



THE new vine

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Blackall Range Uniting Churches

(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)

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SUMMER EDITION: 'HOPE', Issue No 19, December 2020

EDITORIAL COMMENT



When it was suggested this edition should concentrate on hope, to fit in with all the rest of what the church was doing, my head went into overdrive because my understanding of hope was multi-faceted. It means different things to different people. There are many different types of hope; different expressions of what it is, there is particularly Christian hope, and so on. I had definitional issues running everywhere.

So, my call for articles was simply something like this – “Could you please do an article on hope?”

In true, heroic fashion, I then left it to everyone else to work out. Brave stuff, and what you will read covers the answers to my request. I am greatly impressed by the variety and validity.

However, during preparation of the journal, I came to realise that we can see hope in many different situations – that is quite normal as the hope is obvious and palpable – and many stories reflect this. But, because I was immersed in thinking about hope, I found it presented itself to me in unexpected ways. I saw reflections of hope in many things where I would not normally expect to find it. By being more conscious of hope, I could see it everywhere and that was a very pleasing place to be. There are things in the journal that reflect this too.

An example. Had I not been concerned about hope, I am sure I would have missed this message in an email I received from The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Melbourne. With such messages I usually don't look at the visuals but go straight to the message it carries. But this one had this image which grabbed my attention.



This is a mural on the wall in the foyer of their headquarters building – The Home of Hope – in Melbourne. It depicts birds, plants and produce from the home countries of the people the

centre supports and is meant to provide a beacon of hope and welcome to those who seek assistance.

It gave me a new understanding of what hope may be and how it can be transmitted.

My conclusion was that if we live with hope and expectation, we will become hopeful people and we will experience hope in just about everything. I'd like to leave that for you to think about.

In addition, there is very little, if anything, about Christmas in this issue. BUT, Christmas is all about HOPE, isn't it.

May you all experience a blessed, restorative and hope filled Christmas.

Graham



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LIENA'S LINES

"Ebenezer – thus far the Lord has helped us!" (1 Samuel 7 vs 12)

This was the text at the occasion of our centenary celebration on Pennyfather, our farm in Zimbabwe. It comes from 1 Samuel 7, a chapter which is about God delivering the Israelites from the Philistines at Mizpah and Samuel placing a rock as a commemoration naming it "Ebenezer". Ebenezer literally means "Stone of help".

With the occasion of our commemorating 100 years on the farm we retrieved a beautiful huge rock from the Munyati river which ran along our boundary and we placed it in our garden, and fixed on it a brass plaque with the words: Ebenezer - thus far the Lord has helped us!.

Little did we know that in less than eight years we would no longer be in occupation or possession of the farm and that our lives and our livelihoods would be dramatically changed. This however did not mean that the Lord was no longer with us or was no longer helping us. On the contrary in our changed circumstances God's faithfulness and help was more evident. And indeed, continues to be.

Also, little did we know in November 2019 that 2020 would involve us in a global life changing year due to the impact of covid-19. And on a more personal level, some of us experienced life changing illness or surgery, or the loss of a loved one. Yet, now, at the end of 2020 we can look back on this extraordinary year and say: Ebenezer - thus far the Lord has helped us!

And as we enter 2021 we can hold wanted the words of Isaac Watts: *“O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.”*

At the end of November 2020, we like in November 2019, do not know what the coming year may bring. We cannot foretell what may happen in our own personal lives. We cannot surmise what lies ahead for the community and the state. Neither do we know what events may occur nationally or internationally.

However that does not mean that we enter 2021 with uncertainty or even fear. On the contrary we enter with boldness and confidence because we believe and know that God, our help in ages past, is also our hope in years to come.

Indeed, we know *“that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for”* (Hebrews 11:1). The reading of the testimonies of the ancients in Hebrews 11 gives us inspiration and assurance at the eve of each new calendar year. And I invite you to reflect back on your own family histories and how your ancestors journeyed. Recognise and commemorate God’s faithful help through the past years: Ebenezer – thus far the Lord has helped us!

We need not know what lies ahead.

Ebenezer: Thus far the Lord has helped us! These words are as true for us today as they were for Samuel. And they will certainly still be true at the end of 2020, 2021 and for years to come.

Shalom Liena



A HAPPY COINCIDENCE?

The time had come. I simply had to sit at my computer and start seriously preparing the Summer edition of the *New Vine*. I could procrastinate no longer. So off I went, and as I sat down, I checked the computer’s calendar for the day. Oooh!

I found I had registered to participate in an annual conference in Melbourne that I have attended for some years. This year, given the Covid restrictions, it was to be done on-line, and because of daylight saving, it was due to start 10 minutes ago. What to do?

I chose to prove to myself that I could, in fact, be part of the digital age, so I logged in to the conference [my first webinar] and thought I would have time later in the day to work on the *New Vine*. Then I discovered, and I had not noticed this before, the conference theme was - Connection, Creativity, Community: Finding Hope in a Climate of Crisis. Coincidence? Who knows, but somehow I felt justified.



The conference starts with a welcome to country [which I had missed] and then has a musical introduction and I got there just as this started.

The musician this year was Katie Noonan who sang, I think from her home, on the Sunshine Coast which gave a nice localised feeling. She talked for a while explaining her choice of song – “A Song of Hope” – which was her adaption of a poem by Queensland Aboriginal poet Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Noonucca]. So, I looked up the words of the poem that inspired the song, while still engaged in listening to the conference addresses.

Here they are:

A SONG OF HOPE

by Oodgeroo Noonuccal

From book: *My People: A Kath Walker Collection*

*Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking,
The world is waking
To a new bright day,
When none defame us,
No restriction tame us,
Nor colour shame us,
Nor sneer dismay.*

*Now brood no more
On the years behind you,
The hope assigned you
Shall the past replace,
When a juster justice
Grown wise and stronger
Points the bone no longer
At a darker race.*

*So long we waited
Bound and frustrated,
Till hate be hated
And caste deposed;
Now light shall guide us,
No goal denied us,
And all doors open
That long were closed.*

*See plain the promise,
Dark freedom-lover!
Night's nearly over,
And though long the climb,
New rights will greet us,
New mateship meet us,
And joy complete us
In our new Dream Time.*

*To our fathers' fathers
The pain, the sorrow;
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow.*

Can you feel the sense of hope that runs through this poem? I did. So, I thought I'd share it some 60 years after it was written. That hope still exists today.

I felt encountering this poem was a bonus – to find it while distracted from the real work of preparing the journal. I don't really believe in coincidence, but there are times...

And, amazingly, it showed that I could do two things at once – listen and search. And me, a mere male!



MUSIC CAN BE A CHALLENGE

Sometimes, for some of us, the greatest challenge in preparing a worship service is the selection of the hymns/songs to fit the theme. Sometimes you are lucky, and they just jump out at you. They present themselves without any fuss. At other times, it becomes very hard work – working your way through all the hymn books you have; doing a computer search; testing your memory and talking to those around you; and even resorting to prayer.

I can hear some of you saying – REALLY?

Yes, really.

For those of us who aren't really convinced, can I suggest we try an exercise.

Imagine you are to prepare a service where the theme is HOPE. You decide you will need four, or perhaps five, hymns/songs which will fit the theme and structure of the service something like this:



- 1 An opening hymn/song of praise emphasising hope
- 2 A focus on the scripture reading about hope [choose your own]
- 3 A song/hymn that reflects the message about hope
- 4 A follow up to the prayers for others to bring hope
- 5 A hymn/song of hope that send us out into the world in God's company

In fact, let's not be so specific if we don't want to, as we haven't been given scripture readings and we haven't prepared a message, so just look for hymns/songs that reflect hope in some way. That makes it a tad easier.

Having worked them out, along with the appropriate tunes, just write them down.

Then, please send them to me and we'll publish them [anonymously if you wish] in the next edition and let's see the similarities and differences. There could be some surprises.

Music can be a challenge.

Graham

Note: She who puts this journal together couldn't resist inserting her contribution here:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus' name
On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand*

Edward Mote, Nicky Chiswell

Verse 1, CCLI Song No 2585446, Used with permission CCLI Licence No 150722



HOPE WITHIN A CONGREGATION

Hope has many faces, so I asked a few people around the church more generally to tell the rest of us a story of hope that had occurred in their lives. Here are the responses:

Hope

What happens when you have been hoping that your footy team wins the grand final and your hope is shattered by a goal in the last minute? Well, the standard response is, "There's always next year."

What happens when the political party you voted for loses the election? Do you just project your hope out to the next election in four years' time?

What happens to your hope in God when you have been praying earnestly for a positive outcome from a friend's cancer treatment and they don't go into remission, but die instead? Do we simply project our hope out until

Eternity?

Do we simply tell ourselves that it is the next life that is important, not this one?

This year has been tough for many people in so many ways. Promises of a vaccine for Covid-19 have not yet materialised. Hopes for a speedy recovery fade as we accept that we must learn to live with the risks associated with Covid-19 for quite some time. The public language has shifted from "Hope" to "Resilience". Is there no hope? Must we simply hold on stoically trying to do the best we can? Is hope only to be found in the development of an effective vaccine?

Throughout the scriptures we are told that we can "hope in God". Does that simply mean praying earnestly; pleading with God to fix up our situation; to do what we want? If that's the case, then teaching about prayer is teaching techniques that will get God to conform to our will.

Is God so unaware of our needs we have to shout until we get God's attention and convince him to do what we want?

I am convinced that God is faithful and loves all his people with an infinite love. This is the source of my hope and I am prepared to live my life grounded in Jesus Christ, trusting that, whatever happens. God's grace is sufficient for me. For me, prayer then is taking the time to listen to what God is asking of me, sharing my concerns and fears and hopes with God, then resolving to move forward confidently trusting that all will be well.

Unfortunately, the events around me, the mistakes I make, my feelings of insecurity mean that my attention is often taken off Christ and I begin to believe all the voices that tell me that things are getting worse, that the darkness is winning and that there is no hope.

"Hope commits us to actions that connect with God's promises. What we call hoping is often only wishing. We want things we think are impossible, but we have better sense than to spend any money or commit our lives to them. Biblical hope, though, is an act—like buying a field in Anathoth. Hope acts on the conviction that God will complete the work that he has begun even when the appearances, especially when the appearances, oppose it."

— Eugene H. Peterson, [Run with the Horses: The Quest for Life at Its Best](#)

Bruce Johnson

Hope – A Chaplain's Perspective

As a Chaplain I am very passionate about people and children - in particular, the need to bring hope and perspective into the lives of the children I minister to.

I see an overall 'hopelessness' in our culture and a lack of purpose. So, for the last few years I have been running a program in 3 schools called SHINE. It is a program for girls that teaches them they have worth, strength and ultimately purpose for their lives – 3 key areas that create HOPE.

Every time I do this program, I am amazed at the unspoken sense of worthlessness that each girl struggles with. I see, time and again, that if a child's sense of worth is destroyed at a young age, then their sense of identity is built upon a very unstable and fractured foundation. The SHINE program exposes and reveals God's heart for humanity and God's desire to bring a hope and a future for ALL of his children.

As the girls start to believe in their own sense of worth and purpose; as they start to believe that they are on this planet for a reason; and they realise they each have a distinct and significant part to play in the world around them – it is then that I see HOPE begin to take root and grow within them. What a beautiful thing it is to witness a light 'switch on' in the eyes of a young person as they begin to believe in their own value and significance.

Just like the planting of a seed, hope is the belief that although I may not see results just yet, I wait and believe that over time, with care and attention, something marvellous is taking place. Something IS happening in the dark space, in the 'dirtiness' of the soil of life, there is change happening and greatness is growing. And just at the right time, that new life will come through the ground and demonstrate that our investments in the things that truly matter will come to fruition.



Hope keeps nurturing, caring and investing. Hope keeps doing the next right thing. Hope persists and never gives up. Hope believes in something bigger than just ourselves.

Be that person who brings hope into dark places.

Becky Francis, Chaplain to Maleny and Conondale primary schools



Band of Hope

When I was a small child, I used to go to a children's group called the Band of Hope. We played games, sang songs like *Dare to be a Daniel*, *Dare to stand alone*, heard about the damage caused by alcohol and signed a pledge to abstain from alcoholic beverages. The organization no longer exists. I read now that it was founded in Leeds, England, in 1847 and that it flourished in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries in England and in other countries such as Australia.

It seems quaint now and strangely old-fashioned, but it sought to give hope for a better future both for individuals and for the community. Unable to withstand the commercially driven changes in community attitudes, it, together with the rest of the Temperance Movement, has either morphed into a general movement against drugs and alcohol or gone out of existence all together.

Does that mean its hope was ill-founded? I don't think so. No organization can exist without hope. Even if it does not reach its objective, it gives its members something to work for. It lifts their sights. It points the way ahead for others to follow. The old Band of Hope may no longer exist, but alcohol's contribution to disease, crime, domestic violence, lowering of moral standards and road trauma is still very much something to be tackled. Neither the Church nor the community can ignore this.

The Church has its own Christ-centred message of hope for the world. The fact that the Church in countries like Australia has suffered savage loss in membership, standing and influence over the last half-century does not mean that this message is irrelevant or not desperately needed. It might mean finding different ways of delivering the message, but its hope is not merely of human origin. We must let our Spirit-induced hopefulness, eager anticipation of God's saving and transforming activity, be known for, surely, this hope in Christ is the only antidote to the prevailing despair and emptiness all around.

Ron Potter



Deep and Abiding Friendship Brings Hope

Advent is a season that celebrates hope! People rehearse the 'looking forward with hope' that is the very foundation of the faith we profess. It is hope that gives rise to faith.

As the new season begins, our sister church, the Church of North India [CNI], celebrates 50 years of Unity, Witness and Service. The Uniting Church in Australia has strong relationships with the CNI. This is readily visible in the Dostana relationship between the Diocese of Amritsar and our Queensland Synod. (Dostana means deep and abiding friendship - friendship that goes the second mile.)

UnitingWorld actively supports education and child safety projects in the Diocese.

We share exchange visits and learn from one another, be it in designs for school buildings, environmental revegetation projects, ecumenical Peace Walks, or finding new ways to think about mission.

The friendships we share at the personal level during these visits provide much by way of encouragement and hope.



Hope expresses itself in the discovery of new ways of seeing. Hope is a girl finding a loving home and a chance of an education. Hope springs from the deep love shared as we walk, worship, witness and serve together.

May your Advent be a celebration of hope and a time of gratitude for friends in unlikely places who enrich our lives.

Paul S G Moore



Hope

In March this year, when the whole world found itself under the threat of COVID 19 with the possibilities of sickness and death on a large scale, I found myself looking for some sign of hope in a world that I had not experienced. Where was God in the face of a sickness that was out of control and for which the medical world had no immediate cure? Experiences in life so far had taught me that the God was a God who gave people hope in the most difficult and trying situations. Now I knew this, but in this new situation I looked for a sign that would give me hope as we journeyed on.

Twice a day Bernadette and I take our dog for a walk along the road that we live on. It is a narrow bitumen road that leads to the treatment works for the Baroon Pocket Dam. The road has a volume of traffic associated with the treatment works and people who live on the road. This includes at least one semitrailer most days. During daylight hours on work days, it can be a busy little road.

In mid March, as we were on our morning walk, I saw a small, 3 cm high eucalypt tree growing in a crack in the bitumen about 5 cms from the edge of the bitumen. Here was a sign of life in a most difficult place. Here was my sign of HOPE. Most days, as we continued on our walks, I would check on the little tree. It continued to survive. It continued to grow. It continued to remind me that God is a God that gives life and hope in every circumstance of life.



Bernadette and I went away for 2 months in August and September. On our return I had difficulty finding my little tree of hope. When I found it, I noted that the main stem had been broken off, but new shoots were growing. It was not as easy to see but it was still there and growing. When I meet neighbours as we are walking along, if it is near where this little tree survives against all odds, I ask them if they have seen the sign of hope on our road? I then take them and show them the little eucalyptus tree growing up out of the bitumen.

The other day we were having a coffee in Nambour and I was listening to the conversation of the group of people on the table next to us. They talked about church and Sunday School. I wanted to join in the conversation. At some point they moved to talk about names of children and one lady said that the two names she liked most were HOPE and JOY. The thought that came to mind was that where there is joy there is hope.

Signs of hope are all around us. At this time of the year, we are reminded of a baby born in a manger over 2000 years ago who was a sign of hope for the whole world. Our reading from Ephesians 1 this morning reminds us that we need to know and live in the hope to which Jesus has called us.

George Woodward

HOPE

Hope Eternal

"Thank you, Malcolm, for our brightly lit "Hope" display on the roof of our church. Driving by at night its welcome message stands out for all to see – and perhaps ponder.

Have you noticed however that the word "Hope" has become the byword for almost every charity these days.

When I joined the Board of Scripture Union in the mid 80's, SU's tag was (and still is) "Bringing hope to a young generation". Use of the word "Hope" was unique at that time but now almost every appeal that arrives in my mailbox features the word "Hope" in big bold letters.

The problem is that hope can mean distinctly different things to different people and the challenge for the Christian Church is to proclaim and witness to a hope which is not just a wish or even a heart's desire, but a hope which is certain and an assurance about which there is no doubt.

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, his life was almost over. Imprisoned in a cold Roman dungeon by Nero, chained like a common criminal, without friends who were having great trouble in finding him, he wrote these words in Chapter 4 verses 7-8. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day – and not only me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing."

Such confidence, such assurance, such certainty. Not the shadow of doubt.

Presumptuous? Not at all. Paul was simply resting on the promises of Jesus as recorded for us in the Gospels. And I am so thankful for those promises for it is not just the desire of my heart that Annette is with her Saviour in heaven – I KNOW that is where she is and that in God's perfect timing, I will join her there for eternity. What joy, what peace. How I long for others to have that peace and joy.

In Verses 3 & 4 of 2 Timothy 4, just before the verses I have quoted above, Paul also says "For a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." Sobering words indeed as we see that prophecy fulfilled in our time.

As our message of Hope goes out to virtually every resident of Maleny over the next month, let us take this wonderful opportunity to share our faith as given to us in God's word, reminded by Hebrews 11 verse 1 "Faith is being sure of what we hope for".



Yes, we do hope that across the world COVID will abate, we do hope a vaccine with no side effects will be available very soon, but as Christians we can say with confidence "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us (me) from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus" Romans 8 v 38.

Covered in prayer, we need to be bold in sharing our faith, our assurance, our certain hope, with a world longing for an anchor to hold on to in this troubled and increasingly uncertain world. Let us ask God for many opportunities, many divine appointments over the next month to bring to life the message that shines from our Church every day – the assurance of Jesus love and of salvation for all who accept Him as their Lord and Saviour.

May God bless you each one, Bob Grice

Change and Growth

When I started primary school, I recall being told in the schoolyard by some of my fellow students that only Catholics would be saved from eternal punishment – Protestants like my family were doomed. The targets of “othering” have changed since then, becoming more directed at race, religions other than Christianity, or people who are different from the mainstream. Why do we find it so hard to see our common humanity, and to treat each other with kindness?

A few years ago, Barack Obama helped to popularize Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quote, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” The statement originated from the 19th century, and Dr. King gave us this version in the 20th century. There is good reason for impatience that our progress towards inclusiveness, social and environmental justice is so slow.

So, what are my reasons for hope that we can accelerate the move towards justice:

- We have the teaching of Jesus to guide us.
- We have easier access to all forms of knowledge than ever before.
- Australia has the strength that comes from a multicultural society, and is home to the oldest continuing culture.
- As humans, we have the ability to learn throughout our lives, particularly when we listen carefully and respectfully to people of different cultures and world views.
- We have already taken a few steps towards truth telling – surely the time has come to continue that process with a greater sense of urgency.

A few years ago, the Dempsters introduced us to a lovely hymn that begins “Here in this place new light is streaming” (TIS 474). It expresses so well the opportunity we all have to learn throughout our lives, and to keep hope alive as we grow in our faith.

Daryl Reinke



For those who do not know this hymn, it follows:

*Here in this place, new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away.
See, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in - the lost and forsaken,
gather us in - the blind and the lame.
Call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.*

*We are the young - our lives are a mystery,
we are the old - who yearn for your face.
We have been sung throughout all of history,
called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in - the rich and the haughty,
gather us in - the proud and the strong.
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.*

*Here we will take the wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth.
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters,
call us anew to be salt for the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you.
Nourish us well, and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.*

*Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven, light years away,
but here in this place, the new light is shining;
now is the Kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in - and hold us forever,
gather us in - and make us your own.
Gather us in - all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.*

Marty Haugen

Tune: Gather us in, Used with permission CCLI Licence No 150722



A Prayer of Hope

I have some knowledge of God.
I have some experience of God.

Despite this, I continue to sin ... harsh judgment of others, hurtfulness, selfishness, periods when God seems so far away, material things I have turned into idols.

Yet, God persists with me. He assures me, He makes a success of my endeavours and He guides me back to His abiding love.

All my knowledge and experiences, my sin and shame are reconciled in a very unexpected way – a baby!

A baby, born in the humblest of conditions, into a working class family, under the threat of death.

A child, learning his trade, learning at the temple, daily ... a child blessed by God with growing knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

An adult, experiencing a life that I've experienced, understanding my temptations, understanding my daily journey.

Then, the God/man, ministering to 1000's, performing miracles, teaching and preaching, being in the world but not of it, rejection, death and resurrection.

For here is the hope found in the manger ... that God experienced the life I live and provides the way for me, in my sinfulness, to be united with Him through Christ Jesus, the risen Lord.



Peter Callaghan

A Journey of Hope in 2020, Thus Far

Little did we think back at the 2019 Christmas Tree Festival debrief meeting that the theme of HOPE, chosen for this year, would be so relevant. No, there is not a Tree Festival this year as we have known it, but there is already evidence that hope will be shared by other means.

When the decision was made to light up the outside of the Maleny UC, it was agreed we didn't want to add to the proliferation of Santas and Rudolfs. Instead, Liena wanted to express something of the true Christmas message.

Having already focused on the hope theme, there was a progression from a wordy illuminated sign to a brief, pithy slogan HOPE 4U. We have Micah Jones to thank for suggesting we add the # which he tells us grabs the attention of tech. savvy youngsters.



Malcolm, who by then was undergoing tests which would lead to open heart surgery in mid-October, rose to the challenge of cutting out letters, attaching strings of lights and constructing the metal frame. He thankfully was not unwell at the time and completed the task sooner, rather than later. The sign was later fixed in position by a team of conscripts.

The sign was the first thing he noticed as we drove into Maleny on discharge day, 2nd November.

At this time, we accepted the sign was yet another confirmation that our personal hope for Malcolm's good recovery, which we had felt all along, was a reality.

Good medical practitioners who are gifted communicators, as well as skilled in their specialities, are much appreciated. From the first consultation with a cardiologist, we sensed that Malcolm would be in the right place (SCUPH), at the right time (for planned surgery and not in an emergency situation), with the best support possible and that was not just from the skilled staff, but the prayer support from near and far which was truly a blessing.

Another thing which we are grateful for is safety on the roads. Many readers know the potentially stressful road conditions between Maleny and SCUPH and that the commute is not actually a fun drive. Prayers for safe driving are a calming, and recommended, start to any journey.

SHALOM, Malcolm and Nancy Baker

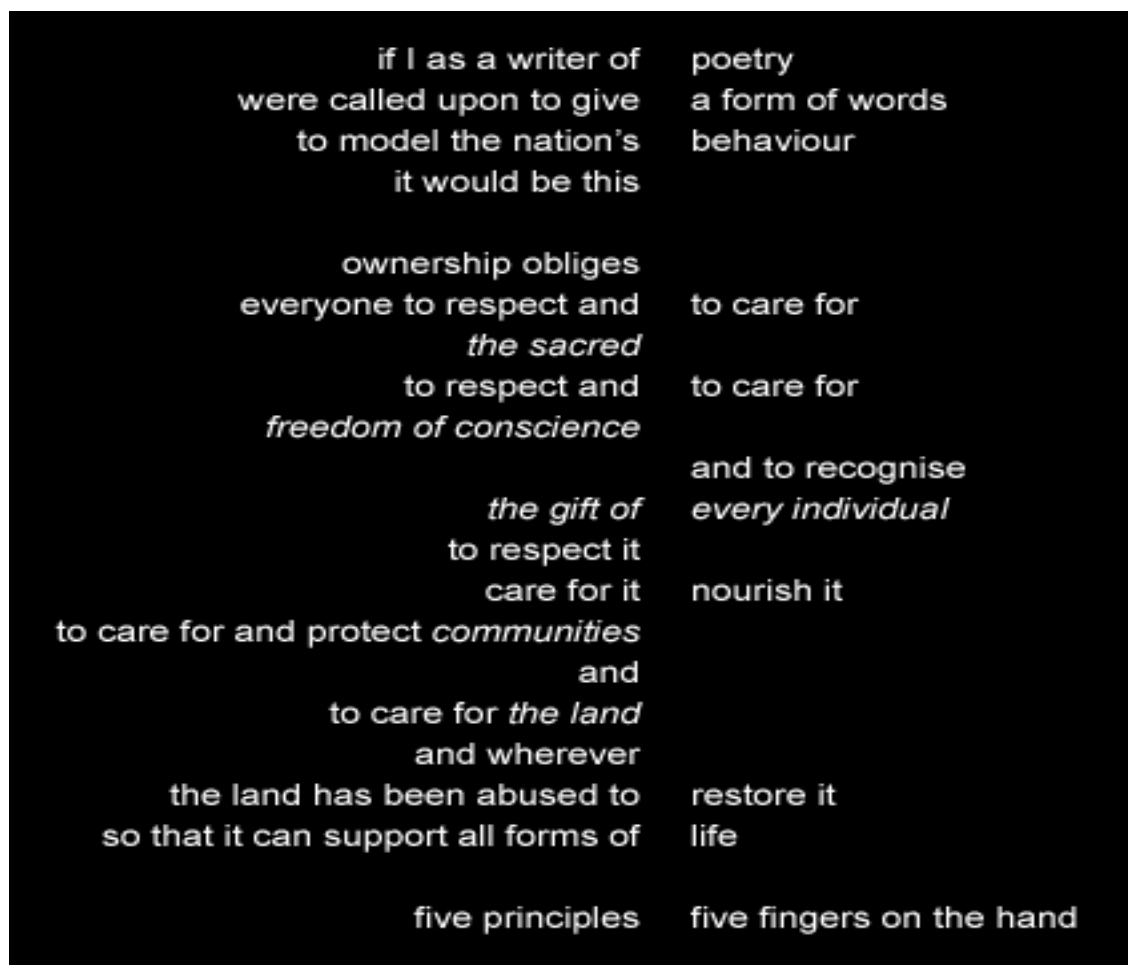
HOPE IN OTHER SETTINGS

A couple of years ago I accepted an invitation to take the Remembrance Day service at Skerray – a remote, small crofting hamlet and fishing port on the north coast of Scotland. It was also home to a community of artists and tree planters. In 1926 it had 500 residents, but now has just over 80.

The local cenotaph was in the church grounds, but the church had long since fallen into disrepair with windows gone, galvanised iron outer walls rusting away - not a happy place at all.

The usual practice was to have a short service at the cenotaph and then file into the church to finish it all. This was not possible so, at the conclusion of the remembrance element, most of us went to the community hall to continue. We did lose some along the way.

What I found in this tiny remote hall surprised me no end. In one corner, there was a poem painted on the walls. It started on one wall and finished on the other wall. After the service, I stood and read this poem, took a photo and sent it to my family. I was greatly affected by it in a number of ways – in the middle of nowhere, a poet had licence to write on the walls of a community hall! That was surprising enough, but what he wrote really challenged me.



I just had to follow it up to see if I could find what it was all about.

It turned out that the poet was Angus Reid and the poem – *Call for a Constitution* - was his attempt to influence the writing of the Scottish Constitution with the creation of the Scottish Parliament around 2012. He set out the five values he believes a country should have, and it was put into places all over Scotland to create discussion. It was only used if building owners

agreed to have wall space where those who agreed with the principles could leave a painted/drawn hand-print on the wall to show support. It also went into the parliament building as part of the discussion there.

Angus Reid had expressed his hope for Scotland, and it was still talking to people years later.

However, it also inspired, in me, a hope our nation might live by those same values. I had hoped that we, as a nation, might aspire to them post Covid – but I very much doubt that will happen.

But just imagine living in a country where there was

- Respect and care for the sacred
- Respect and care for freedom of conscience
- Respect and care, and nourishment for every individual
- Care and protection for communities
- Care and restoration for the land

We can but hope!



In Skerry hall



In the High Street



REFLECTION IN THE GARDEN

What's it all about?

At Palmwoods we have been looking at ways to create more of a bridge between the church and our community. Most of our church is involved with the Community Garden. Some of our members even came to church as a result of connection through the garden. But we wanted to find opportunities to connect at a deeper level with those we have got closer to in the community and meeting at the garden for a time of reflection seemed to be an appropriate way to try to achieve this.

When the COVID restrictions were introduced the impetus to do this became more immediate as meeting outside was a safer option. So, we introduced having 2 Sundays a month where, instead of having a traditional morning service, we have a gathering at the garden in the afternoon.



We have a circular indigenous mat to help define our space and maintain distancing while providing somewhere for children to gather and be cared for collectively. After acknowledging our traditional custodians of the land, or, having a 'Welcome to Country' by one of our indigenous folk, we stress the need for creating a 'safe space' where all can express their views but in a caring, inclusive and respectful way.



Nature, being God's creation, provides a focus and many symbols for us to use to contemplate the divine aspect of life. It helps us to feel gratitude, to find peace, to contemplate on life, to be mindful, to seek healing, to seek renewal in life. It is an added bonus having on hand tactile symbols such as an olive branch, a new leaf, a rock or a sprig of rosemary to illustrate the concepts shared. All these themes gently relate to our Christian beliefs but also resonate with people who don't have a traditional or institutionalised church background. We bring the teaching of Jesus into the time together but also use broad language in expressing these concepts so that people can feel comfortable yet hopefully challenged in this setting.

It has been a bonus to have some musicians come and play guitar and sing their original songs which have fitted in beautifully with our themes each time. They were married at the church last year.

We have already had new people attending who aren't from our worship services.

We hope that God will use this time to bring the love of Jesus to our broader community beyond the walls of the church building.

Kay Nixon

REST; RESTORE; RE-CREATE

Heather and I have found that we need space from time to time to re-focus on the call of Christ and listen to the voice of the Spirit. We have learnt to walk humbly and hopefully with Christ, trusting that, because he has our welfare in his hands, we can let go of our anxieties and fears and simply offer God's hospitality; God's love and welcome to others.

We are so grateful to have found our way to this delightful spot in Witta, that we are keen to share it with others. So, we resolved when we retired to create a welcoming place so others could come and find space to listen to God and re-focus their lives.

Our Retreat Days, or Quiet Days are one way we believe we can do this. The day usually begins with an opening devotion. Then at intervals throughout the day, I offer some input and opportunity for group conversation about passages of Scripture that provide some insight on the theme we have chosen for the day. The time in between is left for personal prayer and reflection or one on one conversation.

Of course, Heather makes sure that we have delightful food to sustain us as we fellowship over lunch. (Heather hopes we have a day of fasting some time, but I'm not so keen.)

We've simply shared our invitation on Facebook and we have had people from Sydney, Bundaberg, Peregian, Brisbane and a few from Maleny. Some engage fully with the content I provide, and others spend time with God on their own agenda. Some are keen to share their insights and experiences, while others prefer to keep their thoughts and insights private.

If you are interested in trying out such an experience, give us a call. You will not be expected to do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Take time to rest in God's embrace and allow him to restore you.

Bruce and Heather Johnson (0407180864)



LIVING IN, AND WITH, HOPE TO THE END

In preparing this edition I talked with a number of people, asking what hope meant to them. I have received a host of different answers and I would like to share one in particular, directly – it came written, and was a living testimony from someone who had died – if that makes sense.

Bob Eather's mum, Dot, passed earlier this year. Her death was expected but, she persisted, and stayed a lot longer than was first envisaged. Who knows what keeps people going at times like this – when their life is winding down and they are losing control of their bodies? What passes through their minds in what most of us would define as a hopeless situation? How does their faith sustain them? Why is their life being prolonged in this way? Is it driven by something they are hoping they will see happen before they depart this life?

These questions were answered for the family when one of them discovered a little notebook that had acted as a makeshift diary for Dot towards the end of her life. She had written a message for the family who have agreed that it could be published.

However, this was but part of the final story for Bob, who had a final conversation with his mum, and has therefore been able to add some context to it. A granddaughter's life had changed

remarkably, and she has turned to God in a real way. When told of this, Dot responded "Ah. My prayers for her have been answered" and she died soon after. Bob came to the realisation that this was the reason Dot had not gone earlier – God still had more for her to do.

The diary extract follows.

"Sat June 27

Suddenly I was weeping – not noisily, but silently and softly.

Why?

It must be a release of tensions built up over a lifetime of lost opportunities. Times when I have missed the chance to be a help to others and think of only myself and my needs.

Now that my body will not respond to my commands and I need so much physical help, it makes me realise we humans are "but like the grass that withers and dies" – or the flowers that grow, carefully tended by the gardener. They bloom and bring happiness and admiration to the eye of the beholder, then fade and are cast aside. With luck they may end in a compost which will help to give back some nutrient to the ground from which they came.

There are so many times we miss the chance to give help to those around us – we are too busy or we flare up in anger over some supposed hurt – there are times when we must bite back an angry retort, or a judgement of others which is unwisely spoken.

One of the sins which I fight against daily is pride.

It is often hard to resist – fear of looking stupid or being ignorant – even of having attention drawn to oneself when we would prefer to be 'invisible'.

Pride in my relatively good health has been shattered. Now I realise that thankfulness is a better attitude.

For all who care for me I give heartfelt thanks – my wonderful family, my friends whose thoughts and prayers sustain me. Also, the doctors for their skill and expertise, for the nurses for their infinite care and patience, for the health care in our country, Australia, which makes it possible for this care to be given. I admire the love and attention given to those of us who need it most.

We need to look at the beauty around us – the lovely smiles that greet us each day and the cheerful chats – I am blessed to have a window through which to view the outside world – the small street where cars park and some people stroll, at this time of year, rugged up against the wind.

So why weep?

Am I trying to "run against God's schedule"?

There aren't answers as to why – but trust and patience and belief – be supported by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the lives of those around us."

A life lived in, and with, confidence and certainty that God, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, will be faithful to his promises. A life of real hope knowing God will complete what he has begun. A life that influenced positively those around her, family and nursing staff, so they, too, were touched by the Spirit.

What more needs be said?



DOES LIGHTNING STRIKE IN THE SAME PLACE TWICE?

In the last journal we printed some short poems written by Maleny congregation members about the time of the virus. One poem was an abbreviation of a longer poem for which there was no room, so I kept it in my file for future use. I have just re-read it and it may have been because I was concentrating on hope, but I really did sense the growing of hope in this poem – so I have included it this time, thanks to Helen Uhlmann. What do you think?

REMAIN IN ME

*Remaining
Abiding
A branch of the vine
Firmly attached
Sap flowing
Sustaining life
Connected*

*Two things needed
To sit with
To stay in touch
In daily life*

*Sitting with...
So easy to schedule
To get it done
To tick it off
To achieve
Job done!*

*Not the idea
Really - is it?
Like a warm inviting home
A place to sit
Invited
Welcomed
Hospitality received
To continue the journey
Accompanied.*

*I race past the house
Like a paperboy
Lobbing my requests
Through the window
As I fly by on my bike.
Calling out a quick greeting
Without looking or seeing
The occupant.*

*Racing to where?
Anywhere really.
Just onwards...
Forwards...
Moving, always moving.*

*But to stop...
To enter...
To sit awhile.
In warm companionship
To listen
To hear
To be embraced
To be shown,
Acknowledged
Met.
Abiding
Remaining awhile.*

*Then to move on
Transformed
Filled
Complete
Ready
In ongoing companionship
Held
Guided
Shown.*

*To be
To love
To embrace*

As for the lightning, I was thinking about whether having to say no to the poem last time, meant it was really made for this time. Coincidence.....?



KIDS RIDDS

What do you call a bee that can't make up its mind?

A maybe!

What did the hat say to the hat rack?

You stay here. I'm going on ahead.

How can you make seven even?

Remove the 's'

What does a teddybear say if you offer him an extra helping of food?

No thanks, I'm stuffed!

What do you call a fake noodle?

An impasta.

What do fish take to stay healthy?

Vitamin sea!

What kind of music do geologists like best?

Rock and roll.

KARL'S KORNER, Justice?

The Uniting Church says a lot about justice - notably "social justice". But what does it actually mean by this? Is justice not like beauty - in the eye of the beholder?

We speak of the poor in many ways as though their poverty was an injustice seemingly perpetrated by others, and we have campaigns whose aim is to eradicate poverty. But is that really possible? Don't we believe Jesus when he says that we'll always have the poor (Matthew 26:11)? Well, perhaps we do but we really mean we'll try to reduce the amount of poverty by sharing our presumed wealth around a bit more.

In an earlier century this would have been covered by the adage "Cold as charity" since it places the recipient in a dependent position. Indeed, when it was suspected, on at least one occasion, that missionaries to India were using their presumed wealth as 'westerners' to make converts, said missionaries were killed out of jealousy. In any case, is it "just" to simply give people money for nothing?

We talk about the marginalised in a similar manner. We don't discuss why they are, nor what can be done to "de-marginalise" them short of again seemingly giving them money for nothing. True, many marginalised people feel they are such because we don't apparently treat them equally (however this is defined) and some are such because of their disabilities which challenge our understanding of them or their needs so that simply giving them money appears to be the only practicable solution. But what would just treatment really look like?

On a wider level, are we not simply mimicking the humanist ideas espoused by the United Nations? When I read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights I see it as an attempt to legislate Nirvana since it makes only vague reference to unspecified responsibilities being required of the individual while listing a whole log of rights. (As an aside, it is patently obvious that many member countries honour this declaration by breaching it.)

Giving money and doing good is also not without its risks in "unforeseen" consequences. The church collective has gone out to make disciples – the assigned task (Matt. 28:19, Mk 16:15) – but in compassion or to sugar the message, it has often taken modern medicine and technology without warning of the downsides of same. So, we had an explosion in the birth and survival rates which is now coming back to haunt us.

On a local level, we westerners have set up government systems to handle extreme poverty, etc. So, are there really any "poor" in Australia? And is poverty not simply the opposite of wealth and so a relative measure? In Jesus' day, the poor were struggling to keep body and soul together as were the widows and orphans. Who are the equivalents today in our community or globally, and what should we do for them without simply handing out cold – i.e. loveless – charity? (Oh, and who's paying the bill?)

Many church people pray for justice to reign but, I suggest, we ought to pray for forgiveness and leave justice to God who knows all.

As an exercise, look up four "servant" parables – Matt.25:14-30; Matt. 20:1-16; Matt. 18:21-35; and Lk. 16:1-13 – and pretend to be each of the actors and what they might consider justice to require.

Karl Tietze



HOPE IS BORN (1)

We sat together, a small group of us, discussing HOPE and our church's Advent/Christmas program. Inevitably, given its timing, the theme of the *New Vine* came up and HOPE was adopted. As quite often happens, however, someone said something that set my mind going off at somewhat of a tangent. The words were quite simple really – "HOPE IS BORN."

I grew up knowing that Jesus' birth brings hope – we are reminded every year we celebrate it. I now know there are a number of hymns and songs, and even a film with this title – so, in a way, there is nothing new to be seen here. Quite simply – "HOPE IS BORN".

I would like to suggest that we all try to find a quiet moment over the Advent/Christmas period to ponder what this means – "HOPE IS BORN".

What surprised me at the meeting was that my thoughts went immediately to the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

For many years I have carried the image with me of – the tomb as a womb. When Jesus burst forth and emerged from the tomb, there was pain, anguish, and great wonder and unknowing, but essentially, the hope of new life for us all was born.

At the meeting, I somehow saw this as reflecting Jesus actual birth and I had difficulty explaining what it all said to me. I am still having difficulty because it made the Christmas story take on a totally new dimension for some reason. The actual birthing seemed to put all the accessories like shepherds, wise men etc in the shade and it was the presentation of the child that was most important – perhaps because he was the one destined for the tomb. I am still not sure.

If, as a result of your pondering – HOPE IS BORN – you come up with something that speaks to you, or which can throw a bit of light on my ponderings, I'd be grateful to receive them.

HOPE IS BORN (2)

This article is the sequel to the one before, mainly in that it challenges us to ponder and to do something with what we come up with.

I thought this is something we can do alone, or have the family involved in when they visit.

I thought/hoped we might be encouraged to write some short poetry pieces.

Just 4 lines for each poem, each line starting with a letter from HOPE, as follows

H
O
P
E

It might go something like this:

How things changed.
Over the time of the pandemic.
People sick and in isolation.
Ever hopeful, ever faithful.

And any poems you produce can be sent to me for publication in the next edition.

Go on, surprise me!!

Please.

A [CHOCOLATE] CHRISTMAS STORY

Joseph and Mary travelled to Bethlehem along a *ROCKY ROAD*.

They became tired on the journey and needed a *BOOST*.

So, Joseph decided it was time to stop for a *PICNIC*.

When they arrived at Bethlehem the only place to stay was a stable full of *FURRY ANIMALS* where the baby Jesus was born.

That night in the field near Bethlehem, some shepherds were minding their sheep. It was so cold the grass was *CRUNCHIE*.

As they were watching their sheep, they were *KINDER SURPRISE* by some angels who told them to go to Bethlehem and see this newborn king.

Meanwhile in the east, there were three *SMARTIES* or wise men who were studying the stars of the *MILKY WAY* when they saw a huge star.

At first, they thought it must have been the planet *MARS*, but it wasn't.

They followed the star and when they arrived at Bethlehem, they entered and presented their *BOUNTY* of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

That night the three wise men had a *DREAM* in which God warned them that King Herod was up to his old *TWIX*. So, they returned home without telling him about Jesus.

You see, Christmas is more than Santa, Reindeer and *SNOW FLAKE*.

It is more than having lots and lots of food to *CHOMP* on.

We can get into so much of a *TWIRL* trying to organise Christmas that we forget what it is really about.

This Christmas we need to take some *TIMEOUT* and remember that the best thing about Christmas is JESUS [not chocolate]!



STOP PRESS



In case you can't read the text to the left, it says:

LITTLE WINGS OF HOPE

IN DARK TIMES

YOU REAPPEAR

little wings of HOPE

REMINDING ME

TO STOP AND BE

little wings of HOPE

I had almost finished the first draft when this arrived. It came to me through a family member who was sent it by someone in the community, nothing to do with our church, who had heard about our reference to HOPE this Christmas and to my preparing a journal on this theme. They thought I might be able to use it. Coincidence.....?

I thought I should put it in as it may be meant to speak to someone specifically. Or to us all even.

STOP AND BE