHING UNDER WATER

By Brian Richards

Some situations in life can sometimes affect us in ways that we feel we are “out of our depth”. This present, unprecedented world health threat can have that kind of pressure.

Encouragement and enabling can come from many sources including meditation and brief talks such as those by well known Christian author, Richard Rohr.

In one of his books he uses the metaphor of “breathing under water”. In other words, finding that which enables us, even when we begin to feel overwhelmed by the circumstances such as we and the world are facing at present.

Although he is writing particularly to those feeling overwhelmed by addiction, some of the principles may be found helpful in this present time.

The drowning waters of the present threat are significant and need to be faced with responsible behaviour.

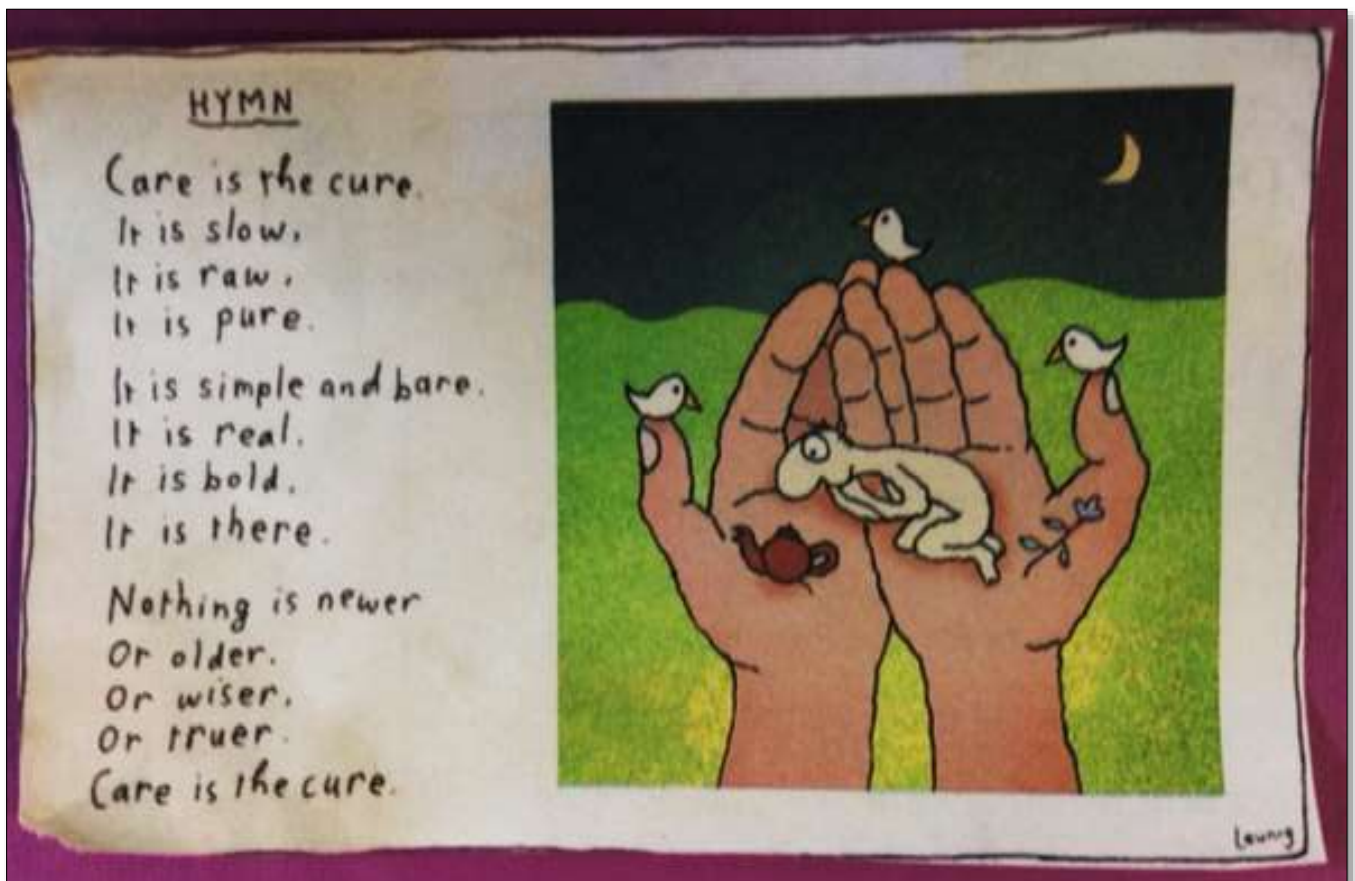
We have available to us a “Coral Castle”, as it were, where we can learn to breathe under the waters of life.

The New Testament called it Salvation or enlightenment.

Leunig calls it Care and suggests it is a “cure”.

Brian Richards

[with help from Michael Leunig as published in *The Hinterland Times*.]



D.I.Y.

By Graham Dempster

When I found I was to preach at Maleny on 29 March, I went to the Lectionary and found the readings - Ezekiel 37: 1 - 14 and John 11: 1 - 45. I started my thinking and found I would need to do a lot of it - so I started early. Then I remembered that during Lent we were going to follow Mark, so I had to change boats in midstream. I started this, and then found with the close down, I didn't need that boat either. Suddenly I was going with the flow of the river with a foot in two different boats, going nowhere. What to do?

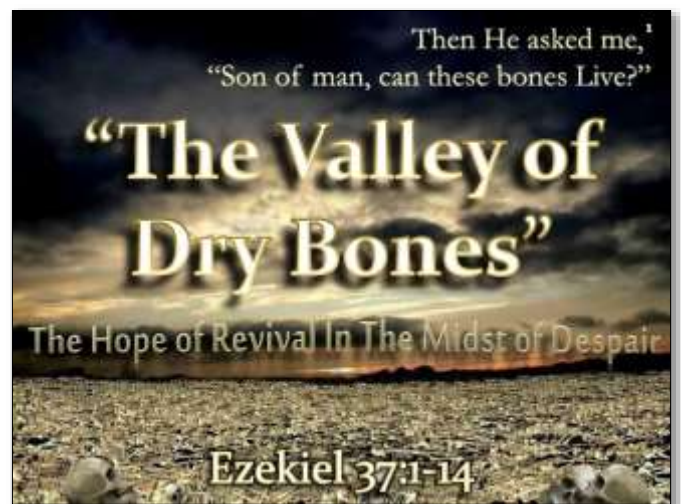
When this special edition arose, the solution became very clear to me. Because readers will have lots of spare time, and will be looking for new things to do, share your early, unformed thoughts and questions with them and let them set about writing their own D.I.Y. sermons. Brilliant, I thought! So here we are.

You will need the bible, pen and paper or the computer, and your imagination. That's all.

First, read each passage given above. Jot down your own thoughts about what the reading says; look at any books/websites you fancy; look at my notes as well; think about things that are of concern to you, your family, the congregation, the church, and the world, things that are impacting on how we live our lives - and off you go.

EZEKIEL 37: 1 - 14

- The question of "Can these bones live?" - and the response "Lord you alone know."
- God knows!
- The prophesy that the Lord will rebuild bodies from the bones and breath into them, giving life
- The Lord says - "I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live."
- What about life generally? Has it become dry and even a bit lifeless? What to do?
- Have you had Spirit blown into your life? When? How? Outcome?
- What might the reading mean in our CORVID-19 affected world?
- This is a story of 'human powerlessness and divine possibility' [*With Love to the World*] - thoughts?
- Where do we find such helplessness in our lives today?
- What is God's promise to us in this passage?
- Is there something we should be doing to explore and accept/ensure that promise?



JOHN 11: 1 - 45

- We could do an examination of all characters in this story and finally compare ourselves to them. Round them out by looking at what else is said about them in other places in the NT.
 - Martha seems to be consistently Martha - always aware and first to know what's going on; practical and perceptive; recognising Jesus as the Christ, then simply goes home and calls Mary.
 - Mary - the woman with the nard [interesting]; she moves a lot faster today than she did on another occasion; visitors are shown as her friends, not Martha's.

- Lazarus - central but silent; the importance of silent witnesses?
- Thomas - doubting in other places but absolutely positive here, even to possible death - what does this mean?
- The disciples - acting out of fear; wanting to take the easy option.
- All Jesus' statements are worth looking at closely; what did he mean each time he spoke? Was he saying anything new? Are we really expected to understand what he was saying?
- There are a few other themes that emerge that could be teased out and examined
 - There was criticism of Jesus' delaying action - is this OK? When is criticism appropriate?
 - Can we see the beginnings of a theology of waiting here? Things will happen in God's time and not ours. Was this whole story planned for this purpose?
 - Jesus wept. He was troubled and deeply moved. We can expect no less today.
 - "Lazarus, come out!" where might this order for release be needed today?
 - "Take away the grave clothes and set him free". Similarly, where and how are people set free by Jesus today? To whom might this order be given?
 - Are we truly free or do we each have some grave clothes hanging off us? What are they?



I guess, once we have waded through all this, we may have a sense of confusion, but I have found that when I sit with the text for a while, some distillation always occurs and God's word for the day emerges.

I hope this has been the case for you.



BEYOND

By Ron Potter

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING MORE TO UNDERSTAND.

BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING THERE LIES THAT WHICH CAN NEVER BE UNDERSTOOD.

BEYOND THE ORDINARY THERE LIES THE EXTRAORDINARY.

BEYOND THE APPROVAL OF FRIENDS THERE LIES THE APPROVAL OF AN ETERNAL FRIEND.

BEYOND THE PRESENT THERE LIES A FUTURE INTO WHICH GOD SEEKS TO LEAD YOU.

BEYOND POPULAR OPINION THERE LIES THE MIND AND PURPOSE OF GOD.

BEYOND ALL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS THERE REMAINS A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

RON POTTER

DYING TO LIVE

By Bob Philpot

There are some strange ways we use words in common speech and one of these is when we say of some unfulfilled action, "Oh, I am dying to go there, do that, or experience that."

In the gospel according to John ch. 12 verse 8, Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit." To paraphrase that saying, "It is only by dying that a grain of wheat can live."

This was forcibly brought home to me by an account in "Kitchen Table Wisdom", a series of stories by Naomi Remen. It is about a young man who had everything going for him and abused it. Great physique, high school and college athlete, beautiful women, fast cars and personal recognition. Then it was suddenly snatched away by an osteogenic sarcoma of the right leg. Two weeks after the diagnosis they had removed the right leg above the knee. In one sense, it was life ending surgery and when referred to Naomi for counselling he became enraged at all the well people around him and filled with a sense of injustice and self-pity.

At their second meeting, she had given him a drawing pad and asked him to express his feelings about himself. On the paper appeared a crude sketch of a vase, just an outline. Running through the centre he drew a deep crack and this he went over and over with a black crayon, gritting his teeth and tearing the paper.

As time passed in their counselling sessions, he recounted stories of other people who had been caught up in devastating experiences. Naomi saw a gradual change coming and he asked if he could meet some of the people caught up by events similar to his. One of these brought him in touch with a young woman who, because of incidents of breast cancer in her immediate family, had undergone a bilateral mastectomy.

At her hospital bedside, and trying to reach her with no response, he unstrapped his artificial leg and let it fall to the floor with a loud thump. Startled, she opened her eyes and saw him for the first time. Encouraged, he hopped around the room snapping his fingers in time to some music that was playing and laughing out loud. She burst out laughing remarking that, if he could dance, then perhaps she could sing.

They began visiting together and after some study to help with this important work, she eventually became his wife, a far cry from the women he had formerly dated.

Somewhere in the process he had a final counselling session with Naomi and reviewed the way he had come. She opened his chart and found the photo of the broken vase that he had made two years ago. He looked at it for a while before remarking "You know it is not finished." A basket of crayons was extended toward him and he took a yellow crayon and made thick yellow lines from the crack radiating to the edge of the paper. Smiling wryly, he put his finger to the crack and said softly, "This is where the light comes through."

Through the act of dying to his old life, he had really begun to live. Jesus exemplified this when he went to the cross. How magnificently he has lived on through that terrible death.

Excerpts from "Kitchen Table Wisdom", *Stories That Heal*. Rachel Naomi Remen, Riverhead Books, New York.

REMAIN CONFIDENT IN YOUR FEAR [Some words from Good Friday]

By Bruce Johnson

There is something about the way John's Gospel tells of Jesus' passion that draws me into the story as a participant observer. Somehow John seems to convey a quiet confidence in Jesus as he encounters all those who are out to get him. Each step, from the arrival of the mob with Judas in the garden, until Pilate finally sends him to his death, Jesus displays a sense of self-confidence and a concern for his friends and family.

While John's gospel doesn't tell about Jesus praying in the Garden, the other accounts show that he was frightened and feeling isolated. He longed for his friends to be near and to stay alert while he prayed. He longed to find another way forward and not have to go through this impending ordeal. Luke tells us that "In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."

So - is it possible to be afraid and confident at the same time? We tend to think those emotions are mutually exclusive. We would say someone is afraid or they are confident. Yet it seems that Jesus was both.

I wonder if you can recall times in your own life when you have felt anxious or afraid about what might happen, yet you faced it with a confidence. You simply didn't know for sure what the outcome would be, but you were not paralysed by the events and went forward with quiet confidence.

I recall an evening when I was 17, at home with only my younger brothers and sister when a man from down the road arrived to say that our mother had just been involved in a serious road accident. He offered to take me to the hospital, about 10kms away. It sounded very serious and he couldn't tell me just how badly mum had been injured. I was not sure if she would live or die. I felt afraid, but knew I needed to think about my younger siblings. So as calmly as I could I told them to do the things they needed to do, then get ready for bed, while I went with the neighbour to find out what had happened to mum. In the midst of my fear, I nevertheless felt a confidence for the sake of my siblings.

Now I was not dealing with all that Jesus was, but I can understand that he could be both afraid about what lay ahead, but also able to face the enemies with confidence. Not only was Jesus being brave for the sake of his friends and mother, he seemed to have a quiet confidence in God. No matter what happened to him, Jesus seemed confident that God would bring him through.

Today we will leave the story with Jesus in the tomb. We will need to wait for the outcome.

I want to invite you to take time today or tomorrow to re-read the John account of Jesus in the Garden, his arrest and crucifixion in the light of this global crisis we are all living through at the moment. You may be feeling fear; fear for your own health; fear for members of your family; fear for your job; fear for your business. Even a free-floating fear that can't be pinned down. We are all confused and uncertain about what lies ahead, and we are completely in the dark about how it will all finish.

As you read the story and identify with Jesus' experience and feelings, I invite you to draw strength from Jesus confidence in God throughout his ordeal. The God we have come to know through Jesus is not sitting pretty, remote and isolated from us. God entered into our world in Jesus and experienced all that this world throws up at us. God chooses not to simply lift us out of the trials and traumas we experience, but he does promise to be with us through them. He does promise resurrection.

For now, we feel as if we are lying in the dark. There may be more pain to come; we may not have faced the worst yet. However, through our baptism we have entered into Christ's death and resurrection, so we can have confidence that the light will dawn, even if it is not anything like the life we have known before.

Feeling fear and uncertainty, we can still go forward with confidence just as Jesus did. We can rest comfortably isolated in the darkness until the light breaks through.

Feeling afraid is not the same as feeling hopeless. The loving God who raised Jesus from the tomb, will not leave us in our current crisis, no matter how dark it appears at the moment.

Easter day will dawn. Resurrection will come to us all. Don't let your current fear destroy your faith in God but be confident that God's love has overcome fear and death.

Bruce Johnson



CHANGE -vs-TRANSFORMATION

The Editor

Rightly or wrongly, I am convinced that society, and the church within that society, will be changed by the Coronavirus crisis. We will come out of the end of the tunnel and the world will be different. I suggest we need to be open to a different future and there would be wisdom, in my view, in our starting to look towards that time now, and planning accordingly, to ensure something positive emerges. We are heading, I believe, towards transformation.

Interestingly, I recently received an email that reinforced that view and made some very pertinent comments about the difference between change and transformation. The paper was written by Dom Michael, the abbot of the New Norcia Benedictine Monastery in West Australia, as they look towards their future.

While his words reflect their particular situation, whatever that may be, as I read it, our situation came floating across my mind, and so I read it again imagining it was written for the Blackall Range Uniting Church. And I heard the challenge these words echoed. I just had to share it.

Here is an abridged version of what he had to say:

If our conversation focuses essentially on changing aspects of our lives and community to resolve current issues, functionally important as that is, it's not enough to generate sustainability for the longer term. But if we want to talk about our transformation communally and individually, then that's a different conversation. The difference between change and transformation is critical.

Change typically is that kind of activity where you stand in the present moment, look to the past and you make some alteration to what's been happening – like how our liturgy can be more inclusive, authority and decision making more participative, community more person centred and supportive, etc.

Transformation is different; we can use the example of what happens in a chrysalis where a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly. That's why the scientific world uses it as an

example of transformation, because you could not in fact recognize the caterpillar in the butterfly.

So, it can be with us and our community if we allow the Spirit to transform us into our future.

If change is standing in the present looking at the past, transformation is that process where you stand in the present moment but look to the future in faith. You look to something that doesn't have a shape or image or something definable, but you commit to moving in that direction and knowing that whatever is going to happen in the future, if it is the result of transformation, it will be a new form and a new function. Nothing about the caterpillar remains. Just like the caterpillar to the butterfly; new form, new function.

It's what Jesus did in reality and in the Gospels – he transformed the People of God into his own Body – new relationships in him and with each other. At the core of any conversation about generating the future monastic community of New Norcia should be this discussion about relationships. It's our relationships that need transformation. The structures follow the relationships..... The form, if you will, follows function. Changing the structures will not give us different relationships; the relationships have to be transformed.

In a relationship, when Jesus had a choice between loving or fearing he chose love every single time. If faced with a choice between showing mercy or judgment, he chose mercy every single time. And faced with a choice between including or excluding, he chose inclusion every single time.

... .. it has to be about relationships that are marked by love over fear, mercy over judgment and inclusion over exclusion.

To understand our mission and purpose we have to go to the gospel life of Jesus and live as he lived. And that is not going to be accomplished by just changing things here and there. It is not simply a journey of change that we're looking at. It is a journey of transformation. And the kind of letting go that has to happen in a journey of transformation is absolutely profound.

It's not new to us to realise that 'contemplative listening and speaking' is our path to embracing the kind of vulnerability and transparency needed to build trust, as well as 'relationships that are mutual and respectful.'

It is in listening to each other simply to understand what the other person is trying to say, not through the filter of whether we agree with that person or disagree, just simply to listen. And when we speak, speak only to be understood, not to try to convince somebody of our way or to prove a point. That contemplative approach will be necessary in discerning together where God is leading us, marked as our lives have been by pain and suffering, abuse and scandal and so forth. Our time seems to be a chrysalis moment where we have to choose transformation.

Change happens whether we like it or not. Transformation though is a choice in faith by the Spirit. Sure, transformation is change but not all change is transformation. It's our road map to the future in which the abbot is first among equals in a culture of participative leadership, accountability, transparency, love and trust free of domination.

SACRED SPACES

“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”
(Exodus 3 v 5)

By Liena Hoffman

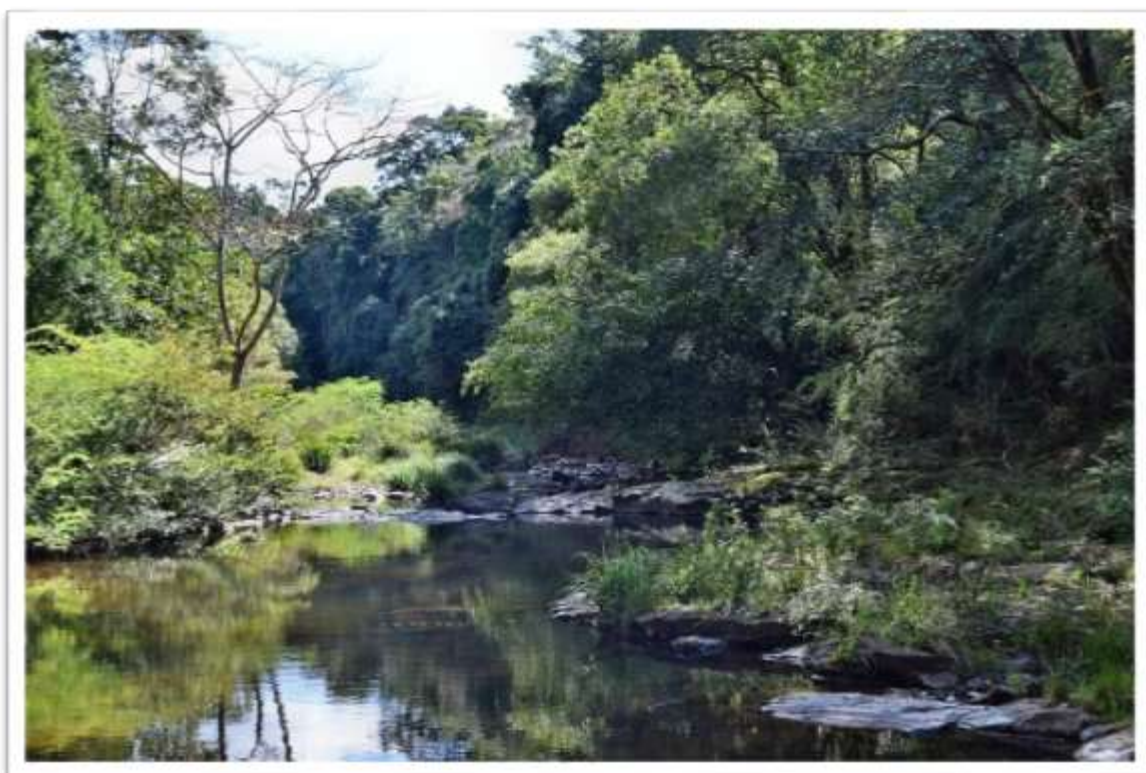
Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu travels with his prayer rug. I personally heard him tell how his prayer rug would be the last thing he would pack, on the top of his belongings, then he would shut the suitcase. And his prayer rug is the first thing he would unpack. And wherever he travelled, whatever hotel room or backyard rural dwelling he would be in, he would place his prayer rug. Create a sacred space. To worship God. To pray to God.

We have the wonderful habit of coming together for Sunday worship. We gather in our church buildings. For worship. For prayer. Our sacred space. Our beloved front door, our treasured altar space, our familiar symbols of worship. It makes us happy: “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’ Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.” (Psalm 122 vs 1-2).

And now, in isolation, we do not have that. Our familiar rhythm has been interrupted. We are disconnected. We are experiencing a loss, a yearning for a sacred space, a place to worship and pray. We are bereft. Saddened.

Yet, we can create alternative sacred spaces – in our homes, in our gardens. Find a corner, somewhere in the house or a spot in the garden. Spread a special cloth, place a Bible, light a candle. Focus on a bush, a flower, a spider-web. Place a prayer mat. Create a sacred space. To worship God. To pray to God.

Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Any place. We simply need to take off our sandals. Know, prepare and accept that we are in the presence of the Lord, in the holy presence of “I AM”. A sacred space.



LAMENT

By The Editor

On the day this *New Vine* edition was born, and in the same week Liena preached on Lament brought about by reports of domestic violence, one of my daily reading sites, that of Fr Richard Rohr, spoke of very similar subjects – coincidence? His article follows – his words are in italics:

Lamentation for a Time of Crisis

Intelligently responding to the Coronavirus demands that we access resources of physical, emotional and spiritual resilience. One practice Christianity has developed to nurture resilience is lamentation. Prayers of lamentation arise in us when we sit and speak out to God and one another—stunned, sad, and silenced by the tragedy and absurdity of human events... Without this we do not suffer the necessary pain of this world, the necessary sadness of being human.

Walter Brueggemann, my favourite Scripture teacher, points out that even though about one third of the Psalms are psalms of “lament,” these have been the least used by Catholic and Protestant liturgies. We think they make us appear weak, helpless, and vulnerable, or show a lack of faith. So, we quickly resort to praise and thanksgiving. We forget that Jesus called weeping a “blessed” state (Matthew 5:5) and that only one book of the Bible is named after an emotion: Jeremiah’s book of “Lamentation.”

In today's practice, Reverend Aaron Graham reflects on the elements found in prayers of lament. I hope that you will find in his words and in the text of Psalm 22 a way to voice your own complaints, requests, and trust in God, who is always waiting to hear. RR

We need to be reminded that our cries are not too much for God. [God] laments with us. In fact, [God] wants us to come to the [Divine Presence] in our anger, in our fear, in our loneliness, in our hurt, and in our confusion.

Each lamenting Psalm has a structure:

- They begin with a *complaint* . . . that things are not as they should be.
- They turn to a *request*. God, do something! Rescue me! Heal me! Restore me! Show mercy!
- Laments end with an *expression of trust*. Laments end with the reminder that God is setting things right, even though it often seems so slow. It is right for our laments to turn towards a reminder that God is in control and about the business of righting all things made wrong. ^[1]

Consider praying these words found in Psalm 22, or choose another passage of lament. Before you pray, ask God to speak to you . . .

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

**In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame (Psalm 22:1-5).**

[1] Aaron Graham, "Lament," *An American Lent Devotional*, eds. Jacalyn Barnes, Amy Leonard, Robert Mackay, and Irma McKnight, 3rd ed. (Repentance Project: 2019), 12-13.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, "Complaining to God," *Tikkun*, vol. 23, no. 3 (May/June 2008), 12-13.

THINKING TIME

This image arrived on my computer during the week. Nothing was said except the name of the person who sent it. It presented itself starkly on the page and set me thinking. My head went in a number of different directions.



What does this image say to you?
About our church today and any other day?
How will we deploy during COVID

CLASSIFIEDS

Surfing the BRUC Web

We remind you to get surf-fit. To acquire the habit of surfing our web-page (www.ourcommonlife.org) and to use the resources that are there.

Remember our Cs

Memorise our Corona-Cs, there are now 6:

Calm – be calm.

Cautious – be cautious.

Common sense – use your common sense.

Care – take care of yourselves and others.

Commit – commit the COvid-19 pandemic to prayer.

Candle – Light the COVID-19 prayer-candle at 7pm (19:00) in your window every night as a symbol of hope.

A GATHERING OF PRAYERS AND OTHER PIECES

In times like these, there is benefit in reflecting on what other people see as important in life. This can be done in myriad ways, of which sharing prayers and ponderings are but two. I hope what follows provides all readers with opportunities to think about where we are, where we might be going, and how we will be at the other end of the tunnel we are currently living through.

The material has been gleaned, and contributed, from an array of sources. I suggest you don't try to read straight through them all, but take them one at a time, and spend time with each.

Happy contemplation!

Bruce shared two prayers with the Maleny group that met on Sunday 22 March to hear about church arrangements during the COVID-19 crisis. They are shared below for everyone.

A PRAYER FOR A PANDEMIC

May we who are merely inconvenienced,
remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors,
remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home,
remember those who must choose
between their health and making the rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our own
children when the schools close,
remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips,
remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the
tumult of the economic market,
remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for the quarantine at home
remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose to love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our
arms around each other, let us find ways
to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbours.

Amen.

Cameron Bellm (Used with her permission)

Bruce found the following prayer on The Church of Scotland website. It was suggested, as an act of solidarity, that we might all light a candle at night and place it where it will shine out the window showing solidarity and that we care.

*For all that is good in life, thank you,
For the love of family and friends, thank you,
For the kindness of good neighbour
and Samaritan stranger, thank you.*

*May those who are vulnerable, hungry or homeless, experience support.
May those who are sick, know healing,
May those who are anxious or bereaved, sense comfort.*

*Bless and guide political leaders and decision-makers,
with wisdom.*

*Bless and guide health workers and key workers,
with strength and well-being.*

*Bless and guide each one of us,
as we adapt to a new way of living.*

*And may the light shining from our windows,
across road and wynd, glen and ben, kyle and isle,
be reflected in our hearts and hands and hopes.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

In *Our Common Life* on that same day, Liena had also used two prayers that are included below as so many of us missed getting the newsletter that day.

A Martin Luther meditation – Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague

I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and then take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.

St Paul to the Thessalonians

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

2 Thessolonians 2: 16 - 17

Two formal prayers, written for the Pandemic, follow. Use as you feel led.

COVID-19 Prayers

[1] From *Interrupting the Silence*

(<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2020/03/14/a-prayer-concerning-covid-19/>)

INTERRUPTING THE SILENCE

God the Father, your will for all people is health and salvation;
We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly;
We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence;
We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

Holy Trinity, one God, in you we live and move and have our being;
We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

All you Holy Angels, Archangels, and bodiless powers of heaven;
Stand beside us to guide and guard us on our way.

Holy Mary, Mother of God;
Pray for us and the people of the world.

Lord, hear our prayer;
And let our cry come to you.

For all who have died as a result of COVID-19;
Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

For all who grieve the death of family, friends, and citizens;
Give them courage and strength to meet the days ahead, O Lord, and the consolation of your love.

Pour out your healing grace on all who are sick, injured, or disabled, that they may be made whole;
Hear us, O Lord of life.

Grant to all who seek your guidance, and to all who are afraid, anxious, or overwhelmed, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence;
Hear us, O Lord of life.

Give peace, courage, and hope to all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit;
Hear us, O Lord of life.

Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world;
Hear us, O Lord of life.

Interrupting the Silence (Cont'd)

Bless physicians, nurses, and all others who minister to the sick and suffering; keep them safe and healthy; and grant them wisdom and skill, sympathy, and patience;

Hear us, O Lord of life

Send down upon our President, Congress, and all political leaders, the spirit of wisdom, charity, and justice; that with steadfast purpose they may faithfully serve in their offices to promote the well-being of all people;

Hear us, O Lord of life.

Give wisdom, creativity, and perseverance to all medical professionals, researchers, policy makers, and leaders as they respond to this pandemic;

Hear us, O Lord of Life.

Guide us in finding and developing the resources, medical skill, and political will to contain and end this pandemic;

Hear us, O Lord of life.

Open our eyes to see that you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and that our life and death are with each other;

Hear us, O Lord of life.

Open our hearts and hands to assist and care for those who will lose their jobs or be affected financially by COVID-19;

Hear us, O Lord of life.

Give us compassion for those in need, patience in this time of distress, and love for our neighbors;

Hear us, O Lord of life.

Let our hearts be not afraid;

Hear us, O Lord of life.

You are the Lord who does wonders:

You have declared your power among the peoples.

With you, O Lord, is the well of life:

And in your light we see light.

Let us pray.

A period of silence follows.

The Celebrant concludes the Prayers with the following Collect:

O Lord our God, accept the fervent prayers of your people; in the multitude of your mercies look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help; for you are gracious, O lover of souls, and to you we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever.

Amen.

[2] *A prayer during times of COVID-19 by the Right Rev. Richard Bott, originally posted on Facebook.*

*In this time of COVID-19, we pray:
When we aren't sure, God,
 help us be calm;
 when information comes
 from all sides, correct and not,
 help us to discern;
 when fear makes it hard to breathe,
and anxiety seems to be the order of the day,
 slow us down, God;
 help us to reach out with our hearts,
 when we can't touch with our hands;
 help us to be socially connected,
 when we have to be socially distant;
 help us to love as perfectly as we can,
knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."
For the doctors, we pray,
 for the nurses, we pray,
for the technicians and the janitors and the
 aides and the caregivers, we pray,
 for the researchers and theorists,
the epidemiologists and investigators,
 for those who are sick,
and those who are grieving, we pray,
 for all who are affected,
 all around the world...
 we pray
 for safety,
 for health,
 for wholeness.
May we feed the hungry,
 give drink to the thirsty,
clothe the naked and house those without homes;
may we walk with those who feel they are alone,
 and may we do all that we can to heal
 the sick —
 in spite of the epidemic,
 in spite of the fear.
Help us, O God,
that we might help each other.
In the love of the Creator,
 in the name of the Healer,
in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,
 we pray.
May it be so. Amen*

As well as prayers, there are many writers who, while not identified specifically as Christian, see the world through special glasses, and some of them are very sensitive, penetrating and deep – and some are shared below.

An American writer and artist, Mary Anne Radmacher, author of eleven books, in one of them *Lean Forward into Your Life*, has this piece of helpful advice to share:

*Speak quietly to yourself
and promise there will be better days.
Whisper gently to yourself and provide assurance
that you really are extending your best effort.
Console your bruised and tender spirit with
reminders of many other successes.
Offer comfort in practical and tangible ways -
as if you were encouraging your dearest friend.
Recognize that on certain days the greatest grace is
that the day is over, and you get to close your eyes.
Tomorrow comes more brightly.*

And then there is one from the Twittersphere and Facebook, written not all that long before being included here, but old enough to have gone viral around the world as it seemed to touch many who were frightened of what lay ahead because of the actual Coronavirus. It is that current! The author, Kitty O'Meara, lives in the USA and is a retired teacher and chaplain who wanted to do something but didn't know what – so she wrote

And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and grew gardens full of fresh food, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.

And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.

And now, a quote from a quite different source.

Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés is an award winning American poet, bestselling author, Diplomate senior Jungian psychoanalyst, *cantadora* (keeper of the old stories in the Latina tradition) and post-trauma specialist. She is a lifelong activist in service of the voiceless; as a post-trauma recovery specialist and psychoanalyst of 50 years clinical practice she worked with persons traumatized by war, exiles and torture victims; and as a journalist covering stories of human suffering and hope.

She had this to say in her *Letter to a Young Activist in Troubled Times*, not directly about Coronavirus, but it seems to fit

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, build signal fires...causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of the soul in shadowy times like these – to be fierce and to show mercy toward others, both – are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do.

And then my favourite poet, Irishman JOHN O'DONAHUE, in his book *Benedictus*. These verses come at the end of a poem called *For the break-up of a relationship*. It can be seen how they are pertinent to a relationship breakdown, but I feel they are also relevant today as we sit within our fractured society.

*This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.
Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.
If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.*



Another American poet had this to say:

PANDEMIC

*What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath –
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Centre down.*

*And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.*

*Promise this world your love-
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.*

– Lynn Ungar, March 11, 2020

Finally, the Roman Catholic church has developed over time a practice they call – Examen. This is where we sit quietly at the end of the day and reflect upon what has happened, and what we have done, during the day and then commit it all to God in prayer. Here are a couple that I found on the net.

AN EXAMEN IN CARING FOR OTHERS

What interactions with others were significant to me today?

What care and compassion did I show?

What was going on in my head during these interactions? Was I truly present?

What control do I have over the circumstances of these individuals?

Did I do all that I could in this point in time?

What can I do for tomorrow?

FOLLOWED BY A PRAYER FOR COMPASSION

*Merciful God,
Open my heart and mind to be fully present to those I interact with throughout the day.
Allow me to listen to others without passing judgement or haste to solve what I cannot change.
Give me patience and understanding and grant me grace in my shortcomings.
Be with me in times of fatigue and lift me up with the strength to carry out your compassionate love to all those I meet. Amen.*

- By Ashley Henkes, Hall Director, Residence Life

AN EXAMEN TO BECOME MORE LOVING

Creator, thank you for my many blessings, especially [name them]_____.

*Be with me at this moment,
and guide my thoughts to those places
where I could have been more loving in my day
and consider how I will improve.*

*Help me to see those places where I was loving
and strengthen those parts of me
so that I can better do your will.*

*Thank you for all the love I've been blessed with
and help me in the moments ahead.*

- By Ellen Hurst, Senior Teaching Professor, Economics

THOUGHT ON PRAYER

The one thing we can all do during this time of isolation is pray – pray for the whole Coronavirus situation. But that can be a bit daunting because of the immensity of the issue. I find, too, that I tend to become repetitive, praying for the same thing over and over, inevitable missing some important issues altogether. So, I would like to suggest a way to assist us. Something quite intentional.

If we could sit and identify the major issues we believe need prayer, and list them out

For example – and by no means restricted to these:

- All government decision makers – politicians, health advisers etc
- Those on the medical front line – doctors, nurses, orderlies etc
- Those who have tested positive – hospitalised or at home
- Those awaiting test results
- Those who are grieving a death
- Those with loved one still overseas and unable to get home
- Families under stress through the virus requirements – working from home, etc
- Those in enforced isolation in hotel rooms

And so on.

Wider matters to do with the economy, community cohesion, sensitivity for those policing the new arrangements etc can also be added.

Once we have the list completed, we can divide the items up between the days of the week and, on a daily basis, concentrate in our prayers on those listed for each day.

MALENY NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

Recently I was asked if the Maleny Neighbourhood Centre was continuing its great work of providing emergency supplies to those in need during the shutdown. Here is what I found out expressed in an email.

"The MNC will be continuing its ER [Emergency Response] work for as long as it is able.

It is open Monday to Friday for this purpose. Weekends are left to Lifeline and other larger providers.

This ER is provided in a couple of ways

[1] People can visit the centre and make their needs known from outside the centre, and be provided with what is available [food and personal items]

or

[2] They can phone the centre and then pick it up or it can be delivered

The sorts of items MNC would appreciate are:

** tinned food*

** dry goods e.g.*

- rice, pasta, pasta sauce*
- cereals - muesli, weetbix etc*
- Baked beans spaghetti etc*

** personal items e.g.*

- hand cream*
- women's products*
- toilet paper*
- tissues*

** money for purchasing items not donated*

** carry bags. ER goods are given to recipients in supermarket type bags - not ordinary plastic bags but the firm, handled, branded ones. These are in high demand.*

The ER supplies are simply put in the bag and placed where they can be collected [either outside the centre or the home to which they have been delivered]

No contact is made with recipients in either method of distribution

There is also a call for people to nominate as food delivery volunteers as this method of distribution is increasing, I believe.

The number to call is 5499 9345 or e-mail coordinator@malenync.org.au

The person responsible is Margaret McKenzie."

I have been told since that financial donations can be made on-line through the MNC website. This can be found at www.malenync.org.au.

I am not aware of what happens at Montville and Palmwoods, but this suggests that any such bodies in those areas may also be still functioning.

HUMOUR

In a crisis there are always those who can be relied upon to see a funny side. I hesitate to pass on some of what has landed on my computer as we each have a different appreciation of what is funny, and some jokes can cut really quite close to the bone for some of us. Nevertheless, on this occasion, I felt I should attempt to lighten the mood as things are really quite bleak for us. So here goes:

If the schools are closed for too long, the parents are gonna find a vaccine before the scientists...

WHEN YOUR HAIR SALON IS CLOSED



BUT YOUR DOG GROOMER HAS A CANCELLATION

Our cleaning lady just called and told us she will be working from home and will send us instructions on what to do.



OLYMPIC GAMES TOKYO 2020

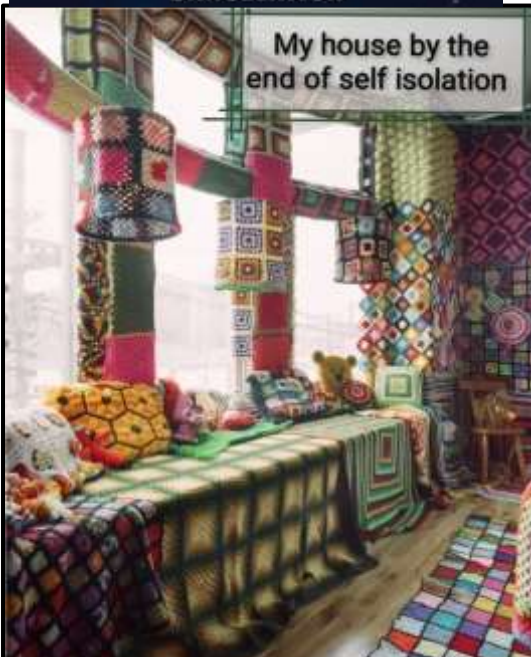
(SAFETY DISTANCE)

Social Distancing Tool



GAS IS FINALLY AFFORDABLE AND WE CAN'T GO ANYWHERE!

My house by the end of self isolation



If you see my kids locked outside today, mind your business. We are having a fire drill. #HomeSchool

We are about 3 weeks away from knowing everyone's true hair color



So technically showing up at the bank in a mask and gloves is ok now.

SNOW WHITE IS DOWN TO 6 DWARFS



SNEEZY HAS BEEN PLACED IN QUARANTINE