

# THE new vine



UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
Blackall Range Uniting Churches  
(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)  
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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

joy ... now there's something to think about.

joy ... came to me as a likely theme for this edition of our journal as I became aware it was something we were going to concentrate on as we approached Christmas - and then Peter Uhlmann preached on the topic and left us with some questions too. So, it seemed appropriate to ask everyone to reflect upon joy and to write about it.

joy ... pretty well describes how I felt when so many varied responses came in - stories, poems, a sermon, reflections, thought pieces and photos - at last, *The New Vine* is becoming OUR journal.

joy ... but how do we see joy? Peter referred to it in relation to suffering; others have compared it to happiness; one discussion I had, spoke about joy and pleasure. It seems that joy might well be something that has to be seen in juxtaposition with something else.

joy ... is something I experienced in the week this was written. I was struggling with coming up with a definition of exactly what joy is. How can it be defined? Then it struck me. I had taken a time out and visited a sea-side village for a few days. As I sat under the casuarinas lining the foreshore, overlooking a pure blue, benign Coral Sea with its regular breaking waves, a gentle breeze fanning my face, I felt at peace. This, I interpreted as JOY.

joy ... sharing this thought with some Christian friends later in the week, I was drawn to consider this thought a little further and we came up with a realisation, rather than a definition, of what joy is. It goes something like this.

joy ... occurs when we look at the finite and are inexorably drawn into the infinite. That meant that I could look at the beautiful seascape [the finite] and come to realise that this was the work of the Creator God [the infinite]. That **satisfied** my yearning to understand joy more fully, even though it was not a definition. And it was an interesting exercise to then overlay this idea over all contributions received - the finite leading us to the infinite.

WHAT joy

Peace and blessings

Graham

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## WHO'S WHO IN THE BLACKALL RANGE CHURCHES

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Palmwoods Representatives: John Daniells and Sisa Rokovaka

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 Rev Brian Richards, Rev George Woodward.

## LIENA'S LINES

### The Joy of God (Jehovah)

*"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks,  
and send some to those who have nothing prepared"  
This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve,  
for the joy of the Lord (Jehovah) is our strength."  
(Nehemiah 8 vs 10)*



JOY is a word we readily associate with the birth of the baby in Bethlehem, with the birth of Jesus Christ. JOY is a word for Christmas, because of Christmas, during Christmas. We celebrate and rejoice in the Word becoming flesh and coming to dwell amongst us.

Yet, Nehemiah 8 tells us of another JOY, an earlier JOY. A JOY still present and worthy of celebration and participation. The JOY of God. The JOY of the Word of God. It is the story of the rediscovery of the Word of God, the Torah and the presentation of it to the people in Jerusalem.

It is fascinating to read about the *public nature* of the presentation. It was brought to *all*, assembled at the Water Gate (vs 1, 3). A public space, probably close to the water source of Jerusalem. And remarkably, all assembled in *unity*, as one to hear the word of God – men, women, and others who could understand (vs 1, 2, 3, 5). And the word is explained and taught by the leaders: the politicians (Nehemiah the governor); the clerics (Ezra the priest and scribe) and the church leaders (the Levites) (vs 4, 9).

And the *invitation, the command to go and celebrate and share*:

*"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared"* (vs 10,12). A joyous celebration. A good party – for *all*: for those who have and those who do not have!

And the declaration: *"This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the JOY of the Lord (Jehovah) is our strength.* JOY is the JOY of Jehovah. It is sacred. It is divine. It is not a human emotion, depending upon our mood and our feelings (indeed we read the people were grieving). It is a gift of God from God.

Moreover, it is our *strength*. The Hebrew word means, fortress, a place of protection, of safety. The JOY of God is our stronghold. It protects us. It strengthens us. It is not a product of some state of well-being. The JOY of God is a divine gift that strengthens and protects. Upholds and encourages.

As we ponder and reflect upon JOY in the coming weeks, may we reflect on how we have privatised and personalised JOY. How we have reduced its meaning, limited its understanding. And how we have domesticated it – made it exclusive.

May we, like *all* the people, 500 years before Christmas, rediscover the JOY of God, the word of God, and may we then

*"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks,  
and send some to those who have nothing prepared"  
This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve,  
for the joy of the Lord (Jehovah) is our strength."*

Shalom Liena

## A JOYFUL MIND



In his book, *The Naked Now*, Father Richard Rohr encourages readers to approach each day with a joyful mind. He goes on to suggest we might have a joyful mind

- ... *When your mind does not need to be right.*
- ... *When you no longer need to compare yourself with others.*
- ... *When your mind can be creative, but without needing anyone to know.*
- ... *When you can live in contentment with whatever the moment offers.*
- ... *When your mind does not need to be in charge but can serve the moment with gracious and affirming information.*
- ... *When your mind follows the intelligent lead of your heart.*
- ... *When your mind is curious and interested, not suspicious and interrogating.*
- ... *When your mind does not “brood over injuries.”*
- ... *When your mind does not need the future to be better than today.*
- ... *When your mind can accept yourself as you are, warts and all.*
- ... *When your mind does not divide and always condemn one side or group.*
- ... *When your mind can critique, and also detach from critique.*
- ... *When your mind can wait, listen, and learn.*
- ... *When your mind can live satisfied without resolution or closure.*
- ... *When your mind can forgive and actually “forget.”*
- ... *When your mind doesn’t need to complain or worry to get motivated.*
- ... *When your mind can find God in all things.*

What do you think?

### John 15:10-12

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my JOY may be in you, and that your JOY may be full. ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.’”

### Psalms 16:11

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of JOY; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

### Romans 15:13

“May the God of hope fill you with all JOY and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

## JOY IN FRIENDSHIP

Kathy Galloway, a member of the Iona Community in Scotland, has written a short book called *Living the Rule*. It tells about the founding of the Iona community, as well as expanding on some of its activities and outlining how members are required to live to remain members. This includes reading the Bible intentionally, a commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and being accountable for personal money and time. This is all to be covered by the practice of daily prayer.

In the section on daily prayer, [pp 32 - 33], she tells a little of her own views on this prayer as outlined below. I thought it an interestingly different viewpoint and thought *New Vine* readers might too.

She writes:

*And though I don't quite know what I'm doing, I have discovered that it doesn't really matter. I have come to think of prayer as rather like a good friend.*

*... a good friend doesn't let you get away with murder but will speak for you in your defence*

*... a good friend asks hard questions but stays with you while you struggle with the answers*

*... a good friend sees you at your worst but still loves you*

*... a good friend has had plenty of practice in forgiving you*

*... a good friend has no illusions about you (knows you're only human) but still has hopes for you*

*... everyone needs a good friend, otherwise you'd just go on making the same dreary old mistakes*





## **A BRIGHT and BREEZY LETTER**

Hello everyone,

We are writing this letter as convenors of the Connect Groups' program at Maleny. These groups have the aim of bringing people together to get to know each other better and to follow whatever 'Christian growth' activities they each come up with.

Recently one group came up with the idea of a program they felt was worth sharing with everyone in all three congregations. That was '*BRIGHT and BREEZY*.' We agreed to help spread the word.

So, what is it all about?

The group found that some people had mentioned that the *New Vine Anthology* was fairly sombre reading, and there seemed to be a sadness running through it. Others were concerned about the heaviness that COVID had imposed on individuals, families, and the wider community, including congregations. The questions were – "How do we break this cycle? How do we lighten things up a little?" '*BRIGHT and BREEZY*' is the answer they came up with.

Simply put, it aimed, throughout November, and November only, to have members conduct activities for other members that are beyond the normal purview of the congregation; something away from the worship centre. It was mentioned that using our homes might be a good way of going.

Suggested activities could be walking through a garden, having a singalong round the piano, a discussion on worm farms, bees, macadamia growing, hobbies [e.g. photography, painting, glass blowing, fishing, stargazing]. As we understood it, the list of activities was only limited by our imaginations and willingness to share.

At the time of writing, a list of these congregational suggestions was being drawn up and interest ascertained. It will then be up to the activity leader to sort out, with those who have indicated an interest, whether the activity was viable and if, and how, it would proceed. Hopefully, there would be a number of different activities each week to choose from [there would be no compulsion to attend multiple events] and we could go to whichever we chose. It would be up to each of us to respond as we feel led.

Although this started as a Connect group activity, we are happy to endorse it for wider congregational consideration. We think it has real promise of meeting the sorts of aims that Connect Groups have, and that will surely encourage growth in individuals and congregations.

We commend it to you.

Blessings

Jan and Stuart Craig



## A Thought Inspired by the above Letter (from the Editor)

Over many months, I have been wondering, as have many others, I know, about how we would come out of COVID. Would we be faced with something new, different, and full of possibility or would we simply find the same old, same old ..... For me, this has contributed to the heaviness I have experienced, and which may have impacted *the Anthology* with a sombre feel. My sense is that there has to be a silver lining somewhere arising from all the angst we have felt.

**BRIGHT AND BREEZY** seemed to suggest something new and different for us to experience and this reminded me of a poem by John O'Donahue, who died in 2008, well before the pandemic, which I have printed below. It has inspired me to keep going, for there is light ahead.

I wondered what it may say to others.

### For a New Beginning

*In out of the way places of the heart  
Where your thoughts never think to wander  
This beginning has been quietly forming  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.*

*For a long time it has watched your desire  
Feeling the emptiness grow inside you  
Noticing how you willed yourself on  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.*

*It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the grey promises that sameness  
whispered  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent  
Wondered would you always live like this.*

*Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and dream  
A path of plenitude opening before you.*

*Though your destination is not clear  
You can trust the promise of this opening;  
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
That is one with your life's desire.*

*Awaken your spirit to adventure  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.*



## **JOTTINGS OF JOY**

Spring is in the air ...and a spring in my step! That's how I returned from town a week or so ago.

"Just a check-up" at my Dr. was on the calendar - you know what I mean!

So, an uplifting and caring consultation - smiles all around, greetings shared by staff and waiting patients and a pathology form to take further! The regular facility being closed for the moment prompted a walk further up the hill.

I was intercepted by my patient husband who had had other things to do - "Would I like a cup of coffee?"... just the right invitation!! Then, interactive chats with others on the "Wait" seat - and - back to the original medical facility - greeted again by laughter and the smiling comfort of "no stress" and all was completed!!

Next, the Information Centre with the caring volunteer receptionist; then to the Newsagent!! So much laughter in one small space! A trained eye soon found just what I wanted!

Returning to the car park via the Grocery store, for a few necessities of course!! A question posed at the store - "Where would I find ??? "I'll take you there" with more smiles - more greetings!! On our way to the car, a young child using the downward rails to practise her monkey grip drew apologies from Mum, but appreciation and enjoyment from me.

Next - Coping with my "not really necessary" but contrary trolley, a young gentleman approached, and with a broad smile, "Do you know there is a new bar on these now to help you to guide them in"? and he kindly gave me a demonstration.

I sank into my passenger front seat and reported my wonderful morning of JOY!! Each happy incident, each simple act of kindness, each new person taking a further step from their "line of duty" to give cheery assistance to another ...

The JOY of giving and I was the happy recipient ... I give thanks for knowing and feeling the JOY of community in our wonderful town!!!

Marnie Mc Callum



## **CUPPA CRAFT**

This smallish group, which meets in the Maleny church at 9.30am first and third Tuesdays for coffee, tea and a chat is growing slowly.

Activities have included knitting, crocheting, jigsaw puzzles and tatting.

Our good news story to share. It brings JOY.

Susan, a dear friend in lockdown in NSW, and her group, have sent many beanies for us to send to India and items to sell on the table at the back of the church on Sunday. Such generosity lifts our spirits and spreads JOY all round, in fact. God moves in special ways.

There is an open invitation for anyone who would like to come, to just turn up. You are assured of a warm welcome.



## THE POETRY PAGES



*How can we find great happiness  
For happiness is hard to find.  
Is it the time we greet each day  
Knowing the day will be carefree.*

*Is it the thoughts of family  
Or the success our children bring  
Is it the food that nourishes us  
And the thought it will always be there.*

*But happiness may be fleeting  
As our memory fades away  
But JOY continues forever  
For this is a part of our soul.*

Colin Harding



### A Prayer Poem

*O loving God, we are glad you have inspired preaching ministers to teach us,  
and joyful friends to laugh with us, and sometimes cry too.*

*We thank you for shared silences  
and for those with deep understanding  
- just like yours, O God.*

*May the God we find in the beauty of holiness accompany us,  
and may we share great joy and delight with everyone we meet.*

Moyra Jones



**JOY** - two consonants & one vowel - together make the word **Joy** come alive to living. To me, JOY represents Jesus Outside Yourself. Jesus reminds me to leave oneself and become involved in the company of others. In the midst of a pandemic, find joy in ordinary things. These are just a few of what joy means to me.

*A cup of tea, and a warm embrace,  
A new baby, and a familiar face.*

*A gentle smile, a reconciling touch,  
All cost so little but mean so much.*

*Watching the stars dance through the night,  
Seeing the sunrise come to light.*

*Meditation, songs of praise,  
Family time and holidays.*

*Love's tender word, forbearing and forgiving,  
Brings to the heart true peace and joy of living.*

Margaret Pow

## Happiness Is ...

*How happy we are to live in this world  
And enjoy the canvas that God unfurled  
The sky, the earth, the ocean and streams  
So much beauty to fill our dreams.*

*Be still and know that I am God  
Creator of all on Earth and above  
The moon, the stars, the sun and rain  
Bringing joy and beauty to your terrain.*

*So let us joyful and thankful be  
For all that we are and all that we see  
So lift up your voices and sing a new song  
For the joy of living where we belong.*



Joyce Butterfield

## Growing Old

*As we grow older  
what thoughts are in our minds  
of days long forgotten  
or future times to come*

*do we remember people  
or is it usually things.  
The pleasure of knowing people  
or the power of owning things*

*and is our life near over  
to give us time to think  
what joys that we have witnessed  
as our life goes rolling on.*

*The joy of new borne babies  
the joy of wedding bells  
the joy of health returning  
the joy of knowledge new.*

*But all these joyful moments  
can disappear at once  
for life returns to normal  
and we face each day anew.*

*Is this the end of the story?  
Of course there is more to tell  
the joy of remembrance never leaves us  
and the story never ends.*

Colin Harding

### Psalm 100:1-3

“Shout for JOY to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”

### Psalm 63:6–7

“For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for JOY. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.”

*joy*

*Graham Dempster is at it again  
So, I got out some paper and also a pen  
Put my thinking cap on and tried not to be coy  
For now is the time to write about JOY.*

*Let us be joyful and sing songs of praise  
The Lord is powerful so our voices we'll raise  
It's a time for rejoicing for what we are  
And nought what we bring - it's just because we're able to sing.*

*Be thankful for life and time well spent  
Bringing joy to the world and to Jesus our friend  
All glory to God and peace among men  
Time to put away my paper and pen.*

Joyce Butterfield

### **A Regal Bird of Joyous Colour**



A male regent tanager. (Credit: Patty McGinn/Flickr)

*He came as if from times of old,  
with intense plumage of deliberate black and gold.  
Black cap neatly round his head,  
and crown of golden orange red.  
Weather had grown extra warm,  
bird bath water free from harm  
was destination for a morn cooldown.  
Body temp reduced and wash for the golden gown.*

*The moment was his part story:  
For us - a view of God's creation glory.  
Over years not so recent,  
His nom de plume was "bower bird, regent".  
A story, a story, and more to the point,  
our hearts with wonder he did anoint.  
What beauty rests in the Creator's soul  
to delight with avian colour is His goal,  
and lift us away from Covid fear  
with a bird, a bird of infectious cheer.*

Bob Philpot



### **Kookaburra's Joy**

*'Twas the day of the party  
And all through the bush  
Not a creature was stirring  
They knew they must shhh.*

*Some people had come  
What a difference it made  
They looked for a spot  
With cool trees and shade.*

*For eleven years they'd met  
In a Church on the range  
To celebrate their birthday  
They wanted a change.*

*Baroon Pocket Dam  
Gives me nurture and care  
If they bring food along  
I am happy to share.*

*I'll sit in the trees  
And be silent and wait  
They sit on their chairs  
And imitate! No, meditate!!*

*At last there's some action  
The bar-b-que's on  
Must get me a snack  
Before it's all gone.*

*A snag in a bun  
My favourite food  
I'll just swoop when it's ready  
Can't look like I'm rude.*

*Sorry, Margaret, my love  
On you I will pick  
Don't want them distracted  
By Graham's party trick.*

*So I laugh and I call  
As I dive out of sight  
"HAPPY BIRTHDAY to all  
And continue your flight".*

Barbara Richards

(For the full story, speak to someone from the Christian Meditation Group)

## Threads of Joy

*In the midst of the busy activity of life  
Threads of joy run through.  
Even in the darkest of times.  
Deeply imbedded joy...  
The presence of God's Spirit.*

*The smallest reminders  
Ignite the thread of joy within.  
The twitter of a tiny bird,  
The soft kiss of a gentle breeze on my face,  
The sun softly seeping its warmth into my shoulders,  
The new rose unfurling its petals on this new day.*

*All reflect their Creator.  
God with us.  
I am part of His creation.  
Such joy!*

Helen Uhlmann



## FOR THE YOUNG ONES

**Why should a new king go to the dentist?**  
*To get his teeth crowned.*

**Why are astronauts such successful people?**  
*Because they keep going up in the world.*

**Why is a bald man always cheerful?**  
*Nothing gets in his hair.*

**When is a bus not a bus?**  
*When it turns into a street.*

**When are you likely to drown in a plate of muesli and milk?**  
*When you get dragged under by a strong currant.*

**Why isn't it safe to go to sleep when you are travelling by train?**  
*Because trains run over sleepers.*

**Who can jump higher than a tree?**  
*Everyone. Trees can't jump.*

## A CHURCH STORY

A little boy was attending his first wedding. After the service, his cousin asked him, "How many women can a man marry?"

"Sixteen," the boy responded.

His cousin was amazed that he had an answer so quickly.

"How do you know that?"

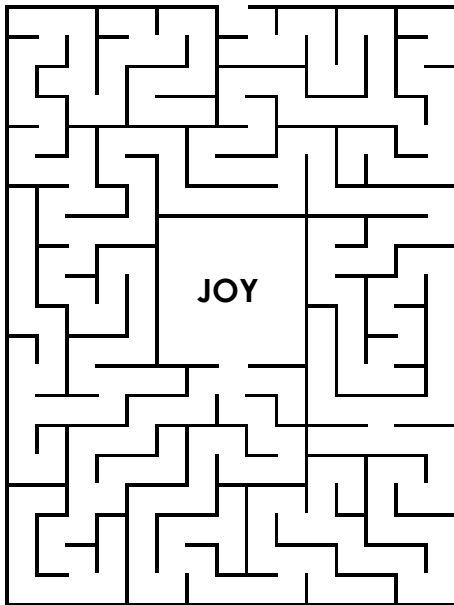
"Easy," the little boy said. "All you have to do is add it up, like the pastor said, 4 better, 4 worse, 4 richer, 4 poorer."



# JOY

Find the following words in this

CELEBRATE	CHEER	DELIGHT
GLADNESS	GLEE	HALLELUJAH
HAPPINESS	JOY	MERRY
MIRTH	OVERJOYED	PLEASURE
REJOICE	THRILL	



Find the path through the maze to find JOY



There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and they were terrified. But the Angel said to them "I bring you good news of great **joy** that will be for all people. Today a Saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord. Luke 2: 8-11

Draw a picture of a place that gives you JOY

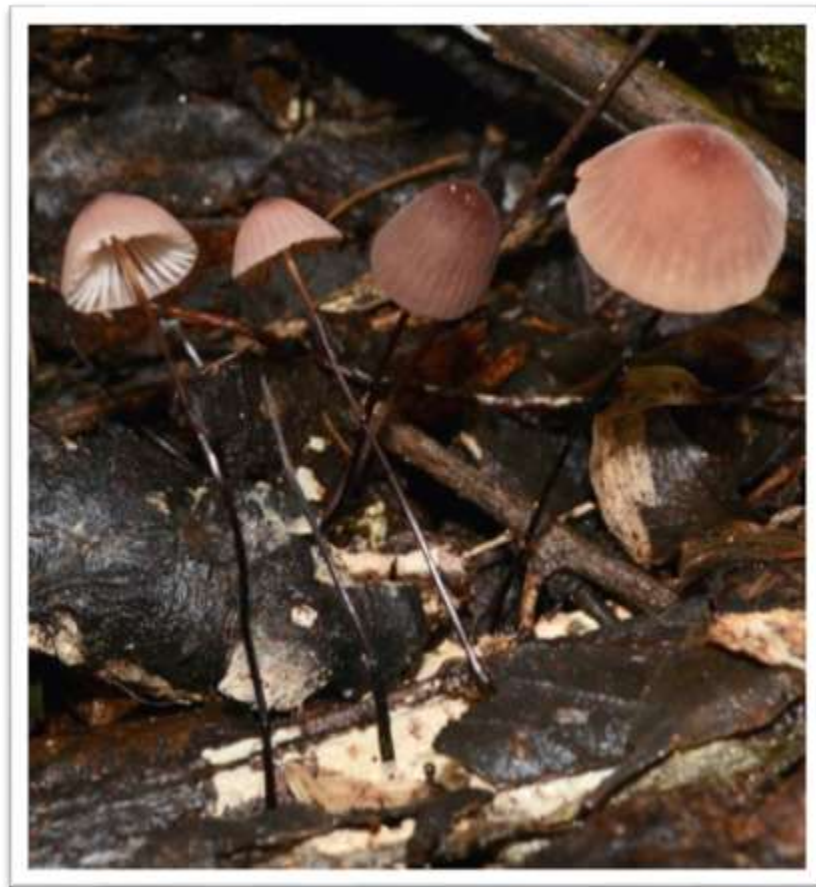
## WHAT GIVES ME JOY, AND HOW DO I THINK OF JOY?

There are two kinds of joy that I can think of at present and both are linked with the incredible creative power of God.

The first is the overwhelming sense of awe and wonder I experience when suddenly I catch a glimpse of a regent bowerbird – its velvet black and golden mantle, and flashing red cap. It always comes as a complete surprise, and almost takes my breath away. It makes me think of the gift of God's grace – free, unearned, totally generous, and always surprising.

The second is the quiet joy of discovery after long hours of search – in the forest, under the microscope and in the laboratory, probing into the inner structure of a tiny organism. To discover one of God's unique creations, never before noticed, examined or named; to bring it before science and the community; to see where it fits in the whole family of living things and consider what role it plays – what a privilege that is for me! I feel that I am working with the Creator God, to know, value and conserve some of God's precious family. I am very blessed and that fills me with joy that can be shared.

Fran Guard



Chronicles 16:32–34

“Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall the trees of the forest sing for JOY before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”

Galatians 5:22–23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, JOY, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

## KARL'S KORNER

### Unless the Lord.....

Over the past decades I have been watching our church (and other “mainline” churches) gradually shrink and wither (grow old). There doesn't seem to be much regrowth around and I ask myself “Why?” We have tried to pass on the faith by doing good in the community and the wider world but, while there have been the occasional sprigs of new growth, mostly the landscape is getting more barren. “Why?”

Over the next months we will be talking about “joy” in the church. But what gives us this joy? 2 Corinthians 4:7 says **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”**, so it is not by our efforts or plans that the church grows since we have no power in ourselves (the clay) but by allowing God to speak through us and our actions. To motivate us to do this, however, we need to have faith that God does indeed have a purpose and plan for our lives – even the little that is left for some. And the fact that we have this purpose gives meaning to our life and should engender joy. We are part of a bigger story than just our existence. Isn't that great?

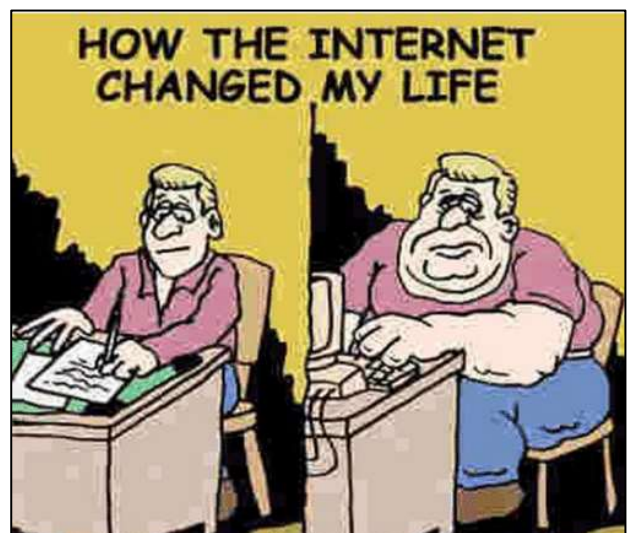
But then, we have to communicate this to others in the society we live in. Sadly, our society is all too happy to have us do charitable works, but should we want to say we are doing this because we have a faith, this is frowned upon as this might disturb others. Whether we support chaplains or Lifeline, these people, because they function in a government funded entity, must refrain from raising faith unless the “client” does so.

Also, society's “influencers” are so focused on their own importance that they give short shrift to ideas of a higher purpose (than themselves?). Even when they do charitable works it seems their name or interest has to be attached to it. Others seem so focused on what I might call “in your face” advertising of “who” they (think) they are. The church and its activities, however, are taken for granted and so do not become “news” unless things go wrong, or its representatives fail some “pub test”.

So, we must accept the world as it is and persevere.

In Jesus' day, people noticed how Christ and his followers loved people. When we help others and see them grow – particularly in the faith – we experience joy if we do truly love them. So, keep on doing what you feel God is calling you to do but also notice what God is doing in the world despite its failings – i.e. Count your blessings.

Karl



## **JOY TO THE WORLD THE LORD IS COME [A Sermon by Peter Uhlmann]**

### **Readings**

**John 16:16-24 and Philippians 4:4-7**

#### **All year round**

This is one of the most popular Christmas hymns across the globe. Watts took his inspiration from Psalms 96 and 98 which collectively make the point that the Lord's blessing extends over both heaven and earth. Sadly, songs like this have been relegated to the Christmas season. Yet the apostle Paul encouraged the faithful to 'rejoice always' – not just to sing about it for a couple of weeks over Christmas. The church is to proclaim good news of great joy all year round. Importantly, Isaac Watts did not start the hymn with happy is the world. Happy is temporary and circumstantial. Joy takes the long view. Happiness is conditional, joy is unconditional. Happiness is an attractive but shallow pool. Joy is profound, deep. Happiness is me, myself and I. Joy is us.

Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson said in Treasure Island "to miss joy is to miss everything."

#### **Joy and Sorrow**

In the farewell discourse of John 16, Jesus speaks of his own joy and that the disciples will share in that joy. Was Jesus delusional or perhaps just a little too optimistic? With what lay ahead for him and his disciples, surely joy was a bridge too far. Jesus knew of the pain that awaited him – the anguish of his approaching death, the physical pain, the separation from God, and the pain of bearing the sins of the world. To be clear, death by crucifixion was one of the most horrible forms of execution ever devised by man.

And Jesus also spoke to his disciples of joy. And yet, Jesus knew the disciples would suffer greatly for their faith and, in many cases, meet a violent death. For himself and others, Jesus speaks concurrently of joy and sorrow.

The apostle Paul writes that we are to rejoice in the Lord always. In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul expresses his own joy and invites the church there to enter into that same joy. And yet Paul is in prison, and the Christians at Philippi are being persecuted. Paul writes concurrently of joy and sorrow.

In the middle of a pandemic can we really shout aloud the words of Psalm 30:

*You have turned my mourning into dancing,  
You have taken off my sackcloth  
And clothed me with joy.*

Can we really speak of joy when so much is wrong with the world and perhaps even with our lives?

#### **Angela Gorrell**

In 2015, the Templeton Foundation donated four and a half million dollars to Yale University's Centre for Faith and Culture for the express purpose of developing a theology of joy. The foundation held the view that joy had been marginalised in our western society and therefore it needed to be brought to the forefront if we were to solve some of the world's greatest problems. The Yale team, led by the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf, went about recruiting theologians and researchers. One of the recruits was Angela Gorrell. Angela had just finished her PhD in practical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena and she was overjoyed to be offered a position. She had to pinch herself. Angela thought this was going to be the best year of her life. How wrong she was.



Angela commenced work at Yale in March 2016 and immediately began collating and reading all that was written on joy. In September that year she took time off and went on a family vacation at the beach. There she met up with family members including her cousin Dustin. Two weeks later her mother phoned to tell her that Dustin had taken his own life. On the phone she yelled at her mother “no, no, no”. Then the oxygen was sucked from the room, and she could barely speak because of the pain of grief. With her husband Paul and her black funeral dress they drove the 12 hours to Kentucky to be with the family and attend Dustin’s funeral. Less than 2 weeks after returning to her work at Yale, her sister phoned and told her that their 22 year old nephew had died of cardiac arrest. Those same feelings associated with grief rolled over her again. This time her colleagues chipped in and so with her husband and the black funeral dress they flew to New Mexico to be with her sister and attend Mason’s funeral.

Again, she returned to Yale and recommenced her work on the theology of joy knowing that she was required to present a course on “the good life” with Yale students. The night before the first class she received a text message that said her father had been taken to the ICU and that doctors thought that he would not survive the week. Those same feelings of grief rolled over her again. Angela had a complicated relationship with her father. When he was a young man, he was a respected trial lawyer. He lived life BIG. He was an active youth group leader. If you needed a Santa Claus, he was your man. He had many friends and a high octane social life. He would regularly phone each of his four daughters and pray over the phone with them for hours. He loved his daughters, and he championed the agency of God in their lives.

Then something happened. He experienced several medical events and became addicted to the prescription drug oxycodone for the last 12 years of his life. He no longer phoned his daughters and even failed to attend Angela’s wedding reception. Angela recalls on her last visit, she arrived late in the afternoon and there her father was still dressed in his stained pyjamas. The house was an absolute mess. His fourth wife had left him. Empty snack packets were everywhere. Dirty washing was piled up in the bathroom. The water to the house had been cut off. All her father could talk about was finding another doctor to write another prescription for the oxycodone.

The day arrived for her first lecture as a Yale University professor. A lecture on the good life. She went into that lecture room reminded that people are not always what they seem. That tomorrow is not guaranteed. All we have for certain in this life is now. That starting well is no guarantee that you will finish well. At the end of that first lecture Angela told the class that they needed to take one question with them for the duration of the course – in the context of joy, for you, what is a life well lived? For the next 12 months as Angela taught the class on the theology of joy she battled with anger, fear, and grief. Anger about Dustin’s suicide, fear around Mason’s unexpected death and grief over her father’s unfolding life and death.

### **Joy to the world the Lord is come.**

If Angela was here with us she would tell us that out of suffering she has been restored by joy. Not joy because of her suffering. But joy despite her suffering and because her life is worth living. If a life well lived is to be sustainable, it must find a place for suffering. Can suffering and joy dance together? Jesus spoke about it. The apostle Paul wrote about it. And Angela Gorrell lived it.

### **Some questions to ponder:**

**Firstly, how do we each participate in the work of joy?**

**Secondly, how, as a church, can we bring joy to our community in the midst of a pandemic?**

### **Further reading:**

*The Gravity of Joy – A Story of Being Lost and Found – Angela Gorrell*



## A Comment on the Sermon [from the Editor]

Peter highlighted the nexus between suffering and joy. Perhaps, we once thought they were unlikely bedfellows, but can now see some linkages. On reading, rather than hearing, this sermon, I was reminded of a poem by my favourite poet – Irishman, John O'Donahue.

It comes from his wonderful book *Benedictus – a Book of blessings*, Bantam Books, 2007 p139.

He writes, in explanation of what blessing is, [pp 210 – 211]

*“What is a blessing? A blessing is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect, heal and strengthen. Life is a constant flow of emergence. The beauty of blessing is its belief that it can affect what unfolds.....*

*We never see the script of our lives; nor do we know what is coming towards us, or why our life takes on a particular shape or sequence. A blessing is different from a greeting, a hug, a salute, or an affirmation; it opens a different door in human encounter. One enters into the forecourt of the soul, the source of intimacy and the compass of destiny.*

*Our longing for the eternal kindles our imagination to bless. Regardless of how we configure the eternal, the human heart continues to dream of a state of wholeness; that place where everything comes together, where loss will be made good, where blindness will transform into vision, where damage will be made whole, where the clenched question will open in the house of surprise, where the travails of a life's journey will enjoy a homecoming. To invoke a blessing is to call some of that wholeness upon a person now.”*

Can I suggest you read the blessing on the next page with those thoughts in mind.



## For Suffering

*May you be blessed in the holy names of those  
Who, without you knowing it,  
Help to carry and lighten your pain.*

*May you know serenity  
When you are called  
To enter the house of suffering.*

*May a window of light always surprise you.*

*May you be granted the wisdom  
To avoid false resistance;  
When suffering knocks on the door of your life,  
May you glimpse its eventual gifts.*

*May you be able to receive the fruits of suffering.*

*May memory bless and protect you  
With the hard-earned light of past travail;  
To remind you that you have survived before  
And though the darkness now is deep,  
You will soon see the approaching light.*

*May the grace of time heal your wounds.*

*May you know that though the storm might rage,  
Not a hair of your head will be harmed.*



And while my head/brain was surrounded by thoughts of blessings and blessing, it wandered off on a journey all its own - as it is wont to do from time to time - and it settled on to some of the sung blessings we use in our services from time to time. They are the last thing that happens in the service, so may well be what is most likely to be remembered and we are singing them to those around us. So, let's go back to that definition of blessing again:

*A blessing is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect heal and strengthen*

*We enter into the forecourt of the soul, the source of intimacy and the compass of destiny.*

*To invoke a blessing is to call wholeness upon a person now."*

So, I encourage thought about these blessings

*Shalom, my friends,  
Shalom, my friends,  
Shalom, shalom,  
Till we meet again  
Till we meet again  
Shalom, shalom.*

English version written in 1988 by Donald P Hustad [1918 - 2013] – an American Evangelical hymn writer, organist, conductor etc.

*May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.*

*May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.*

*May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.*

*May the child of God grow in you, and his love bring you home.*

Written in 1999 by Aubrey Podlich [1946 - ], a Lutheran pastor who has served in South Australia and Queensland.

*God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you,  
 Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight:  
 So may God grace you, heal and embrace you,  
 Lead you through darkness into the light.*

Written, in 1997, by Scotsman John L. Bell [1949 - ] of the Iona Community probably in association with colleague Graham Maule.

*Shalom to you now, shalom my friends.  
 May God's mercies bless you, my friends.  
 In all your living and through your loving,  
 Christ be your Shalom, Christ be your Shalom.*

Written by American Elise Shoemaker Eslinger [1942 - ], a consultant in worship and spiritual formation and formerly Director of Institute for Applied Theology & Director of United Sound at the United Theological Seminary.

## **THE ONLY ANSWER RECEIVED** [To Peter Uhlmann's two questions on Page 19]

In thinking about the questions on JOY as posed by Peter Uhlmann, it seemed important to me to consider the difference between HAPPINESS and JOY. This is because I believe many people do not distinguish between them at all, with the result that there is often a lack of understanding which leads to disillusionment and confusion when hard times come.

The fact that the Bible refers to JOY and its derivatives over 200 times, but HAPPINESS and its derivatives less than 30 times, suggests to me that whilst there may be rare situations where either term might be appropriate, JOY is particularly relevant for those who love God and walk with Him.

For me, happiness is most often a temporal and fragile feeling founded on pleasant circumstances at a moment or season in time – a gift, a kind word, a pleasant surprise, good news, a positive interaction or relationship – essentially a set of circumstances pleasing and to our liking. It would be a rare occurrence for a person to be exhibiting happiness in times of ill health, disappointment or trouble or even in the hum drum of everyday life.

Joy however, speaks to me of a stronger, deeper and enduring underlying condition which can exist in the ordinary circumstances of life and especially, in times of hardship and suffering. For the Christian this is possible knowing that God knows what is going on, that He cares, that He can help us through and that He can bring good out of what at the time is painful. There is joy in trusting in God's promises for this world and the next.

So how does this brief analysis relate to BRIGHT AND BREEZY and our interaction with a largely unchurched community?

We must continue to bring happiness in to people's lives (a smile, a flower, a hand across the road, a meal, a cheery word or a listening ear) but it seems to me that is the easy part and we have to understand that the happiness will evaporate when we cease to provide the reason for its existence.

The challenging part for me is to share our faith along with the things we do to give temporary happiness. When we do this, we sow seeds of lasting joy as people come to a saving faith and trust in the Saviour.



I admire those Christian organisations that make the gospel and the sharing of faith integral to all the practical help they provide to address injustice and distress – to be intentional, and up front, about why they are doing what they do.

A service club or a kindly citizen can offer things that can bring a degree of happiness, but the Christian Church alone is custodian to the words of eternal life – words that can bring lasting joy even in the face of ongoing adversity and pain.

As another Christmas rolls around, are we up to it to share our faith, the reason for the season. Not just the babe in the manger, but the crucified and risen Jesus who alone can give the deep joy of peace, assurance, and security that the world craves but does not know – the One who alone will never let us down and who wants to walk with us in this life and into the next.

I don't have all the answers, but I pray that God will lead us into endeavours that bring lasting joy.

Bob Grice



## JOY IS HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD

The World Day of Peace in September is a time where we can reflect on all manner of things related to peace. The Christian Meditation Group was given little posters which were hung in various places and when The New Vine items reflecting on joy were called for, this was the result.



The photos came with this caption: "Joy is Living in a Safe Environment".

And soon after, a visit to another member's home told this story. It had been on the front door since last year!



## **UNEXPECTED JOY**

About 6 weeks ago, my neighbour and dear friend, had a partial hip repair. All went well, and she was home two weeks after the surgery. Then, something let go, and she landed on the floor resulting in a broken femur, same side as the hip operation. So, she was back in hospital again and underwent a second operation to repair the damage.

I was watering her pots and garden every couple of days.

One day, I decided to visit Faye at Selangor hospital where she was doing rehab. I picked a bunch of flowers from her garden and added some from my own. When I wandered up to the top section of Faye's garden, I noticed a beautiful orchid growing under a tree. It had three very large, spectacular blooms in a beautiful burgundy tone. I picked one. It only had a short stem, so I took a tiny jar to the hospital especially for the orchid.

I was rather surprised when I passed the orchid to Faye as she said "Kevin's orchid. It always flowers on his birthday. What is today's date?" It was 3 days from his birthday.

I could see the love and joy on Faye's face.

Kevin passed away in early days, leaving Faye a young mum, with four children, to continue life and run a dairy farm at Beaudesert.

There were other orchids in bloom in Faye's garden that day, but how special it was to have chosen the very one that meant so much to her.

I drove home that day thinking how special the visit was and thankful I had given a special friend such overwhelming Joy.

Lyn Baker



## THE EXAM

I often joke with readers, when talking about *The New Vine*, by telling them that the exam will be on such and such a day. They laugh as they know I am joking.

Not today. Here is the examination.

I encourage you to write the answers down – in the spaces provided, or on a separate sheet of paper. That way, you can revisit them from time to time.

### BLACKALL RANGE UNITING CHURCHES

#### EXAM PAPER

- Question 1** [a] Choose a biblical text about joy that appeals to you, not included in our journal  
[b] Memorise it  
[c] Repeat it daily for two weeks
- Question 2** Write down one thing of joy you have experienced in the past week.
- Question 3** Which poem about joy speaks to you most?
- Question 4** Write one verse about joy for yourself – Go on, nobody else will see it.
- Question 5** Do you consider you have a joyful mind? Why? – See page 4.
- Question 6** Write your own “JOTTINGS FOR JOY” – See page 9 - [Marnie excepted]
- Question 7** Having read everything, what are your answers to Peter U’s two questions now:
- How do we each participate in the work of joy?
  - How, as a church, can we bring joy to our community in the midst of a pandemic?
- Question 8** If you were to write a blessing for your congregation, what would it be?
- Question 9** If you were to write a blessing for your community, what would it be?

*[Your result will become obvious through self-assessment]*