

BANYULE BABBLE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF BANYULE
ST JOHN'S HEIDELBERG ❁ HOLY SPIRIT WATSONIA

APRIL
2026

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DENISE'S DATELINE

This week I've been thinking about our Easter Services, that highest point of our Church year when we commemorate and reflect upon the events of Holy Week. Along with that, our Editor shared with me the article about the Brock brothers, Francis (Frank) and Ian, which details their service in WWII (p. 6). Frank's name is included on the plaque of St John's Heidelberg among those who died in service in WWII.

As I read this account, my imagination was captured by these two young men, who lived in our area – what was life like for them before the war? Probably the everyday things of life that most of us navigate each day – working, eating, socialising, time with family. For both these young men, they no doubt faced challenges in the army; both at different times were reprimanded for undisclosed reasons – youthful hi-jinks perhaps?

It is sobering to think that young men and women serving in our defence forces now may be sent to 'foreign fields' soon; we are all up in the air about the state of the world generally, and about the situation in Iran and the Middle East in particular.

How do we navigate life amid anxiety-inducing news reports, the rising price of fuel, and concern about how all this will impact on our daily lives of shopping and visiting, and working and worshipping?

The Scriptures encourage us to 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.' (1 Peter 5:7). Our Heavenly Father knows what we are all enduring, at both the global and the individual level; and as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?' (Matthew 6:27). So, in times of worry, anxiety, doubt of anything, we can, and should, turn to God.

The onerous task set before Jesus on that last week of his life was enormous – the cross was ever before him; yet he continued the work given him by the Father, continued praying and trusting God.

For us, as we enter Holy Week, let us come before God in prayer daily, remembering both his care for us, and the love shown us by the Lord Jesus Christ's rescue mission, accomplished at such a cost.

On Anzac Day, we rightly remember and give thanks for the service of young men and women like the Brock brothers of Heidelberg.

In Holy Week we intentionally focus upon and give thanks and praise to our Saviour Jesus for his 'one true sacrifice for sin' and for obtaining 'an eternal deliverance for his people' through his death and resurrection. Resurrection day! Now THAT is a good antidote for anxiety.

Denise



Holy Week:

Palm Sunday March 29 9.30 am Holy Spirit
Maundy Thursday April 2 7.30 pm Holy Spirit
Good Friday April 3 9.30 am Holy Spirit
Easter Day April 5 9.30 am St John's

— The Venerable Denise —



For more on Her Venerability, see page 3.

Come and join Tuesday Bible Study! Lots of fun, especially when the Vicar has a birthday!! — Wilma Walker



This Month – April

Wednesday 1st: 11 am Iris Grange; 3 pm Strathalan

Thursday 2nd Maundy Thursday: 7.30 pm **Holy Spirit**, Service of Shadows

Friday 3rd Good Friday: 9.30 am **Holy Spirit**
Isaiah 52:13–53:12; John 19:1–30

Sunday 5th Easter Day: 9.30 am **St John's**
Acts 10:34–43; Hymn to the Risen Christ; Matthew 28:1–10

Sunday 12th Easter 2: 9.30 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit.
Teaching starts: *Living in the light of Christ* (1 Peter)
1 Peter 1:1–12; John 20:19–31

Sunday 19th Easter 3: 9.30 am Combined, St John's
1 Peter 1:13–25; Matthew 28:8–15a

Wednesday 22nd: 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers' Union;
3 pm Roshana Macleod

Saturday 25th Anzac Day

Sunday 26th Easter 4: 9.30 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit
1 Peter 2:1–10; John 10:1–10

Money: February

Income:	Giving:	\$7,159.40
	Other:	\$7,542.50
	Total:	\$14,701.90
Expenses:		\$30,375.96
Deficit:		\$15,674.06

Giving was down. Much of both income and expenses was held over until March.

How can I leave a place I love?

How can I leave a place I love? A place that has been the location of incredible experiences, learning, friendships, challenges, beauty, opportunity and so many partnerships?

We've been living in Mallacoota for almost eight years. For Andy this has meant working as a Fisheries Officer, for myself the role of Priest-in-Charge of the Cooperating Parish of Croajingolong. I became the longest serving incumbent in the Parish's 100-year history.

Why stay so long in this small, beautiful, isolated and challenging location; in a parish that has a congregation that rises and falls in number like the tide; where it takes an hour to drive to the secondary centre; and where there are no other churches so the minister must cater for a diversity of denominations, theology and expectations?

We stayed for love, joy, partnership, and carrying on a good work until it felt our tasks here were 'complete'.

We've been here through the bushfire; an experience that has shaped me and my ministry in a way that is yet to be fully recognised. We've been part of a community where the boundary between church and community is blurry. Where many see me as their 'Community Priest' even if they've never attended church. I was voted onto MADRA (Mallacoota and District Recovery Association), starred in an ABC TV documentary, been the community rep on the school board, the Police chaplain, presented a weekly radio show, led the annual community Christmas Carols, and spent time each summer with Scripture Union Family Mission and Theos teams.

These are the stories that feature in articles from *The Real Australian*, Gippsland Anglican and other publications. While they have been incredible opportunities, what's kept me here is the partnership with the people. The radio listener who asked for a Bible. The regular op shop customer who invited me to meet her dying partner and then take the funeral, because "you will show her respect and that's important". The stressed-out Mum who wants to talk about her teenager. The congregation who now ask, "I wonder?" as we approach the Scriptures, who accept each other's differences, and who have both laughed and cried together through fire, COVID, and all that life has sent our way.

We began here in 2018, our partnership with BCA began in 2020. For six years we have been blessed with this partnership, a reminder that even when Mallacoota seems so isolated, we are part of a much larger body of Christ around Australia. We have been blessed financially, making the church braver and bolder in activities and mission ideas

Holy Spirit Mothers' Union

Meeting held on Wednesday 25th February 2026 at 10 am: After our cuppa and chat, we had our MU Service and meeting. All our fees and funding have been paid and cleared. (No notice on where the Australian Disaster Fund money is going.) Then it was time to look through old papers (very interesting). We ended our meeting with Middy Prayers.

The **March** meeting will be on Wednesday 25th at 10 am, and will have an Easter theme.

The **April** meeting on Wednesday 22nd will have an ANZAC Day theme. (One year ANZAC Day was on the same day as MU. After the march, MU opened a coffee shop in the church: only three tables, but it looked good and we had customers.)

Elsie Storr

Mission News

Jude & Andy Benton, Croajingolong Parish, East Gippsland

From *The Real Australian*, the magazine of Bush Church Aid, Autumn 2026 issue:

FAREWELL

Jude & Andy Benton are moving to South Australia where Jude has been appointed as Coordinator of Discernment and Formation in the Diocese of Adelaide. This appointment grows out of Jude's ministry experience and further study, particularly her interest in equipping and supporting clergy for the realities of ministry, including times of community crisis. Jude's ministry to her parish and the wider community in the aftermath of Black Summer and during COVID was profound.

In the same issue, Jude wrote an article:

for the Kingdom of God. We have been blessed through prayer support, monthly encouragement through phone calls, emails, even regular cards and letters – these have been appreciated, even if I'm not always good at replying. Andy & I have been blessed with the Field Staff Conferences, and with meeting colleagues from around Australia who are also ministering in rural, regional and remote places.

So how do we leave a place we love?

We leave with grief because change is hard, but we also leave knowing that the Parish is not ours. These are God's people, and God who began a good work over 100 years ago will continue it on to its full completion.

We leave with joy because of all that has been done. We leave with prayer that I will be able to use the experiences of fire and recovery to help others in their ministries when facing difficulty. We leave with hope that one day we'll be back – in the house we own, in the garden we've established. But for now, our task is to entrust the Parish to God, and ourselves to new chapters.

But we do ask for your ongoing prayers for the Parish, for the community, for a new Priest to come and for us as we begin again elsewhere. *"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel."* Philippians 1:27

— Jude Benton

Rowan in Indonesia

Rowan's report arrived late and can only be summarised here.

He reports a lot of local travel by foot and by car. This included the church's camp/retreat, held every two years, in the hills on the outskirts of the city. He was encouraged that over half the church attended for the full weekend, even though many people work six days a week. Clean air was a bonus, also 'relatively chilly' days of 27°.

Rowan's visa has finally arrived, so he has applied for a new passport; when that arrives, the two then have to be linked, then flights booked. Much prayer is needed, but he hopes to be back in Australia from May to November, and we hope to see him at some time then. If anyone has a small car Rowan could use during that time, he would be grateful.

Rowan thanks God for the retreat, for the visa, and for his upcoming Home Assignment.

The Venerable Denise

At church on March 22 Denise announced to us that she was now appointed an Archdeacon. Archdeacons are a kind of administrative assistant to the bishop—they are given the difficult things to sort out that the bishop would prefer not to have to handle, thank you very much. Peta Sherlock was an Archdeacon in the early years of the parish and she hated it. ‘I know you have been cheated of much of my energy over the four years I have been here’, she wrote as she left, referring to her archdeaconly duties.

To slightly dull the pain, being archdeacon is considered a sort of honour or promotion, though how it ranks compared with Denise’s position of canon that she holds already has been a matter of speculation: ‘Anglican theological debate is at its deepest in discussions whether an archdeacon is above or below a canon’, sniffed the Rev’d Bosco Peters in 2014 (<https://liturgy.co.nz/clergy-status-anxiety>). Fortunately Rosemary Bellair has investigated this question and decided that archdeacon is indeed the higher position, and this has now been reflected in the *Babble’s* masthead, which didn’t have room for both titles.

Archdeacons are styled ‘The Venerable’. Wiktionary defines ‘venerable’ as:

1. Commanding respect because of age, dignity, character or position.
2. Worthy of reverence.
3. Ancient, antiquated or archaic.
4. Made sacred especially by religious or historical association.
5. Giving an impression of aged goodness and benevolence.

The *Babble* leaves it to its readers to decide which of these definitions fits Denise best. Rather many of them make more reference to age than Denise would probably prefer; and ‘giving an impression of’ seems to the Editor a little back-handed. The word of course comes from ‘venerate’:

1. To treat with great respect and deference.
2. To revere or hold in awe.

but of course we must keep Acts 14:15 in mind.

(Grammar nerds will be interested to know that the term ‘reverend’, = ‘to be revered’ or ‘must be respected’, contains a

use of the Latin gerundive, often considered equivalent to an English future passive participle. Cf ‘reverent’, = ‘revering’, a present active participle.)

Denise told me that in reference to some unnamed archdeacon she considered ‘The Ven.’ to stand for ‘The Venereal’, presumably indicating shining like the morning star (or perhaps skill at hunting).

To indicate the parish’s congratulations (or perhaps in mourning at the death of Denise’s free time), Denise was presented by Emmi with a sheaf of flowers:



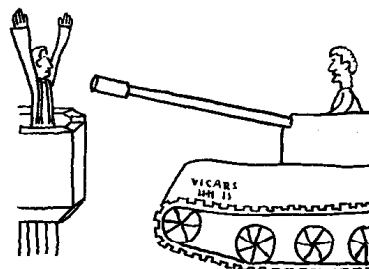
The Venerable Arch, under a venerable arch

ARCHDEACONS

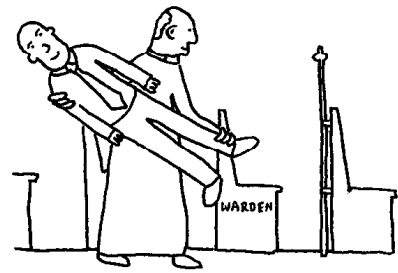
THESE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THEY DO



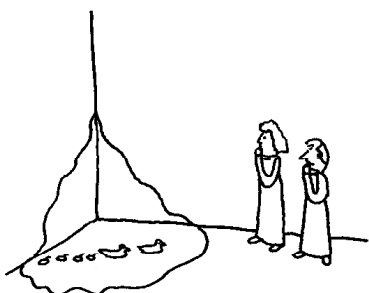
MAKING SURE THAT PARISHES TAKE CARE OF THEIR BUILDINGS



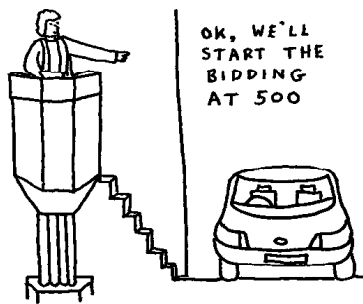
RESOLVING PROBLEMS BETWEEN CLERGY AND THEIR CONGREGATIONS



INSTALLING CHURCHWARDENS (PUTTING THEM IN THEIR PLACE)



ADVISING ABOUT THE DAMP IN THE NORTH WEST CORNER



MAKING SURE THAT YOU ARE RUNNING A CHURCH AS OPPOSED TO ANY OTHER SORT OF ENTERPRISE



ACTING AS A FOUNT OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Blokes Helping Blokes



The Blokes met on 7th March at their lair. This was their second meeting of the year, but the Editor missed the February meeting because he was away. The Blokes had not seen him since early November, and there were some comments about his weight (lower) and appearance (older and more haggard), and by Glen especially about his haircut, even before he had seen it. 'If the haircut is as bad as what was described to me I'd be surprised if Australia let you back into the country', he texted. Now the Editor is always interested in what people really think rather than politely say, and he wondered who Glen's informant was. He did not have to wonder long, as Allan quickly denied saying anything rude about the haircut, so the Editor knew for sure it was he.

Glen did credit the Editor with inspiring him to go on a diet and lose weight, and indeed it was evident that he had made significant progress in that direction.

As well as the usual eggs and bacon, Glen provided pickles of his own preparation, and David's wife Dale, with her usual generosity, had made a rich chocolate cake. Glen said that when he was a pastrycook there was a rule that whatever you burnt or otherwise ruined you had to eat yourself, and he had once done this with a whole tray of sponges (26) and had to eat them all. The sponges he referred to were sponge-cakes and not the kind used for washing dishes, but even so it was not easy, and may have been the start of Glen's unwanted weight gain.

The Editor was sure this anecdote had not been inspired in any way by Dale's chocolate cake, so he wondered why Glen had told it. The solution to this enigma would soon become apparent.

Neil said they had a similar rule at his bowling club if you bowled short, and Glen said he was surprised they had to eat the bowling ball.

We had a new Bloke, Ted Saw. In an example of nominative determinism, Ted became a carpenter, and then a cabinet-maker. He was keenly interested in basketball, and started a club for Watsonia and Greensborough which achieved 300 members. They had also introduced basketball for girls. Glen said he had been Father Christmas there and there were 400 kids.

We got onto the main topic for discussion, 'AI: what is real and what is not'. Glen said he is becoming more self-sustainable, and as part of that drive he is getting more into food preservation. Food preservation by bottling or canning involves temperatures over 100°, which kill bacteria, but brining or pickling is only done at 70°. This runs a risk of botulism unless the medium is sufficiently acid. So he consulted AI on

the correct amount of acid (usually vinegar) to use, but found it confusing and inconsistent. (Glen did later send the Editor some material on quantities, and apologised that he had confused some things, but this didn't really matter: the point was that he hadn't found it clear.)

(Glen also complained that he had bought some vinegar, and found in hidden text that it was 'artificial vinegar'. The Editor understands that artificial vinegar, made from industrial acetic acid, is now the norm in British fish-and-chip shops.)

But this turned on a light over the Editor's head, because he now understood why Glen had told the anecdote about having to eat what you had done wrongly. Except that Glen's pickles weren't being eaten by Glen, but by the Blokes.

Allan now spoke. His daughter is with a very big advertising agency, and the advertising business uses AI a lot. Like any good lecturer Allan had hand-outs to distribute, viz five pairs of similar images, and the Blokes had to decide for each pair which one was AI-generated and which one was real. The first two pairs were labelled 'easy' but the Editor did not agree; the next two pairs were labelled 'medium', and the last pair 'hard', with which the Editor could indeed agree. The Editor got one of the easy ones and not the other, and had no idea of the others.

Allan explained that signs of AI included:

- Small details, including hands, are wrong;
- The background is too blurry, colours too saturated;
- Water is too still, without ripples;
- Faces are too symmetrical, teeth too perfect.

We then heard from Jon. Jon said that when Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) came in, people were at first suspicious of them, but now they often preferred them. We had had to cope with a lot of changes, such as decimal currency, but in time we grew to accept and even like them. So, he suggested, with AI.

Jon then revealed that these comments had been written by AI.

He said that data was the new oil. Whenever you seemed to be getting something for free, there was a reason for that, and the reason was that your data was worth money, and especially for training AI.

Jon compared Kevlar, a very strong and stiff artificial fibre used for bullet-proof vests, with spider web, which can have even better properties. Similarly, he said AI was good, but consumed vast amounts of power compared with the human brain, which was usually better (though he conceded that AI is now so good at chess that humans cannot beat it).

AI is good at some things but not others. This was similar to humans: Jon said that he, for example, was good at fixing computer problems, but not at handyman stuff. AI was not good at getting to the nub of things, or anything that needed judgement. Jon pointed out that jobs like crossing supervisor or cleaner might be called unskilled, but they really required people skills and a lot of judgement.

AI was now coming for the middle-class jobs like computer workers, but Jon does not think it will replace doctors. It can analyse scans, but not reliably interpret the results, which requires judgement. Computers, he said, have so far added to people's workload, as database has been added to database to produce fragile and ill-documented structures.

Jon did suggest that basic routine work such as conveyancing and junior accounting would increasingly be done by AI. He did not think AI would take over teaching as making learning interesting required human skills.

David F said he got out of teaching because he was not allowed to write honest reports.

The Editor said that AI first came into its own with language translation, and this was therefore an example of relatively mature AI, and was very good and useful, allowing people to communicate across languages. He also pointed out that though doctors used judgement, as the patient you really didn't know how good the doctor's judgement was, and a second opinion might be quite different. He also added (and both Jon and David knew this well) that humans could be very stupid, and make very stupid judgements—especially people in management.

Glen said he was very impressed by the skill with which robots could make sandwiches.

There was discussion of new methods of warfare, such as drones, but also interference in elections etc. AI was useful in farming, and in fire-fighting with drones.

Next *Blokes Helping Blokes* will be on Easter Eve, 4th April. Glen promised there would be his own, extremely fruity, hot-cross buns available. Jon asked if someone he referred to cryptically as 'lead-foot' would be there. If you would like an invitation, talk to Glen on 0487 852 808.



Denise's computer skills

Certain friends(?) of Denise were *very* keen to tell the Editor about Denise's ability with computers. Apparently one time, quite some time ago, she was having trouble because her computer would not start. The cause became apparent when it was observed that on the computer (which was in a tower case) she had stuck lots of fridge magnets.

Of course we all know that magnets are death and destruction to data stored on magnetic media, as all computer hard disks were in those days. I believe the whole hard disk was rendered unreadable and she lost the lot.

It was urged in mitigation that Denise had been a major source of spiritual growth for the whole family, so there is that.

The Editor on radio

Did you know there is a radio station at Warringal shopping centre? (No, we are not talking of Coles Radio.) The Editor has been a resident for 38 years and did not know it existed. It is called 96.5 InnerFM (originally 3INR) and has been broadcasting from a deeply hidden location to the right of Coles for 35 years. It has an all-volunteer staff.

Gary Ross, who runs a magazine-style program on Wednesdays, happened to meet the Editor one day. He interviews people as part of his program and was obviously desperate for new people, as he invited the Editor to talk about the parish and his work on the *Babble*, and the Editor, in a moment of madness, agreed.

The Editor had to choose three songs to be played; he chose ELO's *Livin' Thing*, Schubert's *Der Doppelgänger*, and *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* (Whittier & Parry).

After the ordeal was over and the Editor slunk back home, his wife (who had listened in, potentially doubling the audience) described it as 'very sad', and the Editor reflected that at least he was unlikely to be called back for a return visit.



Francis Cedric Brock



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P08703.018

Frank Brock was born on 5th June 1920 in Ivanhoe, and attended Heidelberg State School and Ivanhoe Grammar. On 28th June 1940, shortly after his twentieth birthday, he enlisted into the AIF (Australian Imperial Force) at Caulfield*. He was living with his parents at 56 Banksia St Heidelberg; his father was Cedric Harper Brock who worked at the Navy Victualling Yard, his mother was Beryl Evelyn Brock. He gave his occupation as 'clerk': he was working for ICI. He was given the number VX29801.

On 2nd July he was taken to Puckapunyal for training, and joined 2nd/4th Field Regiment. On 8th July he was down with flu, serious enough to need hospitalisation until the 14th.

On 20th October he was put on a ship leaving Port Melbourne for Bombay. It arrived on 5th November, and on the 11th he was put on another ship for somewhere in the Middle East, arriving on the 26th. In March he is recorded as being in Matruh (Matrouh), the Egyptian governorate that includes the infamous El Alamein.

On 21st March 1941 Frank was graded a Group II Signaller. This would have been the result of undertaking a specific training course, and carried the duties of installing, maintaining and operating communications equipment, including radio and field telephone systems. But on 17th June he relinquished this position, for reasons unknown. Though better paid, it would have been a lonely job.

He would have returned to ordinary duties, and the result was almost immediate: on 9th July he was wounded in action, reportedly in Syria, with multiple

gunshot wounds to the face, at least one of which became infected. However on 28th July he was well enough to be discharged.

He then spent a week in the Artillery Training Regiment, before rejoining the 2nd/4th Field Regiment. This time was evidently well-used, because on 28th August he qualified as a Group III Gunlayer. A gunlayer was responsible for aiming an artillery piece, a very important and specialised job.

In 1942 Frank was given home leave, officially from 28th April to 8th August, but in practice he was put on a ship on 30th January, transhipped again at Bombay, and arrived home on 25th March. However he spent most of the second leg in the ship's hospital with mumps.

During his official home leave he transferred from being a Gun Layer to Group II Observation Post Assistant. This sounds like someone who makes the tea for someone in a lookout tower, but actually they are responsible, working in small teams, for covertly monitoring enemy movements, gathering intelligence, and directing artillery or air fire support—essentially, forward scouts. It is a dangerous rôle, made famous by Lord Baden-Powell; however it is not clear that Frank ever did it. He was in fact to remain in Australia until July 1943.

There was an atypical Absence Without Leave from 0930 to 1830 on 23rd August 1942, for which he lost one day's pay and was confined to barracks for a week.

From 22nd March to 24th April 1943, perhaps sick of being kept at home, he went on a School of Artillery Battery Assistant course, which made him an artilleryman. His report card described him as 'bright personality; confident type' and reported 'Knowledge sound; Has shown improvement, worthy of promotion'. On 11th July he was shipped from Townsville to Port Moresby, arriving 4th August. On 14th August Frank was appointed Lance Bombardier (equivalent to Lance Corporal).

1944 was a series of medical evacuations. 18th January: unknown fever. 23rd January: scrub typhus—this caused him to be taken back to Australia. He was not discharged from hospital until 28th March, and was convalescent for another month. Then on 12th May he was diagnosed with 'benign tertian' malaria. Out of hospital on 29th May, another month in convalescence; then on 30th August another unknown fever; on 18th September he was diagnosed as having a recurrence of the malaria. He did not rejoin his unit until 24th September.

On 12th December 1944 he was promoted to Bombardier, the artillery equivalent of Corporal. On 2nd June 1945

Frank was finally sent back overseas, from Townsville to the Indonesian island of Morotai, the site of a long-running battle with the Japanese. Germany had surrendered a month before, but the war in the Pacific continued. Frank arrived at Morotai on 8th June, but on the 20th he was sent on to Balikpapan, on the east coast of Borneo.

The Battle of Balikpapan was a big operation that started with a landing of 100 ships on 1st July. Major combat ended by about 21st July, though mopping-up continued until the end of the war. It was the first time Frank saw a major operation from the beginning.

On 10th July, his captain was wounded. Although Frank was only a corporal equivalent, he saw what had to be done and took charge of the men. He himself was then wounded and rapidly died of his wounds. Japan announced its surrender a month and five days later.

Frank was buried in the field at Sepinggan, but his body must have been moved later to the Labuan War Cemetery on the island of Labuan, off the coast of Malaysian North Borneo, where it now rests.

Frank was given a posthumous Mention in Despatches (recommended by the Governor-General 24th June 1946, gazetted 6th March 1947) for 'Exceptional service in the field'.



* The fall of France in June 1940 shocked and galvanised the Australian public, and there was a great surge in enlistments.



Above: Labuan War Cemetery; below: Frank's grave plaque. His age is an error: he was 25.



Frank had a brother, Ian Henry Harper Brock, born in Heidelberg on 7th October 1924, so four years younger.

Unlike Frank, who enlisted straight into the AIF for overseas service, Ian initially enlisted into the Militia, a part-time army that was only permitted to fight at home (or PNG). (It eventually became the Army Reserve.) Many in the Militia were conscripts, but Ian was not. He enlisted on 15th October 1942, just eight days after turning 18, and was given the number V503105. He gave his occupation as 'Warehouseman', and said he did not have any educational qualifications, not even a certificate for secondary school entry.

But just one week later (22nd October) saw him volunteering for overseas duty. Such transfers were quite common. However he was not formally transferred to the AIF until 23rd April 1943, when he was given the new number of VX146130.

Ian seems to have chosen to be an artilleryman from the beginning, describing his rank in the Militia as 'Gunner'; after training, on 30th April 1943 he was appointed a Lance Bombardier, but on 29th September he was reverted to Gunner (equivalent to Private) for undisclosed reasons, while on two weeks' leave.

On 15th August he had joined the 9th Australian Field Regiment. There was more training, including in jungle warfare in both NSW and Queensland. In March 1944 he was taken to Merauke, on the coast of what is now South Papua Province, Indonesia, then Dutch New Guinea; there is known to have been ground fighting between Australian and Japanese patrols in the area. He also did an amphibious training course there for a few days in September. He left in October to return to Australia.

On 23rd January 1945 Ian transferred to the 2nd/4th Field Regiment, his brother's regiment. When Frank went to Morotai on 2nd June, Ian also went there, on the same boat. Frank was sent to Balikpapan on the 20th; Ian went there on a different boat, on the 22nd; but he survived. He was graded a Group III Battery Surveyor on 8th August, but relinquished the pay on the same day. Japan announced its surrender on the 15th. On 24th September Ian asked to be discharged on compassionate grounds, which was granted. We may assume his brother's loss hit him hard.

There is little more in the records until a scrawled letter from Ian, dated 7th November 1990, received on the 13th. His father has died and he is living with his mother at 3 Macleod Parade West Macleod. He complains that she never received official notification of Frank's death, or a 'grateful thanks of a nation' message. Ian died on 27th May 1991, aged only 66.



<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6207823&S=2&R=0>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1243687>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1575037>

<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/621144>

<https://nominal-rolls.dva.gov.au/veteran?id=441112&c=WW2>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1695481>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/23278866>

[6/25114368#](https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2676864/francis-cedric-brock/)

<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2676864/francis-cedric-brock/>

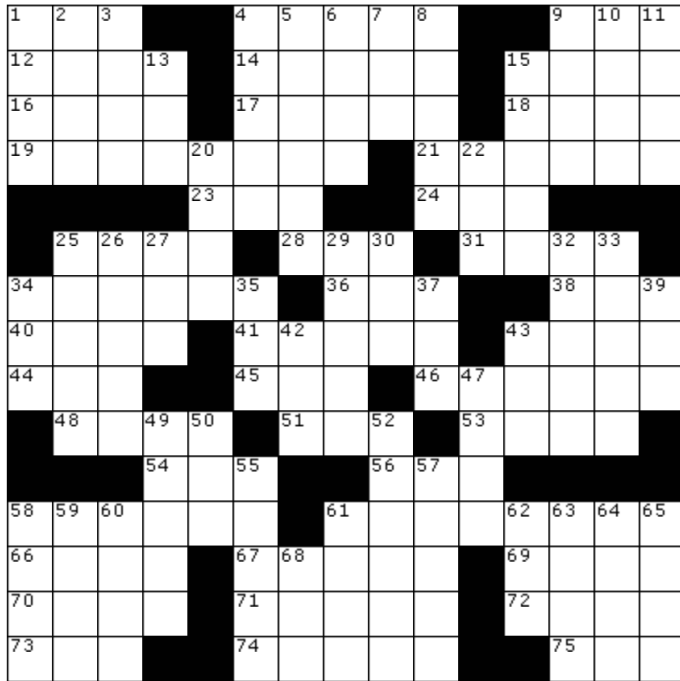
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/20344024/francis-cedric-brock>

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6627430&S=7&R=0>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/248484923/ian-henry-harper-brock>

<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/1484192>





<https://www.christianbiblereference.org/crossword.htm>

ACROSS

- 1 Metronome marking
- 4 Aches
- 9 Bard's before
- 12 Burden
- 14 Register
- 15 Animal stomach
- 16 National capital
- 17 Multi-coloured rock
- 18 Plague of Egypt
- 19 Let the little _____ come to Me
- 21 Defroster
- 23 Building addition
- 24 Short-term memory
- 25 Sacrificial animal
- 28 Use up
- 31 Word meaning father
- 34 Aviators
- 36 Wooden club
- 38 Less than two

- 40 Dog food brand
- 41 Graven images
- 43 Plod
- 44 Dit's partner
- 45 Cain fled to this land
- 46 Counterfeit
- 48 Artful
- 51 Internet
- 53 Alleviate
- 54 Tyrannosaurus _____
- 56 No room for them in the _____
- 58 Make current
- 61 Survivor of fiery furnace
- 66 Wall support
- 67 Southern girl
- 69 Bark
- 70 Madam
- 71 Went gently
- 72 Hint
- 73 Venomous snake
- 74 Where Jesus died
- 75 Part of a min.

DOWN

- 1 Coalition
- 2 Fashionable
- 3 African nation
- 4 Ocean gem
- 5 Gabriel & Michael
- 6 Iraq's neighbour
- 7 Negative
- 8 Children's sliding toys
- 9 Little Mermaid's love
- 10 Speed
- 11 Pitcher
- 13 \$ (abbr.)
- 15 Scale
- 20 Financial obligation
- 22 Terminal abbr.
- 25 Light purple flower
- 26 I am the _____ and the Omega
- 27 Cow's comment
- 29 House
- 30 Chum
- 32 Sphere
- 33 + electrode
- 34 Tablet
- 35 Transgression
- 37 Teaspoon (abbr.)
- 39 Pride
- 42 _____ Jones Industrial average
- 43 Ocean
- 47 Deliver by post
- 49 School mark
- 50 Still
- 52 Collections of sacred books
- 55 Three-masted Mediterranean boat
- 57 Requires
- 58 U.S. Department of Agriculture
- 59 Parent groups
- 60 Dispose of
- 61 In addition
- 62 Big Apple (abbr.)
- 63 Snaky fish
- 64 e.g. Rubber cement
- 65 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
- 68 Serving of corn

Bible Word Search: Peter

https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_Peter_0.htm

All the words listed below are in the puzzle – left, right, up, down or diagonally. Find each word and circle each letter of the words you find. After you have found all the words, the leftover letters form the **mystery answer**.

- Alms, Angel, Antioch, Apostle, Arrested, Beloved, Bold, Caiaphas, Capernaum, Cephas, Church, Decapolis, Denial, Devotion, Elijah, Eminence, Energetic, Fig, Fisherman, Galilee, Gamaliel, Herod, Impulsive, John, Judas, Judea, Kingdom, Martyr, Miracle, Moses, Mother, Palestine, Passover, Pentecost, Perea, Rebuke, Samaria, Sanhedrin, Scripture, Spirit, Twelve



Answers to last month's puzzles:

Bible Word Search mystery answer:
MERCY AND GRACE

Last month's cryptogram:

ONE THING I DO KNOW. I WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE!

John 9:25

Cryptogram (<https://www.dltk-bible.com/cryptograms/cryptogram-index.htm>)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	
3				18				17						1							9					

_____ A _____ E _____ E _____ A _____ E E _____ A _____
 16 12 3 26 13 18 22 18 3 14 8 15 18 18 2 21 3 12 5 13

_____ I _____ E .
 21 17 12 13 10 18

Mountain-top experiences

15th February 2026

Exodus 24:12–18; Matt 17:1–9

Sermon by Xiaoxi Lou

Exodus 24:12–18

¹² The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.'

¹³ Then Moses set out with Joshua his assistant, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. ¹⁴ He said to the elders, 'Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.'

¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. ¹⁸ Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Matthew 17:1–9

¹⁷ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.' ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

Where do you get your purpose and inspiration from? I will often be inspired by different words, by other people. I think a lot of people love to turn to nature, take time out of their usual, to look at different things from what they see everyday.

I think this is actually pretty common knowledge. After all, that's why every picture of holidays either looks super relaxing, or more inspirational: rugged, challenging, but also beautiful.

Have you ever heard of the phrase 'mountain-top experiences'? While I've only really heard the phrase used in some Christian settings, it's the same idea when movies show people like Batman being taught how to fight in some hidden Tibetan monastery: he's gone to a mountain to gain special knowledge. Or when we're shown these pictures of our future holiday. Here are a few inspirational holiday ideas I took from 'webjet!' [Slides]

Maybe something more familiar? Mount Doom, and the Fellowship of the Ring trying to get to it. A different sort of 'mountain-top experience', but still cathartic!! A few very different ideas of 'mountain-top' experiences there:

one of gaining wisdom and training, and another of relaxation; yet another of a journey to save the world.

Well, today we have two 'mountain-top' experiences: Moses first has gone up the mountain to receive wisdom from God. For those of us really familiar with Exodus, you might be able to tell from the chapter references which *time* this is that Moses went up. Of course, many of us will know that his first trek up Mount Sinai didn't go so well. Moses gets told by God in the midst of receiving the Ten Commandments, that he'd better go down quick. What's happening? Well, Aaron his brother, goaded on by the people, creates a false god of gold: a cow, for them to worship. Well, today's reading that Moses has gone up the mountain is actually the second time. And many of us would know too, that this is the second time that Moses goes up, and will *bring back* the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments successfully.

And our reading from Matthew has the three closest disciples to Jesus (John, Peter and James) up on a mountain too. This time, Jesus brings them up the mountain with Him and they receive a message from God that confirms who Jesus is. The same message God gave when Jesus was baptised in chapter 3 of Matthew. Not only that, but two other greats of the faith, Elijah and Abraham, appear with Jesus.

Why do you think they have taken this 'mountain trek'? Which do you think they might be like? Is it like Moses going up the mountain to gain some special training like Batman: he did end up with the Ten Commandments? Or like Peter says, is it a chance for them to build Jesus, Elijah and Moses some houses? Peter is probably thinking back to all the houses that the Israelites had to make out in the desert, so of course he might need to make a house for them. I think Peter was feeling a bit overwhelmed and offered this very human, very inadequate, attempt at worship to these three greats of the Jewish faith. In any case both readings have very different lead ups and very different endings.

Similarities:

- Clouds at the top;
- Shining face;
- God giving wisdom and purpose.

Differences:

- The disciples are WITH Jesus rather than being told to stay below the mountain;
- God gives specific approval to Jesus: the exact same wording that Matthew reports from the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

I think the biggest difference between the two 'mountain-top experiences' is the fact that Jesus is there with his disciples. He doesn't have to leave most of them at the bottom of the mountain the way that Moses left Joshua and Hur and the other leaders. Jesus, God in human form; Emmanuel: God with us, is really WITH His disciples. Even though God tells them and reminds them that 'This is my Son and I am well pleased with him' just like the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus is sitting there WITH his disciples. This is very different from the mountain-top experience of Moses and the Israelites, where distance is required. Jesus is really with them and even comforts his disciples saying: 'Get up, don't be afraid'.

These two different mountain-top experiences tell us a lot about human experience in relationship to God. It also tells us a lot about God's plan for humans. Just like we explored before, mountain-top experiences provide space and a different setting (change is as good as a holiday!). This new setting provides rest, space, new learning. The problem I have with 'mountain-top experiences' is that it seems like we humans don't learn much from them, and seem to need to repeat them regularly: we need reminders. After all, Moses had to go up twice. After all, despite the disciples being up there with Jesus, these are the same guys who argue later about 'who is the greatest'.

The problem I think is: I start to think that I need to be on a mountain top to receive wisdom from God. But that's silly isn't it? After all, I've received the Holy Spirit already.

Or maybe, I start to think that the mountain top is a chance to escape the world. In both of our mountain tops today though, they are both places where God was seen and known. That isn't the same thing as a holiday; it isn't a chance to escape. Actually, in both cases, the mountain-top experience was a 'skilling up' like Batman, to prepare them for the work to be done. Jesus preps his disciples for the work they are to do.

Why this sort of 'repeat' pattern? Why does Jesus use the same words he did at the beginning of Matthew? Why does he say 'don't tell anyone' like he has this whole trek to Jerusalem?

I think Jesus does all these things because he's working towards the ultimate plan that we all see at Easter. The one that God shares in Deuteronomy 18:15: *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen: you shall listen to him.*

Mountain-top experiences did have clouds on them like Mount Doom! Wisdom was given, approval was given, like Batman! But unlike Moses and the Israelites, where Moses leaves behind Hur and Joshua to manage things, and directed the Israelites to remain at the bottom of the mountain, the disciples were with Jesus. They were given the privilege of seeing the approval of God of His Son.

What does that mean for us?

Does this mean we should go on top of mountains? Not sure if that's necessary or even possible for all of us. But it's clear that there is benefit to taking time away from everyday concerns to check in with God, to seek His wisdom and guidance.

Unlike in the Old Testament, we haven't been left to our devices to make false gods. We know that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon all the disciples to give them courage to speak, to point them *back* to Jesus.

It does mean though, with this second comparative mountain top experience, we have a huge difference. Here is Jesus and He is the one all of the Jews had been waiting for; Jesus is the one each of us has been waiting for.

It tells us that unlike Moses and the Israelites, who had to make sure they were clean before they entered into God's presence, we can be bold in entering Jesus' presence. We can safely make moments of time with God and know that Jesus is that man who makes it possible—that he is indeed with us: 'beside us' rather than 'distant and on top of the mountain'. Rather than terrifying and distant, one that causes death if we get too close, or

are unclean, we still feel fear and trembling, as evidenced by Peter's response (let's build you houses—really? Houses? They need them?), but we are beside Jesus.

It is God and Jesus who will be our source of wisdom and truth. Whether it is times on a mountain or times of silence before the household wakes up, or maybe when the household is asleep, times of silence with God are good. And for us, rather than look for big fire, clouds coming down, let us remember that Jesus brought His disciples with Him up that mountain. Let us ask for, keep praying about, and turn our faces towards God to find and be guided by His giving of wisdom. Be bold in entering Jesus' presence, rather than worried about whether we are 'clean enough'. Make sure to take moments of reflection and know that the one you are standing beside is Jesus. Not only that, but that it will be His Spirit that will be guiding us. No need to offer to build houses for the greats, just because you're overwhelmed and over-awed. Rather, these regular mountain-top experiences can be a regular practice.

As Blomberg notes: Three disciples are privileged to come to an 'advance viewing' of Jesus' coming sacrifice and glory. This was its own sort of 'mountain-top' moment and point to Jesus' final saving act. It points to the way Jesus reveals God's plans, and the truth and wisdom He provides to us.

As we head towards Lent (I know, it snuck up on me too!), a time of reflection and sacrifice, meant to mimic and remind us of Jesus' 40 days of deprivation in the desert, and also the journey of Jesus with his disciples for his final salvation act of death upon a Cross, we can have our own sort of 'mountain-top' experiences too. Let us make times away, for re-energising; inspiration; and to be guided by God. Whether it be actual mountain-top experiences or just moments to stop and breathe; times to pray; times away from the everyday to turn to God for wisdom, energy and guidance. Let's seek wisdom from God. Let's have 'mountain-top experiences' with God, even in the everyday.

Nicodemus

1st March 2026 (Lent 2), Holy Spirit

John 3:1–17

Sermon by Helen McAlley

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

³ Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

⁴ 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

⁵ Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you

cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'

⁹ 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ 'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

LIVING IN TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

It is now more than sixty years since I began my studies at the University of Melbourne. It was a difficult time for me as I struggled with learning Psychology and English Literature and other subjects as part of my Arts degree. I realised that much of what I was being taught was not in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. For example, in psychology we were told that we are all simply the products of our genes and our environment. What does that mean? That we have no free will. We are like machines which are acted upon by our environment. It was certainly a reductionist view of human life. It meant that we cannot make any real choices like choosing Jesus to be our Saviour. The literature that I was studying was also often anti-Christian or assumed that the Christian faith was irrelevant to modern life.

On the other hand, at the church I attended, I remembered the love, fellowship and acceptance of people for me and for each other. I attended a group called the Young Adult Christian Endeavour where we had interesting speakers who shared their faith. We were taught to value the Scriptures and to pray aloud. There would be youth teas and sing-songs after church on Sunday nights. We would meet in someone's home and sing the old hymns and choruses around the piano. I was also in the youth choir.

For me it was like being in two different worlds, the Christian and the non-Christian, and I struggled to work it all out. I sought out older, experienced Christians to help me sort out my beliefs.

SEEKING

My friend Pearl (who had a car, which I didn't have) took me to visit a lady who was the mother of another friend of ours. We used to visit her by night. This wonderful lady would spend the whole evening patiently answering my questions about the faith. Then there was an elderly doctor (a GP) who was still practicing at the age of eighty. He was one of our church organists. After a church service, I would seek him out and ask him the questions that were concerning me at the time. He would always have a thoughtful answer to my questions.

I was interested in knowing the truth about the Bible and about Jesus. In those days, there was very little emphasis on the supernatural. Reality was what we could perceive with the senses, and this was certainly the idea of the behaviourist psychologist JB Watson whose ideas so influenced the psychology I was being taught at the time. (Needless to say, psychological ideas are quite different nowadays).

I wanted to know the truth. If Jesus was really the Son of God and had risen from the dead, and had a claim on my life, I wanted to follow Him. But what if He were not true? Then I did not want to have anything to do with Him.

NICODEMUS SEEKS THE TRUTH

As I think of myself all those years ago, I am reminded of Nicodemus whose story we have in our gospel reading today. Just as I visited that kind lady by night with my questions, so Nicodemus came to see Jesus Himself one night and asked Him some questions that were on his mind. Just as I was seeking for the TRUTH, so Nicodemus also wanted to know the truth about Jesus.

THE PHARISEES

Nicodemus was a member of a Jewish sect called the Pharisees. About five centuries before the time of Jesus on earth, the Jewish people had been taken as captives to Babylon and the Old Testament makes it clear that this captivity was a consequence of their disobedience to the Lord. The Pharisees wanted to make sure that such an event would never happen again and had added all sorts of extra rules to obey to the instructions that were already in the Bible. For example, they had a long list of things that people could not do on the Sabbath. Moreover, they taught that these extra traditions (the oral traditions) were equal to God's written laws. This put heavy burdens upon the people and Jesus criticised the Pharisees because they often did not obey their own rules and because they tended to be judgmental. And they were certainly not open-minded to the idea that Jesus could have been the Messiah.

Nevertheless, there would have been Pharisees who genuinely loved God and sought to follow Him. The apostle Paul had been a Pharisee and he was zealous for God, although misguided until he had the encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road. Nicodemus seems to have been a genuine seeker of truth. He was also a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem which also functioned as a court. Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin during His trial.

JESUS ANSWERS NICODEMUS

Jesus welcomed Nicodemus, took his questions very seriously and gave him thoughtful answers to his questions. He knew when people were genuinely seeking the things of God and when they were mocking Him. He explained to Nicodemus about the need to be born again. When we come to Jesus for salvation, we are like new people, born 'from above' or from heaven. Jesus went on to explain how He would be 'lifted up' just as Moses lifted up a brass serpent in the wilderness and those who had the faith and obedience to look at that serpent would be healed. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and would be the Saviour of the whole world. John 3:16 is perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bible: 'For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost, but should have eternal life.'

NICODEMUS' COLLEAGUES

Nicodemus is mentioned a couple of other times in the Bible. When Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit, the Pharisees scoffed at Him and wanted to arrest Him. On that occasion,

¹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 265.

Nicodemus stood up for Jesus, which would have been a courageous thing to do. He said to the other Pharisees, 'Surely our Law does not condemn the accused without hearing what He has to say and what He has done?' The other Pharisees made fun of Nicodemus saying, 'Are you a Galilean too?...Look where you will, you won't find that any prophet comes out of Galilee.' (John 7:50-53). Making fun of Nicodemus in this way shows the prejudice of the Pharisees, rather than being logical, open minded and scholarly as we would expect people of their learning to be.

The Pharisees who so prided themselves on knowing the Scriptures somehow could not see how many of the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus, including a Scripture that the Messiah would minister in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1-2).

After the death of Jesus, it was Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who prepared the body of Jesus for burial. This was a loving thing to do and shows the devotion of Nicodemus to Jesus. It is very likely when we consider these passages that he became a follower of Jesus.

AN EXAMPLE FOR US

What can we learn of this story of Nicodemus? He sought the truth even when it would have been inconvenient for him. He opened his mind to the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah in spite of the scorn of his colleagues. He asked questions and sought to find the truth. And he acted on what he found.

Nicodemus is an example to us today in the way that he sought the truth of Jesus. We too would have sought to know the truth of Jesus before we accepted Him as our Lord and Saviour, but, as believers, can we also get into the habit of seeking Him in every aspect of our lives today? Can we ask Him to guide us each day, knowing that if our hearts are right before Him He will certainly guide us? Can we be willing to do His will even if it is inconvenient to us? Can we keep close to Him by reading His word, by prayer and fellowship with other Christians? Can we be obedient in everything that He shows us?

GOD'S PLAN FOR US

I would like to refresh our memories today as to what the Lord Jesus has done for us in saving us. The Bible teaches us that we cannot please God by our own efforts, and that is why Jesus, the eternal Son of God came to this earth to take the punishment for our sins or wrongdoing. Jesus died and rose again and is now glorified in heaven. To become a Christian we need to pray a simple prayer receiving what Jesus has done for us as a gift and asking us to come into our lives through the Holy Spirit. As I pray this prayer now, let us all renew our faith in Jesus and determine that we shall follow Him wherever He leads us.

Dear God. I know that I have sinned in many ways against other people and against you. I need your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ died for me and rose from the dead. I invite Him to come into all of my life as my Saviour. Thank you for your gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Amen.

If that is the first time that you have prayed a prayer like that, be assured that you are now a Christian and in God's family for ever.

Helen McAlley

Shallow conversations

8th March 2026

Exodus 17:1-7; John 4:5-42

Sermon by Xiaoxi Lou

Exodus 17:1-7

17 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarrelled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.'

Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?'

³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'

⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, 'What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.'

⁵ The LORD answered Moses, 'Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.' So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'

John 4:5-42

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

¹¹ 'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?' ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?'

¹³ Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'

¹⁶ He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'

¹⁷ 'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

¹⁹ 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

²¹ 'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from

the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

²⁵ The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.'

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you - I am he.'

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?' ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way towards him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.'

³² But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.'

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?'

³⁴ 'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.'

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I've ever done.' ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'

When we first arrived in Australia, we came direct to Melbourne. After all, when given a chance to work at Monash University, on a new graduate salary, you don't get much money to travel off to Sydney. And so it wasn't until I was older, that I found out about the Sydney/Melbourne debate. And let me tell you, I wasn't sure how things would go between Denise and me once I found out she was originally from Sydney. Unlike the need to build a different city (Canberra), in order to settle the 'capital' debate, I think Denise and I get along well, and it's been lovely to see how you all don't hold any of my South-East Melbourne experiences against me either. After all, the dumpling restaurants I miss, are starting to make an appearance here too...

To any outsider who is visiting Australia, they might say: who cares about Sydney vs. Melbourne? They both have their strengths and their weaknesses. But they matter and they don't matter. Because while the Sydney-Melbourne debate really is a bit on the shallow side, being told by another Chinese person that 'it's clear you're from Changsha (like being told "clearly you're from Franger!)", I can hear it in your accent!' does hurt a bit more. And as I explain to anyone who asks: yes, I do speak Chinese. I would be able to buy something in Chinese, but I would definitely get ripped off. Unimpressed looks from other Chinese people make that debate matter a bit more.

In today's readings we have quite a few debates and conversations happening too: some shallow, some deep. The Samaritan woman's unsurprising confusion in our story makes sense! When John tells us what the Samaritan woman does when meeting Jesus, it makes sense:

⁹ *The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

Not only that, but even the words they use are confusing! *Because of the double meaning of 'living water' . . . the woman finds it easy to think Jesus is talking about fresh, running water, like that of the spring that feeds the well* (D.A. Carson). Add to that, her initial concerns about Jesus being a Jew and her being a Samaritan are all understandable and right! She doesn't normally interact with a Jewish man! She doesn't normally have them approach her, asking for water, and entering into weird conversations with her about drinking water and living water. The Samaritan woman in our story today is naturally expecting a particular sort of response: after all, Jesus knows she's from Melbourne, sorry, Changsha, +sigh+ Samaria, just from her actions, getting water in the middle of the day, and so she is expecting the conversation to stay in shallow waters.

Jesus, being Jesus, ignores this and happily breaks social and religious taboos and just starts talking to her. Meanwhile, John explains why the woman is so suspicious: After all, how can she not be suspicious? *For Jews do not use dishes Samaritans have used* (NIV footnote).

If Jews normally don't even use crockery or cutlery that Samaritans use, how is she supposed to share any water with him (*at his request!*), when he doesn't even have his own bucket!

'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?'

All practical surface stuff right? But there's a much deeper conversation happening here. We know Jesus isn't someone who is great at sticking to the script. Of course he launches into a deeper conversation almost immediately after meeting with this woman. Even before she can ask about HOW she can help him with water he says:

¹⁰ *Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'*

Hahaha! Jesus isn't good about staying in a shallow conversation is he? To be fair though, the confusion from the Samaritan woman is completely understandable.

Jesus wastes no time. He jumps back into the deeper and real conversation that's really happening here, though, when he asks the woman about her husbands. First, Jesus is speaking truth about who HE is (the source of living water), about who the woman is ('Go call your husband and come back'); and about the real needs that he can fulfil and answer. He speaks and sees the truth of what he will do; what the Samaritan woman needs; and brings this 'outsider' into His kingdom.

In response, she does something that the disciples don't do in this story. She has a real and deep conversation with Jesus. She talks theology; and speaks truth about her marital status: *'I have no husband'*. In response, the Samaritan woman does something that the religious leaders who have met with Jesus thus far, *definitely* don't do: she acknowledges the truth that Jesus speaks. She is preaching

loudly about it, and rejoices over His knowledge of her.

As Carson explains: *she cannot fathom what would possess a Jew to ask her for a drink. She does not know that, far from being defiled by what is unclean, Jesus sanctifies what he touches. Others who touch lepers become unclean; Jesus touches a leper and brings healing* (Matthew 8:3).

Does this conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus seem at all familiar? Is it a bit like the conversation between the Israelites and Moses in our earlier reading?: *17 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarrelled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.'*

Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?'

³ *But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'*

⁴ *Then Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.'*

None of these conversations are random; or unreasonable. The Israelites were thirsty! The Samaritan woman is a Samaritan! What they were, though, were those 'get to know you' conversations—shallow conversations—they were thirsty! And just like the Samaritan woman who legitimately needs water to drink, and really IS a Samaritan, and really ISN'T meant to talk with Jews, this conversation gets swept aside by Jesus. God provides water. Jesus brings the conversation to the real issue.

There's even a third shallow conversation happening when the disciples show up. And it isn't a surprise that the disciples have a strange conversation with Jesus too! They're just trying to be practical! I mean, if Jesus is 'hangry' he won't be able to teach well, right? It's important that the disciples bring him food!

²⁷ *Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'*

The disciples ARE concerned for Jesus' physical well-being; but are also really confused. Why is their Rabbi talking to a woman?: not just a shallow conversation about food, but a deep theological conversation. After all, some Rabbis of the time were even saying no male should talk to a female, let alone a Samaritan female!!

Jesus though, doesn't just step past these shallow surface boundaries. He isn't that type of guy who enjoys or remains in 'shallow'. At every turn, he moves into deep waters quickly. And so, a conversation about drinking water jumps from shallow to deep in a moment when Jesus replies to his disciples: *'I have food to eat that you know nothing about'*, echoing Deuteronomy 8:3.

³³ *Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?'*

³⁴ *'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.'*

Yet again, Jesus refuses to keep things surface or shallow when even the disciples are sticking to a 'Sydney-Melbourne' level.

More important than anything, though, is the response to the conversations. The Samaritan woman does bring up the difference between her and Jews. She doesn't brush it under the carpet; she isn't polite. And when Jesus confronts her with a big issue (her marriage), rather than being ashamed or avoiding the conversation, she acknowledges his truth-speaking, is courageous and joyous in response!

²⁸ *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,*

²⁹ *'Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?'*

³⁰ *They came out of the town and made their way towards him.*

And in response to this woman's testimony, they respond to this deeper conversation:

⁴² *They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'*

While it is wise not to 'dive head-first into a shallow pond', as another priest once told me, Jesus gives us an example. At every turn, yet again, He dives in deep where others don't expect. He speaks truth almost immediately to this Samaritan woman. When his disciples think first of physical needs, Jesus speaks of the spiritual food he has 'that they know nothing about'. When the Israelites focus on their physical needs and remain doubtful of the God who just parted a sea for them, through Moses God provides. And so just as those that responded to the Samaritan woman, we too can say: ⁴² *They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'*

That is a good reason for 'getting deeper', right? Why? Because things like BCA, each of our missionaries, and we ourselves, can have deeper conversations that make it worth it.

Let us keep looking for real conversations. Sure, 'don't dive into shallow waters'. After all, that supposed secret chat group that the ladies have, to decide what colours they will wear on Sundays...I would like to join! But the real conversations that matter are the ones about how they are going in their spiritual lives. The heart conversations are the ones about relationships and how we're each travelling with Jesus. I don't want to be like the Israelites whining about water, instead of marvelling at the great miracles God had just performed to save my life! Neither do I want to use the confused disciples as my example. I want to be like the Samaritan women! Let's make sure we keep asking questions, engaging with God (including sometimes asking Him the hard questions) so that truth can be spoken into our lives; so that just like the Samaritan woman, I can speak truth to others and say with joy: *he told me all about my life*. Why? So I can have real conversations that allow others to know the true source of Living Water. So I can have hard conversations that can bring healing and direct them to Jesus.

Let's pray together now, as we head towards Easter, as we look to celebrate our 175th birthday of St. John's, that just like the Samaritan woman we might have the courage to ask real questions, have deep conversations as we invite others to come and celebrate the true and deep need for salvation that Jesus will always choose: he will always head into deep water.

Jesus and the man born blind

15th March 2026

John 9:1–41

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

9 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

³ 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

⁶ After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means 'Sent'). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.'

But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.'

¹⁰ 'How then were your eyes opened?' they asked.

¹¹ He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.'

¹² 'Where is this man?' they asked him.

'I don't know,' he said.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. 'He put mud on my eyes,' the man replied, 'and I washed, and now I see.'

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.'

But others asked, 'How can a sinner perform such signs?' So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, 'What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.'

The man replied, 'He is a prophet.'

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ 'Is this your son?' they asked. 'Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?'

²⁰ 'We know he is our son,' the parents answered, 'and we know he was born blind.'

²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.' ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God by telling the truth,' they said. 'We know this man is a sinner.'

²⁵ He replied, 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'

²⁶ Then they asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'

²⁷ He answered, 'I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?'

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.'

³⁰ The man answered, 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'

³⁴ To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

³⁶ 'Who is he, sir?' the man asked. 'Tell me so that I may believe in him.'

³⁷ Jesus said, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.'

³⁸ Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him.

³⁹ Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.'

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind too?'

⁴¹ Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.'

When bad things happen to good people, we are shocked. We like to think that there is an equilibrium in the world that will even out. And our courts are one way of restoring things to right, so that the wrong are punished and the righteous are upheld.

Sometimes in life we can draw a direct line of cause and effect. Many years ago while I was travelling with one of my friends, we were staying in a beautiful 18th century farmhouse. I happened to wear bedsocks because it was cold. I discovered that bedsocks plus timber stairs don't match. There was a direct causation—not just a correlation—of me wearing bedsocks and the bruise that ensued on my nether region from the huge crash.

We know a direct cause of accidents can be people using drugs or alcohol just before they were driving. We know that people who break the law will go to jail. There is a direct cause. Although I saw a fantastic sign the other day, with this sort of thinking about a direct cause and a correlation and the difference between the two, how that can go awry. On Bell Street, I saw a fabulous sign that says 'Tattoos save lives. The dinosaurs didn't have them. Look what happened to them.' [Laughter]

Now Jesus' disciples were in a world where if you had a disability, people assumed it was your fault, or the fault of your parents or grandparents. So the man born blind prompted the question from Jesus' disciples. Women who were unable to conceive felt shame, because they thought God was punishing them because they weren't able to conceive a child.

I love this account in John 9 of the man born blind, because it begins with a question of a direct line of culpability, a cause and effect. When the disciples asked who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind, Jesus, as he always does, turns things on its head. So Jesus, the light of the world,

who brings light to this man, is able to say in John 9:3, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' Jesus the light, brings light to this man's life.

It's interesting in this whole account, an interaction with Jesus occurs at the beginning and at the end, but mostly it's about the man born blind and his interaction with others. So I have just two points today. The blind man given sight by Jesus; and the sighted who are blind to God's mercy.

So let's first look at the man who was healed. It is pretty extraordinary that a person who had been born blind, so used to have to beg, and who was of age, so he was a grown-up, people can't believe it's him. They even say, 'Oh, no. It just looks like him.' And he has to say, 'I am the man. This is me.' The amazing thing after his encounter with Jesus, where Jesus makes some mud with some spit and some dirt and rubs it on the man's eyes and he goes and washes off, and he comes home seeing: he tells everyone who would listen what Jesus did for him.

First, he tells the people around him. 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.' (verse 11). He then repeats this in verse 15 to the elders, the religious leaders. 'He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.'; and a little later he says the same thing again.

But what we also hear in this account—I wonder if you heard it when it was read: first in verse 11, he refers to Jesus as 'the man'. In verse 15, when the religious leaders ask him what he did, and then say, 'Who do you think he was?', the man answers, 'He is a prophet'. Then when his parents come, and he's again questioned by the religious leaders, he says, 'One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see! . . . Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' So even in his telling of the story, he is becoming more and more spiritually aware. He moves from saying 'the man Jesus' to 'he was a prophet'; and then in verse 32 'he is from God'.

Finally, when Jesus re-enters the scene, when he heard that the man had been thrown out by the synagogue, he asks the man, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Son of Man' was a title that was used of the person who was coming to be the Saviour. The man asks Jesus, 'Who is he, sir? Tell me so I may believe in him.' So, in verse 37, Jesus says to him, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.'; and the man says in verse 38, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him.

As the man's eyes were opened physically, his heart was opened spiritually. He moves from understanding Jesus as a man, to a prophet from God, to one to be worshipped. The one who was sent from God, the one who is the Saviour, God in the flesh. He encounters a physical and a spiritual awakening.

Well, what about the religious leaders? Here we see them do the exact reverse: as they hear of this wonderful, wondrous miracle, they are blind to God's mercy and love.

Straight away they want to put Jesus in a box. They say, 'This man does not keep the Sabbath'. They have categorised him immediately as a sinner, because what Jesus did, by mixing up a bit of mud with some saliva and dirt and putting it on the man's eyes, was regarded as work: work on the Sabbath, which God's people were forbidden from doing. They were so strict about the law, that they forgot that grace always comes before the law.

So, let me just ask you, when did God give his people the law? When did God give his people the Ten Commandments? Was it while they were still in Egypt?—so that that's why he could rescue them, because they kept the law: so God said, 'Okay, I will rescue you.' Or was it *after* he rescued them, and brought them into the desert? Was it before or after? When did God give his people the law? *After!* He set his love upon them, he rescued them, he showed them mercy, grace, love, forgiveness, and *then* he gave them the Old Testament law. Mercy and grace and love always triumph over law.

If this man had been a donkey and had fallen into a pit, it would have been fine for the religious leaders to say, 'Oh, yes, you can rescue a donkey. He's fallen over. He's fallen into a pit.' But to heal a man born blind? 'No, that can't be right. He must be a sinner.' We see in verse 16, *some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others asked, 'But how can a sinner perform such signs?' So they were divided.* So even among the religious leaders, there was a division. Some said, 'He is not from God.'

They brought the man born blind in a second time, in verse 24: *they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God by telling the truth,' they said. 'We know this man is a sinner.'* So, they've moved from saying 'He's not from God. Oh, he's a sinner.' And then when the man says (v. 27), 'Do you want to become his disciples too?', they say (vv 28–9): 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.' So they move from saying, 'Well, he's not from God. He's a sinner.' And because they cannot explain this wondrous, merciful miracle, those people who claimed to know God and see, are blind to God's mercy and kindness to the man born blind.

So they say, as people when they are pushed, well, well, I can't make a decision. They were blind to God's mercy and grace and healing and love. Jesus then says to them that they are blind, for they do not see the greater works of God.

Jesus, the light of the world, gave sight to a blind man; and Jesus does that for us. For every time a person becomes a worshipper of Jesus, every time a person becomes a Christian, their eyes are opened to the truths of who Jesus is, that he is indeed the Son of God, the Saviour, and they finally see who Jesus is. We can give that testimony ourselves, can't we?—when we finally understood who Jesus was and his mercy and grace and love shown to us.

For every human being needs that spiritual sight. We need spiritual sight to see Jesus, as much as the blind man needed God's gift of sight that came through Jesus.

So friends, as we consider those of our friends who don't yet know Jesus as Lord

and Saviour, a good thing to pray is that their eyes might be opened: their spiritual eyes might be opened. They need the gift of the Holy Spirit working in their lives to begin to consider who Jesus is.

The blind man moved from saying Jesus was a man, to a prophet, to 'from God', to 'he worshipped him'. That's the same movement that many people make today as they investigate Jesus. Yet the religious ones, who thought they had God in a box, that God would only do what he had done in the past: they were blind to see the amazing works of God. So friends, let's pray that our eyes would always stay open to Jesus. That the eyes of our friends might be opened to him. And that we would see that miracle of many people coming to put their faith in Jesus and, like the man born blind, say, 'Lord, I believe', and worship him. Amen.

The raising of Lazarus

22nd March 2026

Ezekiel 37:1–14; John 11:1–45

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

Ezekiel 37:1–14

37 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

I said, 'Sovereign LORD, you alone know.'

4 Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD."

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD."

John 11:1–45

11 Now a man named Lazarus was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay ill, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is ill.'

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.' 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days, 7 and then he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.'

8 'But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?'

9 Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the day-time will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.'

11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.'

12 His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14 So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'

16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'

23 Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

24 Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

25 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

27 'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. 'The Teacher is here,' she said, 'and is asking for you.'

29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 'Where have you laid him?' he asked.

'Come and see, Lord,' they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'

37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ 'Take away the stone,' he said.

'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.'

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.'

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth round his face.

Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

There's a quote that's often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, but probably was used before him, that says the only two certain things in life are death and taxes. Well, the statistic that we all know: one out of one people die. We all die. We know that.

Here in this wonderful passage with the resurrection of Lazarus, we see Jesus' ultimate triumph over death. It also points to who Jesus is, as the one, the sent one, God in the flesh, not one of many, but *the* one.

We know that humans can create life. All of us are here because of our parents' love for each other, and were conceived through our parents. We also know that we can resuscitate life. The nurses and doctors here will speak of times when we've been able to resuscitate life and forestall death. One of the reasons we have the (. . . what are those little things? 'Defibrillator'. Thank you very much, Allan) defibrillator down here in the hall is because we know that if we can quickly restart someone's heart, we can resuscitate them even if their heart has stopped.* You probably know of people, or may know people personally, who've had organ transplants that have allowed life to go on as normal for other people. But here in this scene with Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus, we see the triumph of life over death through the Lord Jesus.

So today we have three scenes, and in those three scenes there are three verses, and three encouragements for us. So scene one: the house of grief.

We know that when we go to someone's home who has had a bereavement, it's not the normal sort of greeting that we receive. People are thankful that we go and sit and mourn with them. But it's a different feel, isn't it, in a house of grief. The verse in this house of grief that Jesus says is: '*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*' (John 11:25)

We know this story well: these very, very close friends of Jesus, Martha and Mary, and their brother Lazarus. Lazarus has died four days previously, and the sisters, who were probably under the protection of their brother,

were weeping. This house was a house of grief, and many people had come to mourn with the sisters. Often at this time as well there were professional mourners, who would come and wail loudly, and play particular tunes on flutes and recorder-type instruments.

There was a common belief in the resurrection at the last day. As Martha said, 'I know that I will see my brother again at the resurrection on the last day'. We even know that people think of that time when they will stand before their Maker. I think it was more common in old Westerns: 'Be ready to meet your Maker!' as they stood, ready to have a duel in the street. In verse 23, Jesus says, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha has had faith in Jesus and his gifts to heal and restore—we know that Jesus had already restored three people previously to this great resurrection from death. But Jesus says to her, '*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*'

This is a verse that's used at the start of every Christian funeral. Did you note Martha's response? 'Yes, Lord, you are the Christ' or 'the Messiah' or 'the sent one'. Jesus himself says that he is the centre of resurrection hope. Martha says, 'Even now I know that God will do whatever you ask him.' She has faith in Jesus in the midst of death.

When Jesus says he is the resurrection and the life, it's a bold claim; it's an outrageous claim. It's one that Christians still affirm today, different from other faith traditions. Many other faith traditions point to a path to follow the way to life; yet Jesus outrageously says he is the source of life.

We also note that this was at a time when Jesus is heading to Jerusalem, when his own death on the cross, and resurrection, was imminent. So, the encouragement for us from this section, from this house of grief, is: this is our faith. The faith that, for those whom we know and love who have gone from here, those people whom we have been present in church when we have said our final goodbye to them—we know that there is life for them, and for us, beyond physical life. When Jesus says 'I am', he appropriates the name of God, and does what only God can do.

Scene two: the tomb of Lazarus, and the verse here, the shortest verse in Scripture, *Jesus wept*. In the account, Martha goes and tells Mary that their friend Jesus was there—their friend who had healed others, who had opened the eyes of the blind, whom they knew had authority from God. Mary also had faith in Jesus' ability to heal, and in her grief was weeping and many others with her. It's what we do when people are confronted with grief, isn't it? We go to them. We sit. We visit. We sometimes don't need to say anything. We drink lots of tea. We allow them to cry. And we speak in hushed tones, and weep with them.

Isn't it amazing that Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus? Why does he weep when he knows that he is about to bring him back to life? Jesus said in verse four, '*It is for God's glory so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*' Again in verse 15, '*So that you may believe.*' But why does Jesus weep? It's a natural human response to grief. More than that, Luke's gospel tells us that Mary, who had sat at the feet of Jesus and learned from him—it's like she has forgotten that he is the one, the only one.

The Scriptures tell us that when Jesus approached the tomb, he was greatly disturbed in spirit, and deeply moved. In the original language, we get much more of the sense of Jesus' *anger* at death. *Anger* at the presence of death before him, the one who is life, and the presence of sin and death. The unbelief in him, Jesus was abhorred at.

We might say that because of death and taxes, we know that grief is natural; but we can only say that glibly when we are not in the midst of grief. Jesus' weeping shows us that this is not the way that life was meant to be. Jesus, the Lord of life, is the giver of life: so death in his presence was offensive. Yet Jesus' grief at the death of his friend was real grief. So, Jesus wept.

The encouragement for us in this verse: like Mary and Martha, our faith does not diminish grief, nor does grief diminish our faith. We know that there is a wrench, a finality of death. The chasm between us and loved ones who have died is vast. The sadness is real. Christians like us grieve, but not without hope. We also rejoice in Christ's presence, knowing that he will put it right.

So, scene three, the climax: Lazarus lives. The verse for this scene is when Jesus says, '*Lazarus, come out!*' (John 11:43)

Jesus says to them, 'Take away the stone.' There occurs a conversation about the wisdom of this, the practicality of dealing with a dead body. Martha knew that Lazarus was dead. It wasn't a trick. He'd been buried for four days. Jews and Muslims today still try to bury their dead within 24 hours if possible. But they trusted in Jesus and moved the stone.

I wonder what people thought. I wonder if they were thinking, 'Oh, this is really bad. This is awful. This is offensive.' Jesus prays for the benefit of the crowd, so that they might believe that God sent Jesus, that Jesus is the Lord of Light. So he calls to Lazarus by name. '*Lazarus, come out!*'

It's interesting that he calls him by name, because we had the passage from Ezekiel read—and it's always very hard not to choose that wonderful hymn 'Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones'—but Jesus called to Lazarus by name so that all the other people who had died didn't rise as well. It was just for Lazarus. Jesus' words are reminiscent of God's word, God's creative force. Jesus simply spoke. He calls Lazarus, and Lazarus is restored to life. He really was dead and then he really was alive again.

And many believed in Jesus because of this sign and put their faith in Jesus. Not only that, but people wanted to see Lazarus, who had been dead. We're told in chapter 12 of John, *when the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was at Bethany, they came not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well since it was on account of him that many of the other Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.* (John 12:9-10)

We who have put our faith in Jesus, we too know that we will one day succumb to that statistic: one out of one people dying. But the encouragement for us is that we can rejoice in the eternal life we have in Jesus. The resurrection of Lazarus. He eventually went on and lived a normal life and then died a human death. But it also pointed to Jesus' own resurrection. After he went to the cross for our sins once for all, when he rose from the dead, he rose not to die again but to live forever more.

* The Editor is aware that this almost universally-held view of the purpose of defibrillators is in fact incorrect.

Parish Council Notes

Meeting of Monday 16th March

Ministry matters

- Listening in Lent: Denise to circulate summary of PC comments from February meeting for discussion after Palm Sunday service.
- Curacy: haven't received our share from Birch Trust, or additional \$10,000 approved by Bp Brad. Our superannuation portion needs to be reviewed for both years. Agreed previously to have 2025 overpayment offset against 2026.
- Youth happy to continue with previous activities arrangements. Weekend away postponed as speaker unavailable.
- Op shop has been closed a number of times because of decreasing number of volunteers. Payments for 2025 have all been received. A meeting will be discussing the MOU and lack of Profit & Loss Statements received for 2026.
- St John's 175 years celebration: three people volunteered to be involved; others welcome. Archbishop booked for Sunday 16 August.
- Disappointed potential student minister for 2026 has declined offer.
- Synod reps/Alternates: if necessary, election after combined service on 15 April.

Financial matters

- Transfers into other accounts to accumulate more interest completed.
- Rent for DAA's use of office near lower hall is \$1000 per term.
- AA group has asked how much money they owe, as they did not pay rent for a while.

Property matters

- *St John's*
– Decided plaques in Memorial Garden must be brass. Discussed with recommended manufacturer, emailed families.

- Meeting with Heritage Victoria re inclusion of grounds surrounding church in heritage listing. Report received requiring more inspections by engineer and more detailed drawings.
- New heating and cooling at Gloucester Drive not working, needs more warranty inspection.
- *Holy Spirit*
– Two quotes for carpet cleaning, accepted the cheaper: will be completed 30 March. Notice in weekly newsletter and pew sheet requesting volunteers to clear area after Palm Sunday service and restore after cleaning in time for Maundy Thursday service.
- Met with Roger Curry (grass cutter) re extra area to be mown, clearance of overgrown vegetation.

Diocesan professional standards

- Angela Bergman being qualified for Disability Advisor and Advocate.
- Christopher-Jack has completed Level 1 training. Level 3 next.

Vicar's report

- See *Ministry matters* above; also:—
- Moved staff meetings to Wednesdays, but still with Helen first Monday of month.
 - Weiyi has been acting Vicar at Greensborough for a few weeks as vicar had surgery; I have offered him any time/assistance needed.
 - I have been deployed to about 5 meetings in the last 2 months as a trained support person for a parish requesting support.
 - Numbers at Heidelberg growing: weekly average up towards 50. At Holy Spirit numbers remain small, but attendees very committed – much enjoying Weiyi's ministry twice per month.
 - Great to welcome the commitment of several new Christian people to our parish, attending St John's; also occasional visits of folk from Uniting Network, St James' East Ivanhoe and residents of Streeon Views.

- The small Lenten Study Group has been a joy to lead on Tuesday evenings.
- Thursday Bible Study group is smaller than previously with three regulars needing to opt out for health and other reasons.
- Our three committed youth boys are happy to keep serving on 1st Sundays, and have an activity afterwards. Great to see them come on other Sundays too!
- *Visits booked:*
– 19 April: Bishop Genieve Blackwell, our new Bishop of Oodthenong: a pastoral visit to meet the congregation.
– 23 May: Bishop Kate will attend Holy Spirit on Pentecost to preach and observe Xiaoxi preside.
– Rowan will be home this year: I have asked for a Sunday with us.
– 13 December: Adrian (BCA) Combined service?
– I have asked Lyn Pearson to give us a date when she can be with us.
- Still chasing a review of payments made by us to ASG in 2025.
- New cleaner going well.

Wardens' report

- See *Property matters* above; also:—
- *St John's*
– Two leaking taps repaired.
– Faulty lights in hall replaced, extra exterior lighting installed.
– Galvanised metal replaced with Corten steel edging around driveway garden.
– Further negotiations with Diocese re interest due to parish.
 - *Holy Spirit*
– Gas meter for church building removed.

General business

- Fence at back of Jika Street vicarage needs replacing: liaise with both owners' corporations.
Minutes by Rhonda Taylor, précis by Editor

That's the promise of Jesus: this encouragement. 'I am the resurrection and the life', said Jesus. 'Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

Brothers and sisters, we can rejoice that our eternal life in Christ has begun already,

from the time that God's Spirit moved in our hearts and we responded to that answer, 'Yes, I will follow you as my King and my God'. And this eternal life continues on to eternity.

Three scenes, three words, three encouragements. Jesus claimed, 'I am the resurrection and the life'. All we need do is

believe. Jesus' grief when he wept at the tomb of his friends. Yes, we too will grieve, but we grieve with hope in the one who gives eternal life. And Jesus called to Lazarus, 'Come out!' We rejoice in the eternal life we have already have with Jesus; and that will be fully seen when we see him face to face.

