



THE new vine

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Blackall Range Uniting Churches

(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)

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

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Isn't it a great feeling when you can see light at the end of the tunnel – I think light in the darkness is always a genesis of hope. My sense of the present moment is that we are now in that space so far as the pandemic is concerned. May the light simply grow bigger and bigger, brighter and brighter, allowing hope to run joyously and freely among us.

One manifestation of this growing light, for me, as editor of this journal, is that the bulk of the content this time comes from readers. Mostly lay people. There are nearly twenty contributions that have come from those who are normally readers – and their contributions form the bulk of the content; provide much of the variety; tell the stories; write the poetry; provide the funnies; prepare and set up the final copy; and then print and distribute it.

As a result, it is a different edition – stories are really varied; some are deeply personal; some will make us consider if we should respond in some way; some look at the past, others the present, still others the future.

Herein lies the hope. It is becoming 'our' journal.

Amid my hope that this may become the norm, questions that have come to me while working on this issue include:

- Will others, or even the same people, be prepared to write in the future?
- Is it time to introduce "Letters to the Editor"?
- Should editions be free range or focussed on a topic?
- Can *The New Vine* contribute to finding how we might *be*, and *do*, church in future?
- What part might our inherent creativity play in discerning our future as church?

We have some very talented and creative people among our three worship centres who, I am sure, have had different visions of the future during lockdown – including how the church might be as we move forward to advance the Kingdom. After experiencing various expressions of e-church; after living at a somewhat slower pace; after being separated from family, friends, and even the community; after feeling the effect of the virus on individuals, communities and countries; will we understand the Gospel differently? May we see compassion through new eyes?

After having a rest for some weeks, we might even be able to find the energy to implement change – who knows?

Friends, let us live in hope, knowing God will show us the way – we merely need to hold ourselves open to the possibilities, and the challenge, and be prepared to 'do the hard yards' as necessary.

Peace and blessings

Graham

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WHO'S WHO IN THE BLACKALL RANGE CHUCHES

Blackall Range Minister: **REV LIENA HOFFMAN**
 Phone 0490 421 874,
 Email: minister@ourcommonlife.org.au

Palmwoods Pastor: **PASTOR KAY NIXON**
 Phone: 0412 539 020, 5478 9209,
 Email: kaynxn43@gmail.com

Treasurer: **MR ROGER SMITH**
 Phone: 5494 3784
 Email: phelan.smith@i.net.au

Church Office: 1290 Maleny-Landsborough Road, PO Box 297, Maleny
 Hours:Tuesday 9am – 3pm
 Thursday 9am – 3pm
 Phone:5429 6995
 Email:admin@ourcommonlife.org.au
 Internet:www.ourcommonlife.com.au
 Facebook:.....Maleny Uniting Church; Montville Uniting Church; Palmwoods Uniting Church

One Church Council: Peter Callaghan (Chair); Bob Eather and Amity Green (Maleny representatives); Duncan Drew and Rev George Woodward (Montville representatives); Mele Lolohea-Cameron (Palmwoods representative).

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

LIENA'S LINES

ECCLESIA REFORMATA SEMPER REFORMANDA The Church of the Reformation keeps Reforming

We keep hearing things will not go back to normal; we need to seek the 'new normal'; a pandemic, like global COVID-19, is life-changing; the course of the usual has changed, forever. However, the 'new normal' is uncertain. Unknown even. Moreover, we yearn for things to return to normal, to go back to the way they were.

Such thoughts and comments can also apply to the church – both the broader church, and to us, BRUC across the Hinterland – and for us, too, the 'new normal' for the church is presently unknown, yet we are compelled to ponder, to seek, to propose, to discuss various ways of *being* church, of *doing* church.

Of course, what we understand by 'church' is complex, multi-dimensional, rich and dynamic. Being dynamic means the church is every-changing; particularly in evolving historical, cultural, social, political, economic, scientific or spiritual contexts – yet, the Cristian church is not a freewheeling place – certain criteria are foundational; a set of norms is undeniable.

In seeking and reflecting upon who, what or how the church is to be, look and do, the following three parameters are helpful: *IDENTITY*, *MISSION/CALLING* and *MINISTRY*.

IDENTITY: Our identity starts and ends in the Triune God. It is God's church and we belong to God. It is about the kingdom of God. Our existence depends upon God. The purpose of the church is to proclaim the kingdom of God, to glorify God. To witness God's mighty deeds of faith, hope and love is the church's *CALLING*. The church's *IDENTITY* and *CALLING* are integrated, inter-related. The how: how we do church, how we operate, how we function, how we live as witnesses, how we fulfil the church's calling, is the church's *MINISTRY*. These are the critical, yet challenging questions, which we need to raise and discuss on the continual journey of renewal - particularly, now in this hiatus, this gift of a time-interval, this liminal space, the corona virus has granted us.

So, here are a few thoughts on the church to help us as we ponder and wonder:

What is our understanding of the church? Metaphors help, but more than 100 images of the church have been identified in the Bible and we can get lost amongst all the different images and metaphors.

Three of the best known are:

- [1] People of God the Father which links us to the covenant God, the promises and witnesses of faith of the Old Testament. We are partners to the covenant and need to be faithful witnesses of the faithful God.
- [2] The body of Christ image underlines Christ as the Head of the body, but also our connection to Christ and to one another. We are to bear witness of the crucified and risen Christ, the scarred church showing the marks in our hands and feet.
- [3] We are the temple of the Holy Spirit –a metaphor which highlights the creative, life-giving, dynamic nature of the church. A church with no walls.

In all this, we confess we are: *ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC* church:

ONE - unity within denominations, remains complex and elusive, yet no less true.

HOLY - means we are different, sanctified, set apart – that is part of our witness.

CATHOLIC - means universal, common, complete, collective.

APOSTOLIC - means our identity is based on Christ – as the church was founded on Christ by the apostles, then and through the centuries.

In addition, the church is:

- ❖ **LEITOURGIA - A COMMUNITY OF WORSHIP.** Karl Barth described the worship service at the “concrete centre” of church-life, stating that “the church service is the most important, momentous and majestic thing which can possibly take place on earth”!
- ❖ **THE PLACE WHERE THE INSTRUMENTS OF GOD’S GRACE** are received: Kerugma – preaching of the Word and the Sacraments – Preaching to sustain, encourage, challenge, grow our faith; Baptism to endorse our membership of the people of God; Holy Communion to celebrate our freedom and forgiveness and participation in Christ’s death and resurrection.
- ❖ **KOINONIA**, a community of fellowship, of care and support. A community called and unified, bound together by love and peace through the Holy Spirit to God and one another. We do not choose one another, we receive one another. We are chosen by God and in Christ belong to one another.
- ❖ **DIACONIA** - service to one another and to others, with our talents, our gifts of prayers and offerings.
- ❖ **ALIVE IN THE WORLD.** The relationship between the church and culture is on a continuum. Sometimes the church and culture are intertwined, sometimes directly in opposition to one another. The challenge is to discern how to live as church, as *prophet, priest and king* in the world.
- ❖ **CONTINUALLY RENEWING.** Renewal is “back to the future”; “a Trinitarian and traditional event” (Geoffrey Wainwright). The images used is that of oarsmen in a boat, rowing with their backs to the future, the direction they are moving in, with their eyes fixed on the coxswain, responding as *one* to the One’s instructions and directions.

The above has described some characteristics of the church, but the question remains - **HOW DO WE DO CHURCH?** What does our ministry look like, or need to look like? This is the question I invite you to help answer, to ponder on and wonder about.

“Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

HOW, LORD, HOW?

Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda!

Shalom, LIENA



NOW HERE’S A THOUGHT FROM THE EDITOR:

This discussion will, no doubt, go on for some time. We will each have some idea of how we might, as church, face the future. So, could I invite all readers to write in with our answers to Liena’s question **HOW, LORD, HOW?**

And we could then devote the next edition of *The New Vine* to a discussion on what might become our ‘new normal’.

Just saying

STOP PRESS A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!

I'm very privileged to advise the congregation that our minister, Rev Dr Liena Hoffman, has recently had her doctorate degree conferred, albeit differently from the way she had expected when it was actually awarded by the university Senate soon after her arrival here.

After 4 years of hard work completing her Doctorate, Liena had expected to return to South Africa for the Graduation ceremony on 3 April. However, she was not able to attend the ceremony because of the travel restrictions brought about by COVID-19. So, her award was given in absentia at the graduation ceremony presided over by the new chancellor of Stellenbosch University, retired Constitutional Judge Edwin Cameron. Liena could only watch the ceremony, late at night, by live stream. How disappointing that must have been.



In her studies, Liena particularly looked at the cost and complexity of 'economic crimes' and the inclusion of mediation into South Africa's Criminal Procedures Act. She writes "*The cost of serious economic crimes is not only financial, but also to confidence and trust in corporate and commercial relationships in South Africa.*"

In 2001, section 105A of the Criminal Procedure Act (plea and sentencing agreements) was added as a model of 'negotiated justice'. Liena proposed an amendment/addition to the Act, namely the insertion of section 105B, "Mediated Settlement Agreements". In this context, 'mediation' as a restorative justice process, is a facilitative and flexible procedure that allows the voices of both the victim and the offender to be heard securely and meaningfully. To facilitate this model, Liena proposed "*that an accredited mediator, mediate between the public prosecutor, the perpetrator, the victim and possibly members of the community.*"

Similar models already exist in Australia. As part of her thesis, Liena reviewed these models of justice to arrive at her conclusions.

Our warmest congratulations Dr Liena.

Peter Callahan
Church Council Chair



A recent NSW/ACT monthly magazine contained the following article which I felt worth sharing, especially as it meant that I would not have to write, or find someone else to write, what it has to say. It is by the minister from Tuggeranong in Canberra and says it all really. I am only a bit sad I couldn't get it to you earlier in the shutdown. [The Editor]

A SACRED SPACE AT HOME

As people of faith in these dispersed times, it can be important to set aside a space in your home or room where you can come before God in prayer, explore the questions that may arise in your life, and spend time exploring scripture in meditation or silence. Your sacred space should be a place where you can strengthen your relationship with God and find strength for yourself in these uncertain times.

Even if you can only stop for a few minutes a day, having a space for quiet reflection in your home serves as a reminder that it is important to continue to nurture our faith in the absence of any organised worship. The Christian tradition of the West has generally focused our spiritual life very much on communal worship and learning, such as attending Sunday services and engaging in Bible study. While these are indeed important events in our faith development and practice, they are not the only way we can worship and learn.

People have created sacred places in many different forms and places throughout history. Sacred spaces can be large, like landscapes, or have natural or created structures such as Stonehenge, Uluru, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A sacred landscape can be sacred to people or communities because of something that took place there. Modern sacred places that would fit this description include Ground Zero, Anzac Cove, and the grotto at Lourdes.

Other religious and communal examples of sacred spaces include labyrinths, meditation gardens, cemeteries, and churches, mosques, temples or synagogues. In the absence of these, making sacred space or a personal altar will help you set aside some time dedicated to your spiritual growth and well-being.

The first step is to find a peaceful and uncluttered area in your home or a corner in your room. Sacred spaces should be places that allow you to relax, and where you won't be interrupted by someone entering or exiting a room. Think about why you want a sacred space.

What needs are you hoping to meet? What sort of things are you wanting to do? Are you seeking to deepen your spiritual life or enhance your relationship with God? Do you need a place where you can lament for things temporarily lost? Or do you just need a place to have some quiet reflective time during a stressful day? Will your space be a place of dreaming or reading? Will it be a refuge from all the responsibilities and current distractions around you? Is it a place that will help you put aside the fear and uncertainties of the world? Or is it a place that will provide you with fresh energy and insight into the world? Please take some time to pray and discern what it is you want your sacred space to be for you. Think about what things you would like in your space.

What do you find meaningful and what things will help you connect with God? Some suggestions include a small vase with flowers, a cross or icon, a bible, photographs or pictures, a coloured cloth to reflect the liturgical season and a candle.

All of us have meaningful objects in our homes. You may well enjoy a hunt through boxes and drawers to find that special object. In your chosen space, place a small low table or something similar to hold the special things you have chosen. Place a cushion or comfortable seat in front of your table. Make this place one that invites prayer, ritual and reflection, and allow it to change over time as your needs evolve.

Try to spend time in your space every day — whether it is for 30 seconds in the morning or a half hour meditation at night. Use your space to pray for the day ahead, to express gratitude or to lament, or to discern what God might be saying to you.

You might like to keep a journal nearby to write down or sketch any thoughts, images or inspired ideas that come to you.

There is no right or wrong way to create and use your sacred space; it is there to help you connect personally with God, with yourself, and with the world around you in meaningful ways.

Think of your sacred space as a beautiful gift that you can give yourself every day, helping you to deepen your faith and relationship with God, to put things into a proper perspective. The more you use your space, the more you will find it providing you with unexpected blessings. John and I have created a sacred space in our home during this period of isolation.

The cross is a Celtic one from the Western Hebrides, and the illuminated picture is one my late aunt created, and it shows the symbols of the four gospels. We also have a purple candle and cloth to signify we are in Lent. The Bible is opened each week at the gospel reading from the Lectionary.

Think about taking a photo of your sacred space to share with others. It is one lovely way that we can keep in touch and share with one another as a community.

Rev Elizabeth Raine

A CLAYTON'S CROSSWORD

I tried very hard to find a crossword to put into the last edition as I knew we'd have time to sit and work it out. However, I couldn't find anything suitable that was available. But, lo and behold, when doing a little tidying up of bookshelves, I came across a very old book of party games – it cost 3/6 and has no date of publication but was "Registered at the General Post Office Melbourne for transmission through the post as a book." Ah, those yellowing pages

And would you believe there is a special section of 'Special Biblical Competitions' many of which I am sure we all probably came across at a church social when we were much younger.

So, a nostalgic walk down memory lane.

Books of the Bible

- 1 Men who preside over courts [now includes women]
- 2 Wise sayings
- 3 A word with a similar meaning to Alpha
- 4 To fade out
- 5 The sections of a play
- 6 Only partly warm
- 7 Now said to bring or have bad luck
- 8 Sought when unemployed
- 9 Sobblings and wailings
- 10 They were ruled by the Caesars
- 11 Often taken for gold
- 12 What a mathematician deals with
- 13 To go out
- 14 A piece of foreign money
- 15 There are not as many now
- 16 The first half of a harsh disposition

(Answers are on Page 11)

GET THE PICTURE?

Having a background in English and Fine Arts, it may not be surprising that I love picture books. Hence, they have often featured in my ministry with children and of course in having a Bookshop specialising in children's books. So, when pondering on the question that Liena has been posing - "How will the church look post COVID-19?" - I found myself thinking of it in terms of a picture book.



Whether you call it Fresh Expression, Pioneering Church, Project Plenty or something else, I think the church at large and some sectors of our community see the need for us to become more relevant and 'in touch' with the general public. So, as I think of the history of our faith in terms of a sacred text, how do we illustrate that story?

During this strange time there are many things that are changing, some good, some bad, some just different. I've been encouraged by the number of young families spending time together and reconnecting while wanting to learn about gardening, cooking, how to do a jigsaw. Parents finding out more of what their kids are being taught at school. People encouraging each other by sending letters and cards. Setting up Zoom or Skype to keep in touch. Playing music or exercising together on different balconies on high rise flats.

People realising things that they have taken for granted are actually precious. A walk in the National Park. A hug between a grandparent and grandchild. Going to the theatre or a concert. Meeting a friend for a cuppa and parting with a hug. Gathering for worship...

Why do we miss gathering for worship and what role does it play in our lives? Well there is the teaching, the fellowship, a place to praise and pray collectively, to partake in communion and so on. But it is also a place to equip us so that we can illustrate the text.

We are called to be salt and light in the world. Not just in the church, not just in our homes or with our church network. How can we connect? These days, perhaps more than ever, we need to build up trust. The church has let the community down in a number of ways. We need to show unconditional love and genuine care. We need to find common ground, not point out our differences to be exclusive. In Jesus' day salt was not sprinkled around sparingly but rubbed in as a preservative. Gently, but potently. We need to be real, not pious. Humble, not judgemental. We need to build genuine relationships with those in our community by reaching out to those in need. Whether they come to church or not, we have a God given call to care. How God works in their hearts as you reveal your faith to them is between them and God.

I'm excited at the new opportunities that may arise as we gradually reform community connections over these coming months. People will be seeing the need to be intentional about nurturing relationships and caring for the environment as it breathes a sigh of relief during this time of renewal and clear air.

Perhaps the church can do the same?

Kay Nixon
Community Pastor

A PARALLEL UNIVERSE



Shortages and rationing of food (some items unavailable), unable to see close family and friends, new babies arriving without family to welcome them, weddings postponed or cancelled and many frontline workers needing to isolate for some months while they nurse those who have the virus, rising unemployment. The world we find ourselves in today must seem familiar to those who have lived through wars and the depression of the 1930s, times when Christian faith was tested daily.

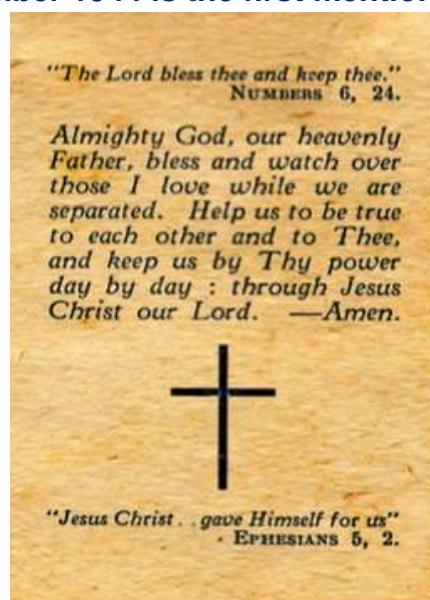
Seventy-five years ago, World War 2 ended and so did three years of separation for my parents, Harold John (Jack) Gunn and Marian. They were parted when my sister Helen was 15 months old and my sister Judy (born in July 1944) would not see her father again until she was almost 2 years old.

During that separation my parents wrote to each other every day and Mum kept all of Dad's letters, over 200. I have had the privilege these past weeks of reading them with my sisters and am now scanning them all to share with the family. Part of the story is their journey in faith, much of it happening for my father during this period.

Before the war my mother attended St John's Anglican Church in Cooks Hill Newcastle and taught Sunday School there. My father had been christened in the Catholic Church but not sure of his spiritual journey after that. As a family we attended the Anglican Church St Stephen's in Newcastle where my parents were very active. Dad was Rector's Warden for many years and my mother a member of the Mothers Union. When I was about 10 years old we had a mission at our church which was led by Bishop Philip Strong. Dad casually mentioned that he had confirmed him during the war while he was on Morotai – an island at the northern edge of Indonesia.

I have scanned the first 200 letters and I can see that he was attending church very regularly while posted at Oakey and he writes of many interesting conversations with the padre. It was a padre in Darwin who was assigned to censor letters and he gave this Prayer Link to my father.

You can see from his letter that he and Mum found the Prayer Link very comforting during their separation. This letter in December 1944 is the first mention of being confirmed.



ISF
PRAYER LINK

THIS double card is printed so that those in the FORCES and those at HOME may join in the same prayer for each other every day. If you are on active service, keep one half of the card to use yourself, and send the other to the one who will be thinking of you at Home. If you are at Home, keep one half yourself and send the other to your loved one on active service.

LEAGUE OF SOLDIERS' FRIENDS (C.of E.)
St. Paul's Cathedral Buildings, Melbourne

Church of England Recreation Centres

NAME LAC GUNN J. Number 132705
GROUP 357
 Battalion RAAF
DARWIN 4/12/1944.
 9 P.M.

ling Marian,

Once again I am able to write you a letter which will be censored by the post. As I mentioned last week he is conducting a class of preparation to be confirmed, and I have just returned from his tent where I spent a most enjoyable hour.

N.S.W. I am enclosing one half of a Prayer Link Card for you. I have been saying the prayer every night and if you would do the same after your nightly prayers it would have the definite effect of bringing us closer together. As a matter of fact you could teach Helen the same prayer.



Chapel at Morotai

In a letter dated 25th March 1945 my father writes

"After tea Chas, Jim and myself went to the chapel for the opening service, the dedication of the chapel, and lastly our long-awaited Confirmation. The Bishop* was making a trip through this area and he was a very good speaker. The service was well attended and with the assistance of a portable organ, the hymns were well rendered. The whole service took almost two hours and when the rest of the congregation had gone the Bishop had a yarn to the fifteen newly confirmed."

*Bishop Philip Strong was Bishop of Papua New Guinea.

There are certainly some parallels with this time in history and our current changes in lifestyle due to the pandemic. Stillness has been forced upon us now and we are returning to a simpler more thoughtful way of life as our busy schedules have come to an abrupt halt. Shops are sold out of seedlings and flour has been a scarce commodity as we find ourselves with time to plant/create our own food. May we also find time to reflect upon our faith and what it means in this world to be a follower of Jesus.

Sue McCleary

THE CREATIVITY OF CONFUSION

The story is told that when the home of Pablo Picasso, the great neo-expressionist painter of the twentieth century, was burgled, Picasso told the police that he would paint them a picture of the intruder. "And on the strength of that picture," the French police reported later, "we arrested a mother superior, a government minister, a washing machine and the Eiffel Tower."

Creativity is what a person makes out of confusion. Confusion happens when the frames of our lives, the certainties on which we have come to depend, begin to break down. Sounds familiar? Confusion stirs the habitual order of things. It throws the deck of lifestyle cards into the air and puts them back together again. Newly. Then the fragments of life that are scattered in broken and bizarre ways can be restructured in new ways, the results of creativity in every field.

It is the symphony of resurrection played over and over in us, every day of our lives. Creativity means to push open the heavy, groaning doorway to life.

All of the above comes from the book "*BETWEEN THE DARK AND THE DAYLIGHT – EMBRACING THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIFE*" published in 2015 by Joan Chittister.

It spoke to me for these "unprecedented times" in 2020. For me, a positive of 2020 has been "discovering" Joan Chittister, a Benedictine Nun. Thank you, Moyra Jones, for introducing me to Joan's wisdom, insight and common sense. So far, I've read three of her books. As well as the book already mentioned I've also found these others helpful:



- "*THE GIFT OF YEARS: GROWING OLDER GRACEFULLY*" (Many of us have gained insights from this book with regards to focusing on the blessings of our years instead of the burdens.)
- "*SCARRED BY STRUGGLE, TRANSFORMED BY HOPE*" (Once again Joan methodically approaches how to deal with big issues. One chapter describes the struggle, the next the gift one can receive from that struggle. e.g. The struggle of "change" can give us the gift of "conversion". The struggle of "isolation" can give us the gift of "independence". The struggle of "darkness" can give us the gift of "faith". There are many more relevant topics.) One of my favourite quotes from this book is "Conversion is the opening of the heart to the grace of new possibilities."

Barbara Richards

ANSWERS TO BOOKS OF THE BIBLE CROSSWORD (PAGE 7)

- | | | |
|------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1 Judges | 6 Luke | 11 Micah |
| 2 Proverbs | 7 Jonah | 12 Numbers |
| 3 Genesis | 8 Job | 13 Exodus |
| 4 Peter | 9 Lamentations | 14 Mark |
| 5 Acts | 10 Romans | 15 Ruth [Ruthless] |

I RELEASE

I sit with you
My loving Abba;
Open my hands
And release...

All that has passed;
Been and gone.
What is now
And what is yet to come.

All that is
And all that isn't.
All that I am
And all that I'm not.
All that I have
And all I have not.

All the words I have said
And those left unspoken.
All that I've done
And what's left undone.

All that has happened
And all that has not.
All that I hope for
And all that I dread.

All that I relish
And all I detest.
All that's delightful
And all that's mundane.

All that is easy
And all that is difficult.
All that goes smoothly
And all that is struggle.

Times of vigour
And times of depletion.
Times of anticipation
And times of disappointment.

Whatever is within me;
This moment
And the next.

Every breath;
Every ounce
Of my inmost and outermost being...
I release to You.

Helen Uhlmann

COVID 19 EASTER SUNDAY

I imagine all of us had a different Easter Sunday than we had expected or are used to. Bernadette and I cannot remember an Easter Sunday where we did not go to an Easter service with others of the faith. Most times it has been with people we have known well. This past Easter we had our breakfast and then went for a walk along our road.

On Easter Sunday I was asking myself what is God saying to me/us on this day that Christians all over the world hold sacred? The walk along our road is a beautiful walk amongst the trees with birds and butterflies and other insects all to be seen. I saw a large grey moth on the road near the end of its life. When I say large, this was large. That is what attracted my attention. Its body was 7cms long and its wingspan was just over 14cms. Now I picked it up because I thought - I can take a photo of this and send it to the grandchildren.

As I continued my walk and continued to think about what God was saying to me on this Easter Sunday, I became despondent because all I had seen that interested me was this large moth that while being large had a dull grey appearance and by now was dead. What could I gain from this moth? Was there a message to be learnt?

The rest of our walk, while pleasant, was uneventful. It seemed that God was saying nothing special to me on this very different Easter morning.

When we got home, I asked Bernadette to hold the wings of the moth out so I could take a photo. When I saw the bright orange of the underwings of the moth, I was surprised. All of a sudden, this big dull grey moth was showing me something new and beautiful. Here was our resurrection, new life lesson for the day. The grave had to be opened for the resurrection to occur, the veil had to be lifted off the disciples' eyes before they could see the resurrected Jesus and the new life Jesus was offering to them. Nature is a great teacher of the lessons of life.

God continues to speak to each of us through our experiences in our everyday living. May you have many resurrection experiences.

George Woodward

INTERDEPENDENCE

During this pandemic crisis and the resulting period of isolation have you been watching your fair share of movies? Perhaps a biopic on the wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill may have captured your attention. Churchill is reported to have once remarked: "*never waste a good crisis*". Is this a moment in history where we hear a trumpet call to reflect on the future of the world? The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff recently commented that what is saving us during this crisis is not competition nor individualism but *the interdependence of all with all*. With this in mind, my intent here is to champion our dual tasks of prophetic exposure and prophetic imagination. So here goes.

Calamity can trigger a cacophony of religious responses. With unshakeable conviction some argue that natural disasters are the location of God's curse and therefore these serve as punishment for particular sins. Of course, there is no shortage of disastrous events in history to choose from. When it comes to exposing the embedded nature of sin within society and our complicity in that sin, there can be deafening silence. Given the potential for dire consequences from a changing planet, it is imperative that we explore appropriate Christian responses to the root and branch interference with creation. Surely our voices cannot remain silent. Perhaps we should take note of Jeremiah, the sixth century BCE prophet, who provides us with an exemplar of how to look beyond judgement without ignoring the dire implications of infidelity. Against

his narrative of prophetic calling, inured with lament, voice and hope, we are left with the distinct reminder that God does act in history.

In the Old Testament there is a dominant theodicy (that is, the answer to the question of why God permits evil) which portrays God punishing human sinfulness through natural disasters. Recall the episodes of devastating plagues and hail (Exodus 9), the lack of rain and plant disease (Deuteronomy 28) and the prevalence of hunger and human disease (Jeremiah 24). Not surprisingly, a retributive theodicy has given rise to modern day edicts that God has sent natural disasters as judgments on communities so that they might repent.

We should not be startled that calamity pushes to the surface a broad range of religious views. Environmental scholar, Dr Janel Curry, studied theological worldviews in relation to the relationship between God, nature and humans within 10 diverse American congregations. Not surprisingly, Curry concluded that there were significant differences across the spectrum of Christian traditions. Some sought to distance themselves from a natural disaster by concentrating on generalised personal spiritual lessons. Others reassured themselves with the belief that this fallen world would one day be renewed. Rather than reflecting on the interrelationships with nature, congregants in one denomination preferred to respond by being exclusively drawn to social service. For all the surveyed congregations, exploring the nature of sin within societal structures and human complicity was mostly absent.

For sure there are pockets of resistance, but the location of our birth seems to determine how we see things. We have inherited a narrow perspective of identity and so we are unable to embrace the urgency of reconciling our current beliefs with what is to come. Complicity brings with it the lack of capacity for self-critique. For many there is a self-serving tendency to treat nature as a gift of exploitable resources. Even efforts to address the current crisis of climate change gives rise to the suspicion that the motivation is to save the Earth not because of some theological recovery of the wondrous nature of God's creation, but rather to ensure it continues to service humankind's endeavours.

Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have altered the earth in significant ways. One quarter of bird species are now extinct, at least one third of all our land mass has been transformed by some form of human activity, one half of all the earth's surface water is now committed to serving human endeavours, and worryingly, there has been a 30% increase in carbon dioxide concentrations. Rapid technological advancement has driven many of these changes and with escalating increase in global population, the dominant human influence continues to impact the very elements that sustain life – both the visible and invisible. Much of what we consume, a vast number of the products we buy, and our seemingly inevitable complicity in the daily activities of life involves the expenditure of non-renewable fossil fuels. To complicate matters, along the way a litany of environmental disasters, from oil spills to nuclear radiation to dioxin releases, have compounded the negative impact on ecosystems.

Though to be clear, acceptance of this position is not universally held, either within communities of faith, our nation state, or the global community. In Australia, the 2014 annual CSIRO climate change attitudinal survey reported that one in three respondents did not believe human activity accounted for changes to the climate. Some Christian expressions have notably tended to be skeptical about the existence of man-made climate change. For them the weight of history intrudes because much of our Christian roots were planted in the capitalist project.

In short, against the juggernaut of human endeavour, climate change represents an impending disaster. The future prospect is one of a calamitous historical episode that will disrupt communities by inflicting overwhelming human, economic and environmental loss. From experience we know that disasters can be caused by nature, but they can also have human origins. From tornadoes and earthquakes to genocide and terrorism, history is replete with a litany of intrusions. What the historical record often downplays is the dehumanizing impact for real people in these concrete situations.

The impending climate change crisis is not just an incidence of natural phenomena measured by sophisticated science. To be sure, alterations of the Earth's ecosystems warrants the attention of science. But it is much more than that. The social and economic fabric of life is

dislocated: routines are placed in disarray, the human spirit is crushed, established patterns of commerce are thrown into turmoil, personal safety is lost, and in doing so God's handiwork is distorted. Has COVID-19 provided us with a foretaste of the future? What will be life affirming for the generations to come? Will it be Enlightenment's propensity to privilege the power of humankind to solve the unsolvable, or perhaps a surrender to fatalism?

Looking forward I suggest that we embrace a convergence of "holy resolve and human courage". These things speak of a household of God where relationships matter - the interdependence of all with all. Isn't this an essential thread that has been woven through the words of the Old Testament prophets and the teaching of Jesus? My underlying intent here has been to release coils of prophetic exposure and prophetic imagination. I am not seeking your agreement with my views but rather I want you to engage in the conversation about the future through the eyes of our creator who looked upon everything that had been made and found it to be good.

Peter Uhlmann

A NEW BEGINNING – SOMEWHAT UPENDED

Would I be prepared to write something pertaining to the new beginning I have found myself in – selling a house, buying a house and settling in to a new community in Maleny? Why would I do that? Sell the house I had lived in for 26 years, the place I loved and where many happy memories remain.

I was trying to be practical, moving myself before I had to be moved, following the pattern of my two older siblings who had downsized and now were concerned about how I was coping. My paddock seemed to grow wilder every year and maintenance costs could escalate. My own beloved children said nothing but were always there for practical help and advice.

I decided that 2019 would be the year to sell the house and find a smaller one – I had all my criteria worked out, but where to go? Which end of the range? What to keep, what to dispose of, what to sell, what to give away; it all took much longer than I thought it would and when I finally sold the house in October, I couldn't think past Christmas – 2020 was a complete blank wall and remained so until early March when at long last, I signed a contract to buy in Maleny. I already had interests and activities here and looked forward to finding more and meeting new people. I would need tradesmen, a plumber, an electrician, maybe a painter, the list went on and on. But "The best laid schemes..." as the poet said, do not always work out and I have been here in splendid isolation, as many others have been, making plans in my head for the better days to come.

While I was thinking about new beginnings, I recalled a song we sang in the Mapleton Choir last year, whose words seem to fit my situation. It begins with – 'There is a season, turn, turn, turn' and the lyrics are taken almost completely from Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. Now I am not in the habit to using bible verses to make my point, but this particular poem seems to express more eloquently and poetically what I wish to say. I have been selective with my choice of verse.

'To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,'
'A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together,
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing' [relevant at the moment!]
'A time to search and a time to count as lost, a time to keep and a time to discard,
A time to be silent and a time to speak.'

Helen Jackson

THE CHURCH NOTICES

The weekly notices are an essential part of church communities' activities and from time to time they can give us a laugh as different things can say different things to different people. We are assured what follows actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services: [The Editor]

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on the Water.' The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus.'

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

The eighth graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the church basement Friday at 7.00 p.m. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again,' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

This evening at 7.00 p.m. there will be hymn singing in the park opposite the church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 p.m. - prayer and medication to follow.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. Please use the back door.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their schooldays.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What is hell?' Come early and listen to the choir practising.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Weight Watchers will meet in the hall at 7.00 p.m. Friday. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

GOD KNOWS

The heading above might immediately be construed as a response to a question. For example,

“What’s for dinner?”
“God knows.”

“What time will they be here?”
“God knows.”

It is an off-handed way of saying, “I don’t know,” perhaps with more exasperation than normal. The irony being, it is closer to the truth than many would admit.

Back in February, plans were developing on how the Maleny Uniting Church would present the Easter services. Song lists were taking shape, Orders of Service were being formulated. The “Tenebrae” event on the evening before Good Friday was being finely tuned. Then, within a week, everything changed as the Corona Virus altered the way we could gather and social distancing and isolation became a way of life.

Just look at the response. Through an outstanding and committed effort on the part of the technical team, the office, our minister as well as a contingent of other participants, “church” is still happening, albeit in a different mode of operation. This missionary effort is reflected across the nation and across the globe. If we have access to the technology at home, we can participate in a church service every day – in fact many times a day if we so desire, and receive them from not only the local area, but from churches on the coast, in Brisbane, interstate and overseas, with a huge variety of pastors, evangelists, teachers, worship leaders and apologists.

Certainly, the face to face contact and the personal fellowship will be missed by many, but great efforts are being made to “stay connected” and ensure that no-one is left totally isolated.

But - there’s more to this, which brings me back to my original statement: “God knows”.

Statistics from the most recent National Census (2016) indicated that for the first time, those who identified as “no religion” (also known as “nones”) exceeded any one religious denominational group, and comprised 30% of the population. This had increased from 18% ten years earlier. Those identifying as the collective “Christian” were 52%. Australia as a nation is not well renowned for regular attendance at church. According to independent surveys, the attendance figure is now around 7% of the population, so we have a large number who, for various reasons, choose not to attend any church whether or not they profess a faith, nominal or committed.

The way that the Christian faith is being promulgated through technology due to the impact of this Corona pandemic is providing a means to hear the Good News on a scale that could not have been imagined a few months ago. It might be through hearing about a service from friends or family, or through casual “You Tube Trawling” that the message is entering some homes – homes whose occupants would not normally see the inside of a church.

The virus is a disaster in many ways and has brought great hardship and grief and will continue to do so. It might also be giving us a signal that there is always an opportunity to make the most of a bad situation and respond in ways that show we do not hide in the face of difficulty.

The parable of the farmer sowing seeds (Matthew 13) is worth re-visiting. God knows how this new way of spreading His word will reach further than the boundaries of the physical church. Trust Him – He knows exactly what is going on.

Paul Tarbuck

COMMITMENT

Many years ago, during our wedding vows, Olive and I gave a commitment to each other.

Part of this promise was that we would be faithful to each other, and that we would look after each other.

I know from my side I have not followed that promise 100%, but I have tried. Sometimes we are not strong enough to not let extraneous thoughts filter our promise.

Where can we regain the strength needed?

Strong friends can shed light on our doubts, only if we are prepared to listen to them.

I have found, on reflection, that the commitment I gave to Olive was before God, and if I wanted wise counsel, where else should I turn.

Commitments, or promises, surround us each day. We give them with very little thought.

Remember, God has given promises through Christ. The promise of allowing us to live through Christian principles, to love one another, to help those less fortunate, to keep our promises.

I have been thinking of commitment recently, as I have tried to live out my promise to Olive.

With God's help, I know that I will succeed.

Colin Harding



THE POWER OF PRAYER

When first in home confinement, I must admit to being somewhat overwhelmed with all the information coming our way on the news. Prospects looked terribly bleak, getting worse by the day, to the extent that we limited ourselves somewhat to the news reports. So after a few days I decided it was time to get to work and I have alternated between the garden and indoors, although 'pottering' might be a better word than 'working', and I've enjoyed reading and knitting. I am enjoying being at home but miss church and the people. I'm thankful for the steps put in place which have protected us, as a country, from the spread of the pandemic thus far, and pray that with the lessening of restrictions there will be no further spikes in casualties.

In March I got the message that my brother-in-law, Ivan, who has cancer, was in hospital in Ireland with the dreaded virus. He was very ill in intensive care BUT had a lot of people praying for him: his church and community, our church, and a prayer group on Facebook for people with Covid 19. It was indeed a miracle that he pulled through. He had been in hospital for 30 days with no visitors allowed during this time, and a phone allowed only during the last week, so it was a wonderful homecoming to his family who were just so thankful.

Ivan still has serious health issues, and has had a few setbacks since his return home, but he is thankful to be clear of the virus and especially happy to be at home with his loving family.
PRAISE GOD!

Muriel Wilson

A PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS

You may recall that the last edition carried a number of prayers we could use during our days of isolation and distancing. Liena sent one for inclusion, but somehow it didn't reach here in time. But, it has since arrived, and is included this time. It is virus specific and I commend it to you for your use, even though, as a society, we are going along a little better than had been expected. [The Editor]

This prayer is written by Christo Greyling, a personal friend. I was close to his father, the late Prof Chris Greyling, who was a professor in missiology and taught me to love and respect persons of other faiths, particularly Moslems.

Prof Chris came to visit me in Chivhu, Zimbabwe amidst the upheaval and uncertainty of the farm acquisitions (must have been around 2002). Those times, like now, were scary and tumultuous, you literally never knew who was at the gate – foe or friend. You did not know when things were going to change, when you were going to be next, and things would never be the same again.

Sound familiar? We do not know, amidst the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, whether we will be next, and whether our lives will be irrevocably changed. I still distinctly recall Prof Chris words of wisdom around the formica kitchen table: Liena, the biggest challenge is uncertainty. It is the uncertainty, which erodes and eats away at a person's calmness, a person's positivity, a person's faith, a person's hope and a person's love. He was right and this remains true today. It is probably why a friend who was tested negative for the Corona-virus, said she wished it was positive because then she would know, be certain that she had the virus. Then she could take action, fight it and build up an immunity. To know is better than to wonder will I be next? When we know something, we can take control, take action, make a plan. It is the uncertainty, the unknowing, which slowly erodes, because we are not in control, not in command.

Thank God we do know who is. As the song confesses:

*Because He Lives I can face tomorrow!
Because He Lives all fear is gone.
Because I know, I know He holds the future
and life is worth the living,
Because he Lives!"*

Christo's life story itself is remarkable. He contracted HIV-AIDS from a blood transfusion when the world still knew very little about the HIV-virus and HIV, meant AIDS, and AIDS meant DEATH. We now know so much more about the HIV-virus and antiretroviral therapy (ART). And Christo is testimony to that – from receiving a death sentence as a young student, he survived, married and is the father of healthy children.

Christo is presently the Senior Director Faith - Advocacy and External Engagement at World Vision International

So, a prayer from someone who has carried and lived with a deadly virus for decades.

Shalom Liena

My prayer in this unreal time with COVID-19 (Feel free to share. A shared prayer is powerful advocacy before God) ... Christo Greyling

Jesus Christ, our Lord, in this time of uncertainty
 You are our Rock of Ages,
 Our Cornerstone,
 Our Emmanuel – our God with us.

Lord our Father, when our hearts tremble with anxiety and fear,
 We hear your voice:
 Be still, and know that I am God
 Know that I am God ...
 Be still ...
 Know ...
 I am ...

And in that peace, which only comes from You
 We stand before You
 God of power – bring an end to this pandemic
 God of wisdom – provide a cure or vaccine
 God of healing – touch those infected
 God of comfort – comfort those concerned for loved ones and those that mourn
 God of rest – surround the hearts of children, parents and elderly
 God of provision – provide the means for all to continue to work and provide for those they love
 God of love – open our eyes how to responsibly act with love
 God of protection – guard children not only from disease, but also from abuse and neglect
 God of justice – guide our governments and leaders
 God of righteousness – raise our voices on behalf of the voiceless and the stigmatised
 God of peace – make us an instrument of your peace
 God of Hope – fill us with your joy and peace, and may our Hope overflow to others by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 Amen.

KARL'S KORNER

Thrice Cursed?

Recently our minister, as has happened a number of times in the past, raised concern about "domestic violence". After the service I approached the minister and said, half-jokingly, that I felt thrice cursed. "Why?" you ask?

Firstly, I was born in Germany after WW2 and came to this country as a toddler. At primary school I was teased because of my name (allusions to mammary glands and South African insects), my origin (even one reference to Nazis), and my dress (I was sent to school in lederhosen for a little while). Those taunts were relatively easily forgiven and forgotten. But one "stain" remains - almost every month in the media I'm reminded of the Holocaust. People may say "Well, we don't blame you of course, but...".

Secondly, it is quite correct to say that Europeans, primarily the British, appropriated the continent without the consent of the original inhabitants. It is also correct to say that no (or little) compensation was paid for this and therefore, a great wrong remains to be dealt with. We call this "reconciliation" and the church seeks to contribute to this effort. What worries me about this, however, is the almost accusatory language used by indigenous spokespeople and many of their supporters, as well as the emotional appeals to "truth telling" aimed at disguising the facts. For example, nobody has been here 650 years let alone 65,000 years (there's been nobody of that age for centuries), nor should anyone really be proud of being part of a surviving grouping of humanity. And if anyone should be asked to pay compensation, I would have thought that would be the British government which effectively undersigned the appropriation. Putting these things aside, however, along with the fact that those calling for reconciliation seemingly cannot paint me a picture of how this would work in practice, I feel that this whole debate leaves me questioning my right to live here - to be a citizen on equal footing with all others. And, if the church truly believes that the land was stolen, then it has no option but to give it back. Is it prepared to do this? And I suppose these people will say to me "We know you had no choice in the matter, but..."

Thirdly, the feminist movement has been dominating the media seemingly blaming men for all possible ills for the last 50 years. When I investigated the ideology, I came to the conclusion that these people believed that it was all about "power", and that, if women were empowered, - mainly by giving them a separate income - this would eventually lead to something called "equality" allowing both "parties" to make arrangements from an equal footing. My rationalist mind, however, says that no amount of social engineering can make an apple equal to an orange (so to speak) and lately the impression left with me is that feminism is really a form of sexism where women want "equality" when it suits them and blame men when they can't get it and for all 'wrongs'. Now it's easy to dismiss the harangue-ings of those in the media called "femo-nazis", but what impacts me is the deafening silence about the unfairness of many of their pronouncements by what I might call "normal" women. I remember a group called "Women who want to be women" being howled down by the media and, more recently, when a tragic event occurred, the sole woman who at least countenanced the possibility of deeper causes was treed like a cat chased by a bunch of baying bloodhounds. Our church, itself, is not altogether free of this ideology. When you look at its publications, the focus of appeals, etc. seem very biased towards the needs and aspirations of women and children. Indeed, at a couple of "World Day of Prayer" events there were prayers for these, but men weren't mentioned. That hurt. Yes, I know they'll say to me "Of course we didn't mean to, but..."

That word "but" hides a lot. You see, we use the word 'reconciliation' in many ways to refer to shortcomings called sin, and the hope of forgiveness. Can I be reconciled to my past? Can I be reconciled with the indigenous people? Can I be reconciled to women? In many ways I see it as impossible unless they acknowledge that they too have sinned - fallen short - and also forgive. While ever people harp on past wrongs and imply that I contributed to them, they engage in a form of water torture and reconciliation is impossible. It is received as blame-mongering and may lead to a feeling in the recipient described by the thought "may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb".

There is a deeper aspect to this for the church. We are told that we "labour not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12) but against "powers" and "spirits". The "sins" are a symptom of a deeper disease and it is this that the church should be addressing. Sympathise with the purported victims, by all means, but not to the exclusion of truth and identification of the underlying causes. Otherwise we will be here in another 200 years arguing about the same things. The Gospel is, after all, the good news that there is forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus our Lord.

Karl Tietze

HOW BLESSED AM I?

Little did I know when my daughter, Ann-Marie, decided to come home from Western Australia to have her twins, just what would be ahead of us.

Twin girls, Annabella and Bronte, were born on 2 January, 2020 and life was progressing as normal, except Ann-Marie was exhausted from lack of sleep, breast feeding, life with two tiny babies and recovering from delivery. Back then, I could enjoy socialising with family and friends, attending group activities, driving to mothers' group at Caloundra hospital, family/friends dropping in for visits.

Suddenly, the Corona Virus hit Australia and I went into self-isolation. Shortly after, Ann-Marie decided to self-isolate with me, with the babies. All four of us have been at home together, only going out for essential medical appointments. Shopping has been done on-line for various items and using click and collect for groceries.

Julie, my other daughter, is still out working so she has been the collector of supplies and doing errands for us, of course social distancing when occasionally she has arrived here with a take-away coffee. It feels very strange not to hug her or my grandsons, Dylan and Travis, when they come with her. The boys have become very responsible at keeping social distancing.

E-church has been great on Sundays. Ann-Marie puts it up on the big TV screen for me. Sometimes, I can't wait till Sunday and I watch on my phone when I go to bed on Saturday night. I especially remember May Communion, all four of us in the lounge room, babies being breast fed while Ann-Marie and I joined in Communion. I love to hear the voices and sometimes see the faces of various church members doing readings, prayers or the welcome to worship and it is also great to hear snippets from other church members. Kay and Tony Nixon's appearance was a nice addition to Mothers' Day e-church.

I look forward to Liena's Wednesday morning cuppas and interviews with other church folk telling their stories. I am always excited and wondering who I will meet when Wednesday comes around.

So HOW BLESSED AM I?

I have been living in isolation with Ann-Marie and the twins for several months now. Sharing life together, bonding with the precious little ones, enjoying each new baby step as the weeks quickly slip by. I have enjoyed so many happy experiences.

It has been such a strange time for me, not being able to hop in the car anytime to visit family and friends, or go to group activities that are the "norm", not even shopping or a walk in the main street of Maleny and an opportunity to bump into somebody I know to chat or share a coffee at one of our favourite coffee shops.

I guess all of us have missed special events, grandkids, trips away, friendship groups, coffee at Maple 3 on Wednesdays, exercise groups, church fellowship, Seniors drop in on Friday, Busy Needles, Ukulele, calling on friends and family - the list goes on.



Photo is six-week check and immunisations at Doctor's, wearing the Dr t-shirts that a Dr friend gave to Ann-Marie. I am nursing Annabella.

How exciting it will be when we feel confident to spread our wings and go out into the community and continue life as “normal”.

Mothers’ Day was a wonderful day. We shared some little gifts and special words in cards. I had a beautiful card and 3 roses from my garden to give Ann-Marie for her first Mothers’ Day from me and the twins.

My sons Peter and John were at my place early morning and attached a new back gate with a catch that is easy for me to use. They made the gate on the Saturday. I didn’t hear or see them install the new gate. What a surprise when they phoned and asked me to go out into the back garden to measure the gateway. The boys were hiding behind the big fig tree in the park joining onto my fence, popped out their heads like garden gnomes and called “Happy Mothers’ Day”.

During the day, four of my children and grandkids called, and thanks to technology, my son David who lives in the Northern Territory, sent a lovely Mothers’ day message. It was indeed a busy and happy day. Too busy to watch Songs of Praise, so I can enjoy that on I-view later in the week.

Some folk have phoned, sent text messages, or popped in – of course with social distancing. This has been much appreciated. I don’t seem to get much spare time for phoning people, but I do think of my church family with love. One day seems to just slip into the next for me. I’m busy with household chores and helping when I can with the twins. I’m sure it is healthy to be busy and I enjoy all the blessings life gives me.

I am looking forward to happy times out in the real world one day.

Lyn Baker

E-HOLY COMMUNION

For quite a while now, our weekly worship has been shared on-line – even to the point of our sharing Holy Communion electronically. Something quite different for us all. And you may remember we were encouraged to take a photo of our home sanctuary to add to the experience and to share with others.

By a roundabout route the photos below arrived on my computer and so I share them. They show Holy Communion at the home of Annette and John Sinclair from Crystal Waters.

My sense, just looking at them, is that these images can take us into another dimension – sharing the sacrament amid the Creator’s handiwork – can this lead to a deeper experience of our relationship with Jesus around the table? Sit with them for a while and see. Do you have any similar photos to share?



GO TO, GO TO THE HIGH STREET ROAD UNITING CHURCH

In the late 80's/early 90's I lived in Wantirna South and Glen Waverley and was not attending any church at the time. My most direct route to the Melbourne CBD was via High Street Road. Travelling down High Street Road one day, I received direct and unmistakeable instructions "Go to, go to The High Street Road Uniting Church". This was repeated over several months.

Eventually, in early 1991, I found myself regularly attending Sunday night services; seated firmly in the back row of a packed church. The senior of the church's two ministers was a migrant from England with a farming background.

The reason for my being there did not unfold for several months. At the time (late 91), I was a sales executive managing a builders' display centre. One Friday morning, due to an unforeseen resignation, I found myself appointed to manage the company's best centre. I went straight there to totally re-arrange the display material to my own liking in time for the weekend rush. During a conversation with a friendly finance broker that afternoon, we talked about how his wife regularly attended Catholic Charismatic meetings. This brought back memories as in the late 70's and early 80's I had attended Charismatic meetings, counting many Catholic Charismatics as close friends.

I carried on working and songs and choruses from the Charismatic era kept flooding my mind. I started my half hour drive home, about 9.00pm, and I sang these songs out loud as I went.

Next morning I woke with pain in a very stiff neck. As I drove to work, I became obsessed with the thought that someone I knew well was in trouble. So, when stopped at traffic lights, I rang various friends on my car phone. "Hi, are you OK?" "Fine", Cheers" hang up and go on. The weekend was busy, so little thought went into the stiff neck and friends in trouble.

Early Monday, my mother rang from Adelaide to tell me my brother Phillip had been injured in a car accident on Friday night and was in the process of being transferred to the spinal unit at the Royal Adelaide hospital. It was nearly a fortnight before his miscellaneous injuries had stabilised to the point where corrective surgery could be undertaken on his fractured vertebrae.

Did I pray? Probably not much. I had mysteriously been in an intense state of worship (singing on the way home) when the accident occurred. Miraculously, a nearby neighbour, who was seldom home on Friday night, heard the impact of Phillip's ute as it left the road and careered down an embankment. He dragged Phillip from the wreckage and drove him to hospital fearing he may have bled to death if they waited for an ambulance.

Two unusual spiritual events unfolded to me prior to his surgery. One was actually a vision. It was Saturday morning a week after the accident. As I went to my car to go to work, I was dismayed to see the car's front righthand side was badly damaged. However, after a few seconds this vision subsided; the car was undamaged. Shaken, several minutes later I made an error of judgement at an intersection. The oncoming driver obviously had advanced defensive driving skills and no contact occurred. I took from this; *what could have been, wasn't*. It gave me great faith!

The other was a direct instruction from the Holy Spirit. A few days before the scheduled surgery I received a revelation that told me to go to the minister and have him pray, laying hands on me as proxy for Phillip. Initially I was reluctant. I doubted a Uniting Church Minister would do this. But the revelation kept repeating. I found myself ringing Rev. Malcolm Hay at 7.30 on the Friday morning, the day of the surgery. He said "Come right over now. I have high school RE soon". I lay back in a reclining chair and Malcolm did what I had asked for several minutes.

The thing that touches me most about this story is that at about 4.00pm my mother rang to tell me that the operation was regarded a success. Upon hearing this good news, I rang Malcolm who said *“Thanks for letting me know. Pat (his wife) and I can stop praying now; we have been praying continuously ever since we got back from R.E.”*

Remember, I sat in the back pew and only attended the evening service. He did not even know who I was until that day.

Richard Hackett-Jones

A LECTURE ON LOVE

I am grateful to the reader/contributor who forwarded this gem to me – no suggestion attached, but I assumed it was meant for sharing. So, here it is for all those who have not seen it before.

A group of professional people posed this question to a group of 4 to 8 year-olds:

‘WHAT DOES LOVE MEAN?’

The answers were broader, deeper, and more profound than anyone could have ever imagined! [The Editor]

- * 'When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So, my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.' ... (Rebecca - age 8)
- * 'When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.' ... (Billy - age 4)
- * 'Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.' ... (Karl - age 5)
- * 'Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.' ... (Chrissy - age 6)
- * 'Love is what makes you smile when you're tired.' ... (Terri - age 4)
- * 'Love is when my mummy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.' ... Danny - age 8
- * Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and just listen.' ... Bobby - age 7
- * If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate. ' ... Nikka - age 6
- * 'Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.' ... Noelle - age 7
- * 'Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.' ... Tommy - age 6
- * 'During my piano recital, I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that, and I wasn't scared anymore.' ... Cindy - age 8
- * 'My mummy loves me more than anybody. You don't see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night.' ... Clare - age 6

- * Love is when mummy gives daddy the best piece of chicken.' ... Elaine-age 5
- * 'Love is when mummy sees daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford.' ... Chris - age 7
- * Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.' ... Mary Ann - age 4
- * 'I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes, and has to go out and buy new ones.' ... Lauren - age 4
- * 'When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.' ... Karen - age 7
- * 'You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.' ... Jessica - age 8
- * And the final one:
It comes from a four year old child whose next door neighbour was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Seeing the man crying, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and sat there.
When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbour, the little boy said, 'Nothing; I just helped him cry.'

A MEDIA VIEW

[An Easter Message found on the ABC website]

Most of us are not prepared

It makes sense that, when we imagine a pandemic, we opt for the most dramatic scenario. On the page or on screen, it's just more thrilling.

But the pandemic we're living is a different beast: it's fatal but nowhere near universally. It's wreaking havoc but it's not civilisation-ending. It leaves room for haggling over which government did it better, and for think pieces of various stripes (sorry), and for truly excellent memes. We have not rehearsed this.

Real life hasn't given us many decent templates either.

For those of us who didn't live through World War II — probably the last time our culture imploded in more than a localised way — it's been easy till now to assume that things will go on more or less as they usually do.

But here we are in this limbo, somewhere between civilisational collapse and "she'll be right".

What stories do we have to orient us? What trajectories does our situation map onto?

But there is a story most of us know

Well, how about Easter Saturday?

The non-public-holiday between Good Friday (the crucifixion) and Easter Sunday (the resurrection) doesn't get much attention — even the Gospel accounts of Jesus kind of skip over it.

On the Friday, the would-be Messiah is brutally killed, and hurriedly laid in a tomb. Because the next day is the Jewish Sabbath, nobody's allowed to do anything — including giving him a proper burial (sound familiar?).

There's a pause. Jesus' followers are scattered, in shock, in hiding. This isn't how this was meant to go! Is everything they've been working for, anticipating, a bust? What happens now?

On Sunday morning, released from the Sabbath lockdown, a few women who loved Jesus go to his tomb to anoint his body.

And, according to the stories, the absolutely unprecedented has come to pass. He is not here; he is risen! Death itself, that hideous mocker, has been defeated right there in the body of the God-man.

It is the classic shock twist; the sudden and beyond-joyous reversal of fortune that Tolkien called "eucatastrophe", *good* catastrophe.

And it offers an alternative approach

The good news of Easter is that our trajectory, personal and collective, is neither a plunge off a cliff (Station Eleven) nor a steady plateau ("she'll be right").

The promise is that in spite of everything, the end of the arc is secure: death doesn't win; relief and glory, and life eternal, lie ahead for all who want it.

Julian of Norwich, the 14th-century mystic who walled herself up in a cell for perhaps 60 years, wrote that "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well".

From someone who lived through the Black Death (possibly losing her family to it) and severe illness herself, it's not a glib platitude.

I suspect this champion social distancer knew something we don't, not the other way round.

But can this message help us now?

Nobody knows how long this current crisis will last, or how bad it will get. But imagine how good it will be to wrap your grandkids in a bear hug again; to meet friends over a pint and a share platter (a share platter! golly!); to cheer in a stadium full of passionate fans just like you. The release of the first Easter was like that, only magnified immeasurably.

Right now feels like an Easter Saturday. We are shell-shocked, unmoored. Everything's up in the air. It feels like it's forever

But the person who believes in Easter believes that no matter what comes at us, we're always post-Sunday. That grief and fear don't get the last word.

That the moral arc of the universe is long, but it was set long ago, and it's heading towards good.

That the resurrection of Jesus was a more dramatic historical event than the largest-scale disaster, because it reveals and guarantees that arc. All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

Happy Easter,

Natasha Moore

A research fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity

FUNNIES – Just a Little Light Relief

Home schooling question:
Does having your child fix
you mixed drinks count as
chemistry?
Asking for a friend.

Why are the
annoying
servants staying
in my home all
day now?

My mom always told me I wouldn't
accomplish anything by laying in
bed all day But look at me now, I'm
saving the world.



THE LESS YOU WANT,
THE MORE YOU LOVE.



Joe Smith started the day early having set his alarm clock (MADE IN JAPAN) for 6am . While his coffeepot (MADE IN CHINA) was perking, he shaved with his electric razor (MADE IN HONG KONG). He put on a dress shirt (MADE IN SRI LANKA), designer jeans (MADE IN SINGAPORE) and tennis shoes (MADE IN KOREA). After cooking his breakfast in his new electric skillet (MADE IN INDIA) he sat down with his calculator (MADE IN MEXICO) to see how much he could spend today. After setting his watch (MADE IN TAIWAN) to the radio (MADE IN INDIA) he got in his car (MADE IN GERMANY) filled it with Petrol from Saudi Arabia and continued his search for a good paying Australian JOB At the end of yet another discouraging and fruitless day checking his Computer (Made In Malaysia), Joe decide to relax for a while.. He put on his sandals (MADE IN BRAZIL) poured himself a glass of wine (MADE IN FRANCE) and turned on his TV (MADE IN INDONESIA), and then wondered why he can't find a good paying job in ... Australia.....

"Today was a Difficult Day," said Pooh.
There was a pause.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Piglet.

"No," said Pooh after a bit. "No, I don't think I do."

"That's okay," said Piglet, and he came and sat beside his friend.

"What are you doing?" asked Pooh.

"Nothing, really," said Piglet. "Only, I know what Difficult Days are like. I quite often don't feel like talking about it on my Difficult Days either.

"But goodness," continued Piglet, "Difficult Days are so much easier when you know you've got someone there for you. And I'll always be here for you, Pooh."

And as Pooh sat there, working through in his head his Difficult Day, while the solid, reliable Piglet sat next to him quietly, swinging his little legs...he thought that his best friend had never been more right."

A.A. Milne

