

BANYULE BABBLE

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

AUGUST
2023

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DENISE'S DATELINE

God's presence in hard times

As you know, the last few months have been challenging for me: my Mum, my dog Mabel and my aunty all died within the space of nine weeks. During this time of grief and loss, I have been comforted by so many people, including folk of this parish, who have loved and cared for me and for which I am so thankful.

I want to acknowledge first of all that so many of you have endured more profound griefs than mine: I haven't experienced the death of my own child, or a spouse; so, I don't want to now come across as an 'instant expert' in grief – I'm not. But I do want to share with you about how I experienced God's presence during these last months.

We all know that being a disciple of Jesus does not inoculate us against experiencing grief: the Lord Jesus himself experienced the death of his friend Lazarus, ridicule, the desertion of friends, and the desolation of the Cross. It is something we will all experience eventually, unless we are the first of our family and friends to die. How can we know God's presence in these hard times? In the last few months, I found the following things.

1. The kindness of others was so appreciated, a word of support, a phone call, some food left in the fridge, a hug. I was profoundly moved that the first flowers to arrive at Dad's home were from you, the people of the Parish of Banyule. This meant so much to me and was a great witness to my family of your care for him and me.
2. Letting our tears flow. I don't cry very often, but tears are a part of grief. Tears do not mean that we aren't coping, or that we are weak, or sooky; tears help us to express our sadness. The scriptures tell us of people weeping in sorrow and sadness, with a quick Google search giving 53 instances of people 'weeping' in Scripture. Christians will cry, it is part of being human, and does not mean that we are failing in our faith. Feeling 'safe' to cry with Peter McKay when Mabel died and he drove me to the Vet; with my dear friends with whom I was holidaying when I heard that Mum had died unexpectedly, is a gift for which I thank God.
3. The Holy Spirit's presence. Sometimes portions of Scripture, or a hymn or song ran through my heart and mind. Have you ever had that happen to you? Travelling in the beautiful Northern Territory, Psalm 121 kept coming to me, versions of which I kept singing in my heart.
¹ *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?*
² *My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*
4. This was my Mum's favourite Psalm, and many years ago she told me she wanted it read at her funeral. Knowing that Mum's health was declining following the death of her younger sister, I do feel that God brought to my heart a song version of that Psalm; and on the day Mum died, I prayed that God would do what was best in His timing for my Mum, knowing that God is our help and stay.

5. Rest. Sleep usually comes very easily for me, but some disturbed sleep patterns are to be expected in grief. Some people struggle to fall asleep or to stay asleep; I just wanted to keep sleeping and not get out of bed some days. A snippet of Psalm 23 came to me with freshness during a time of devotion when I was ill in bed a few weeks back: *He makes me lie down...* I must have read Psalm 23 thousands of times in my life...but that day I really felt that God was telling me to lie down and rest physically and rest in God spiritually. What a blessing it was to hear that message that day! Sometimes we need to just rest.

6. There is no schedule for grieving. I have often envied folk of cultures who have specific rituals and timings following bereavement; and I think it is one of the disadvantages of coming from Anglo-Celtic stock! In my experience there are few prescribed or recommended rituals and practices for grieving for modern Aussies. I know that even though I am feeling much more myself, I'm aware that my grieving continues. Someone told me that the third day, the third week and the third month can be significant emotionally for many people following a bereavement; so I expect that will be some hard days ahead, especially those 'firsts': birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries, Mother's day.

7. I know that there are lots of other things that I have learned these past few months; I am just so thankful to God that I have not walked this path alone. The last song played at Mum's funeral was a recording of Mario Lanza singing *I'll walk with God*; as Christians we know that God walks with us in all the ups and downs of life.

*'Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you'*

Hebrews 13:5, citing Deuteronomy 31:6

Denise



mainly music: August 2023

This second week of term, we had twenty-three children across thirteen families! The children were obviously excited to be able to let off a bit of steam, which is something they can do before the session starts. There is also plenty of activity during the session – we adults need to keep warm too!!

Our waiting list is cause for concern, (not that we can do anything about it) – there are now eighteen families who want to come and cannot find another group anywhere in the neighbourhood. This is more than enough to start another group from scratch – and wouldn't it be lovely? – but, of course, we simply do not have the team members. If you hear of any church in the wider area where they are starting a *mainly music* group, please let me know. I can then suggest to these Mums that they try there.

Rosemary Bellair (0428 595 394)

This Month – August

Wednesday 2nd: 11 am Iris Grange; 3.30 pm Strathalan

Sunday 6th Pentecost 10, Transfiguration: 9.30 am St John's, 5 pm Holy Spirit

Genesis 32:22–31; Matthew 14:13–21

Sunday 13th Pentecost 11: 9.30 am St John's, 5 pm Holy Spirit

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28; Matthew 14:22–36

Sunday 20th Pentecost 12: 9.30 am Combined, St John's: Kate Beer; 2 pm St Andrew's deconsecration

TBA

Wednesday 23rd: 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers' Union; 11 am Streeton Park & general mid-week service at St John's; 3.30 pm Regis Macleod

Sunday 27th Pentecost 13: 9.30 am St John's, 5 pm Holy Spirit

Exodus 1:8 – 2:10; Matthew 16:13–20

Wanted

- More *mainly music* volunteers

Money: June

Income: Giving: \$11,360.35

Other: \$20,587.09

Total: \$31,947.44

Expenses: \$73,154.84

Deficit: \$41,207.40

Giving was down but still good, thank you. Expenses included substantial outlays on capital projects.

Holy Spirit Mothers' Union

Held in Church on Wednesday 28th June 2023, at 10 am, starting with a welcome cuppa, then the M.U. Service, with two songs from *Covenant Songs*. (The last song to be 104, *Now Unto Him*.)

All correspondence has come by email. We decided to have 'Count your Blessings', for funding for the Karen Orphanage. Our 60-year folder will be complete.

M.U. Wave of Prayer July 30th to August 1st 2023.

We posted 20 knitted beanies to the Seafarers. Thank you to all the knitters in the Parish.

We closed our meeting with Midday Prayers.

The next meeting will be at 10 am on 26th July 2023; afterwards lunch at the Watsonia RSL to celebrate our 61st year.

Elsie Storr

Notes from Heidelberg Inter-Church Committee Meeting on 7th July, 2023 in the Sycamore Tree

Kathy, Sylvia, Val and Janine met at the Sycamore Tree to discuss the future of the Heidelberg Inter-Church Committee. Sr Loreto was an apology. We were joined by Merle Gilbo from Banyule Churches Together, a committee which Val, Sylvia and Sr Loretta are already part of as representatives of their churches.

Merle was able to explain that the Banyule Churches Together was developed from Ivanhoe Churches Together.

The Ivanhoe churches still meet together for the World Day of Prayer. World Day of Prayer services rotate among the churches – Mary Immaculate Catholic, St James Anglican, Ivanhoe Baptist and Ivanhoe Uniting. It is functioning well.

Merle is of the opinion that one WDP service in our area instead of two makes sense and the meeting agreed. She thinks that the Ivanhoe churches would be happy to continue holding their services as usual, but should be able to advertise them more widely so that the churches from Heidelberg Inter-church can join in. As the representative for Mary Immaculate she will confirm this with the other Ivanhoe Churches.

The members of the Heidelberg Inter-church Committee are happy to join with the Ivanhoe churches for their WDP services. We would not be involved in organising services, but would encourage our churches to support them. Merle would be happy to take responsibility for contacting churches outside Ivanhoe.

Janine has drafted a letter to the WDP committee for our approval, stated reasons we have decided not to continue.

We are different but we can learn from each other and be friends.

Submitted by Sylvia Webb

Service of De-consecration of St Andrew's Rosanna – 2 pm Sunday 20 August 2023

The Right Reverend Dr Bradley S. Billings, Bishop of the Oodthenong episcopate of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, will de-consecrate St Andrew's Anglican Church Rosanna at 2 pm on Sunday 20 August. This follows the cessation of services at St Andrew's Rosanna on Sunday 11 December 2022, and subsequent application to, and approval by, the Council of the Diocese of Melbourne.

The service of de-consecration is a short, but profound service of thanksgiving to God for the ministries conducted at St Andrew's Rosanna for many years.

You are most welcome to come to this service.

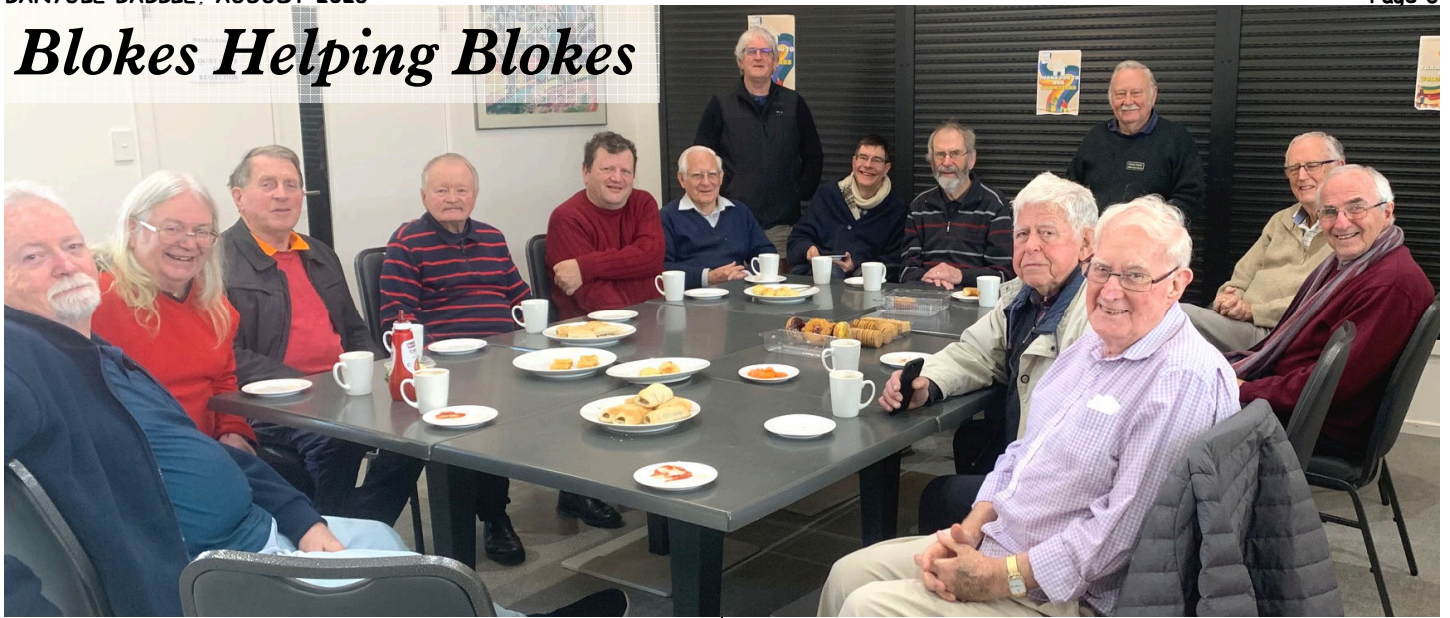
Please note that there are no longer any toilet facilities, or electricity or gas at St Andrew's Rosanna. As a result, there will be no heating and we are unable to offer afternoon tea.

Please wear very warm clothes, and bring a blanket with you if you think you will need it.

Please direct all enquiries to me, Rev Denise Nicholls, Vicar of the Anglican Parish of Banyule. (03) 9457 1144 or denise.banyule@gmail.com or banyule.parish@gmail.com



Blokes Helping Blokes



Blokes Helping Blokes now operates as a morning tea for blokes for an hour and a half from 8.45 am on the first Saturday of the month, at Open House (67–71 Strathallan Rd, Macleod).

There was something new at our meeting on 2nd July. One of the Blokes, while filling the sugar bowl, inadvertently got some on the bench. Glen carefully scraped it off the bench, but then, instead of putting it where it was supposed to be—that is, in the sugar bowl—he put it in the bin. It turned out Glen had just done a course on food safety, where they tell you to do strange things like that.

Speaking of unsafe foods naturally led to a discussion of Coca-Cola and its ability to make old coins sparkling bright, due to its fearsome acidity. David Fitzgerald then said something that utterly astounded us, and we could scarcely credit it. He said that the last time he had drunk this particular fizzy soft drink was in 1965. It was amazing that this event took place so long ago, so early in the history of the world, but what was even more astonishing was that he knew the exact year. Had he written in a diary the dates that he had drunk Coca-Cola, and was thus able to establish the last time? The Editor is well aware that if you asked him a similar question, such as when was the last time his wife made him lemon meringue pie, or when he last sang *Disposer supreme* in church, he would know it was a very long time ago, but be utterly unable to give a year.

Glen said that he had been giving more ‘masterclasses’, and nothing was more satisfying than teaching. This led to discussion of the medicinal value of his bread, which however will not be elaborated on here. Although Glen said there was high demand for it among the elderly, it was not supplied to the Blokes.

Nevertheless this month we had morning tea provision in abundance: Glen’s famous sausage rolls, Jim’s doughnuts, David’s wife’s amazing scones, Mr Arnott’s biscuits, and fresh carrots from the garden. Jon Buttery also stepped up to the plate, and gave us a remarkable lemon slice.

After Glen repeated his acknowledgements (see the July *Babble*), we got on with the first formal business of the day, which was to recognise the 94th birthday of our oldest Bloke, Ken Fitzgerald. Ken was not present, but this did not stop the celebrations. Glen rang him up, and over his messaging service the Blokes obliged with 94 seconds of hand-clapping, which is a longer time to continuously applaud than one would imagine. Despite increasingly sore palms, however, the Blokes persevered.

There were many anecdotes and testimonials given. Ken’s cricketing prowess was famous, and he had been on a

seniors tour of South Africa when he was in his seventies. He also had remarkable skill at fishing, and David told several anecdotes, one of which involved him falling backwards into the water with arms and legs in the traditional splayed position for this activity, because he tried to take a short-cut up a too-steep bank. Immediately after David pulled him out Ken told him it was quite unnecessary.

David Woods and Glen spoke of Ken’s commitment to helping people. He had suggested that instead of a camp with lots of activities, Open House should have a ‘Lazy camp by the fireside’; and despite people’s misgivings, it turned out to be extremely successful. By having nothing to do but talk, people got to know each other very well.

Glen said that Ken used to give him a handkerchief every birthday, and he didn’t use them. (It is of course very possible that Ken gave them to Glen specifically *because* Glen didn’t use them, as a subtle hint, in the same way that people give the Editor gifts of scissors, hedge-trimmers and lawn-mowers.) But Glen has now worked out how to use them, and indeed carries two, one for himself and one to offer any damsel in distress he might come across.

Keith Tupper now spoke to us about a recent journey to Norfolk Island. It was an organised tour, but he said that at first he was unwilling to go, because it looked like all the other travellers would be women. He did not elaborate on why this would be a problem, and the Editor will not speculate here, but it was so serious a difficulty that he made it a condition of going that there be other men present; and in the event there were.

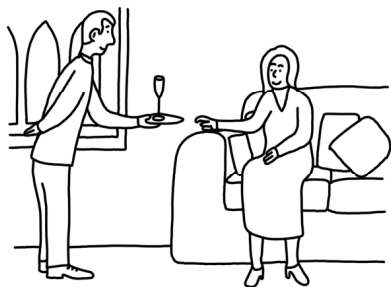
There were other difficulties. It took three hours to go through the formalities at Sydney Airport. To go to Norfolk Island you need either a passport or an Australian drivers’ license, even though it is difficult to drive there. It is difficult to land there in a plane, too, and they were warned after their first go-around that they could only make one more attempt.

Keith gave us a brief history of the island: Captain Cook thought the Norfolk pines would make excellent ships’ masts, but they weren’t suitable. There were free settlers at first, but later they were booted off and it was purely a convict station for the very worst; but this too was closed. Then it was used to resettle the descendents of the *Bounty* mutineers, who had taken Tahitian women and settled on Pitcairn Island, but this had become too small. But after moving to Norfolk Island, half of them weren’t happy and went back to Pitcairn. Keith feels that present-day Norfolk Island survives only on tourism.

We finished with a joke from Frank Webb, but as usual it was totally unfit for publication. Next meeting: *5th August*.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

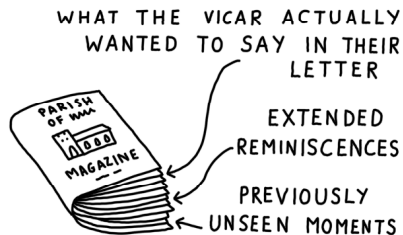
THE BENEFITS



USE OF THE SECRET MEMBERS-ONLY LOUNGE



PREVIEWS OF SERMONS THE NIGHT BEFORE RELEASE



WHAT THE VICAR ACTUALLY WANTED TO SAY IN THEIR LETTER

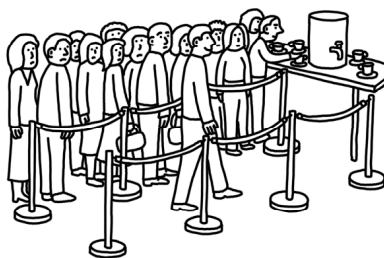
EXTENDED REMINISCENCES

PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN MOMENTS FROM MIDWEEK MEETINGS

A SPECIAL BUMPER EDITION OF THE PARISH MAGAZINE



A 'GET OUT OF A ROTA FREE' CARD



PRIORITY LANE AT AFTER-SERVICE COFFEE



A BADGE, AND SOME STICKERS



YOUTH GROUP: We went to the footy game at the MCG and watched Melbourne beat Adelaide while enjoying chips, pies and doughnuts. Many thanks to Jono, who did a great job organising everything, driving us there, finding a car park and taking care of food. Everyone appeared to have a good time! — Sarah

Across

- 1 Chariot pullers (6)
- 4 Flung (5)
- 7 Backbiters (10)
- 8 Used in the healing of a blind man (4)
- 9 Place of sacrifice (5)
- 11 Gift (7)
- 13 Area where disciples were from (7)
- 15 Cymbal player (5)
- 17 Covetousness (4)
- 18 Aaron, for example (4,6)
- 20 Reddish (5)
- 21 Misgivings (6)

- 3 The sound of a choir (7)
- 4 Between eta and iota (5)
- 5 Regret (3)
- 6 More like Solomon (5)
- 7 Jael's victim (6)
- 10 A unit of measure (6)
- 12 Lingered (7)
- 14 Blinded false prophet (6)
- 15 Son of Jacob (5)
- 16 Elated (5)
- 17 Lost his father's blessing to Jacob (4)
- 19 The Almighty (3)

Down

- 1 Aromatic herb (6)
- 2 Food seasoner (4)

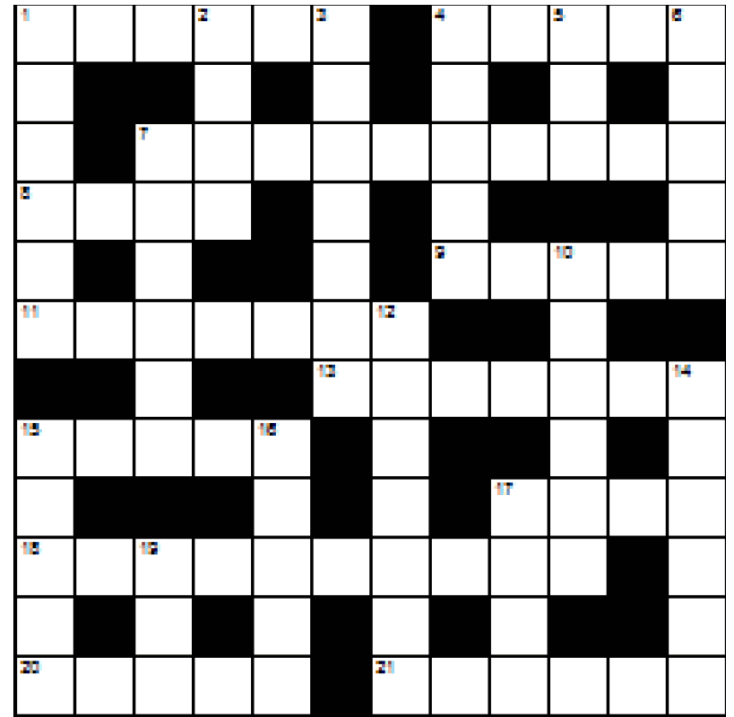
A N I M A L S U R P R I S E E
 D E S I M O R P T E A D D M S
 D E L E V A R T T C F E E A A
 E E D H A R A N C D O D K G U
 R D L N W H U E L E U A C D R
 O E H I E H P S L N R R I L E
 V S A K C T H G I R H T R I B
 A S I S E N E G K U U M T W E
 F I R S T B O R N T N N R B K
 A K Y R O M T C P E D N C A A
 T M E S S E N G E R R E R L H
 H O M E C N A T I R E H N I E
 E D E G G U H O U T D O O R S
 R C O O K I N G N I S S E L B
 S P E C I A L I R E D D I S H

Bible Word Search – Jacob and Esau

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**.

https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_JacobAndEsau_0.htm

- Accept, Animals, Birthright, Blessing, Cooking, Esau, Father,
- Favored, Firstborn, Four hundred, Genesis, Hairy, Haran, Harm,
- Home, Hugged, Hunter, Inheritance, Kill, Kissed, Men,
- Messenger, Outdoors, Pretended, Promised, Rebekah,
- Reconcile, Reddish, Returned, Skin, Special, Surprise, Traded,
- Traveled, Tricked, Uncle, Wild game



by *Philologus*

© BiblePuzzles.com

Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

Jesus Walks on Water Anagram

www.dltk-kids.com



- aeprry _____
- abot _____
- aadfir _____
- aertw _____
- eeprt _____
- bdotu _____
- rsttu _____
- dinwy _____
- afhit _____
- ae fs _____

Answers to last month's puzzles

D	E	C	L	A	R	E	R	O	B	E
E	A	N	L	A	U					
C	U	P	G	O	O	D	N	E	S	S
I	T	E	H	S	H					
S	K	U	L	L	I	D	O	L	G	
I	R	S	M	M	A	L	E			
O	M	E	R	C	H	U	N			
N	D	I	S	H	E	A	G	L	E	
F	C	R	B	H	R					
M	I	G	H	T	I	E	R	T	W	O
V	E	S	E	E	U					
Z	E	U	S	T	H	W	A	R	T	S

Bible Word Search mystery answer:
ANCIENT TIMES

Last month's anagram:

- abekst _____ basket
- aahopr _____ Pharaoh
- deehprs _____ shepherd
- aceilmrs _____ miracles
- bginnru bhsu _____ burning bush
- aeglpus _____ plagues
- aeoprssv _____ Passover
- aceiilrsst _____ Israelites
- acdmmnnost _____ commandment
- adeelr _____ leader

The Vine: 10. Mission

25th June 2023

Matt 28:18–20; Luke 4:16–21; 2 Cor 5:11–6:2

Sermon by Jonathan Lopez

Luke 4:16–21

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

²¹ He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

Intro

At King Charles' Coronation service the reading we just had from Luke was read. I was on annual leave at the time as I watched the service in a friend's kitchen in Houston at the early hour of 6 am to get on a flight to LA. My family spent the night at their home for Cinco de Mayo. We were watching the service live on his phone and this gospel reading grabbed my attention! It is one of my favourite readings of Jesus.

Imagine. There Jesus is. In his home town. In a synagogue. His community—people he grew up around all his life to this point—are present. We are told in Luke 4:15 'He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.'

As he reads this reading of the prophet Isaiah, then we are told in vv 20–21:

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

Why were everyone's eyes 'fastened' on him?

Why did Jesus feel he needed to follow this reading up by saying: 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'?

If you read on, the people quickly turn on Jesus to a point where they were about to throw him off a cliff. In fact the cliff was not too far from the entrance of the synagogue. Why?

Part 1: Why? Jesus makes an exclusive claim: HE is the fulfilment of God's mission!

What claims is he making?

1. *Good news for the poor*: the marginalised materially, spiritually ..
2. *Healing from blindness*: physical healing and for receiving revelation (spiritual sight) and experiencing salvation and inclusion in God's family
3. *Release*: a reference to an Old Testament release or reset of slaves and debts, which refers to *deliverance*: announcing God's plan of redemption, healing and salvation.

Lofty claims! And this basically is what God's mission through Jesus announces to the world!

'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

We come to the end of a ten-part series of teaching today called 'The Vine series', which was designed for the church to grow in faith. If you are interested in knowing more about this, I have a playlist collecting all the live streams of the past nine weeks on our church YouTube: search 'Banyule Anglican' and you will see them.

I wonder what topics have grown, challenged or stretched you in this series? For me it was the topic of *Affirming our Faith (The Creeds)* by Helen. It was so important for me to remember the Creeds pre-dated the bible: the church agreed and recited these truths by memory. Why, you might ask, is this so important? So when someone would come along in history, now or in the future and try to tell you something different about Jesus, you can respond with the creeds.

Rachael shared this quote with me this week that is relevant to the topic of the Vine and growing in faith:

'A plant doesn't grow by being dipped in soil once a week. The invitation isn't to visit the Vine. It's to abide in it.'

Let's be real: you can't grow in faith if you think attending church is a once-a-week check box item.

YOU and ME and all the world are invited to be part of a living growing vine: to abide.

To grow in faith is to abide: to be connected.

This is what Jesus is proclaiming and this is why it was controversial for the people first hearing it:

- Those far from God, those excluded by religious, social standards: those perceived as broken in society—they are on God's heart, they are God's mission.
- But it is not just them (the marginalised), because this prophecy of old, this claim of liberation and freedom, is for *all* because we all fall short of God's standards: we sin. Jesus proclaims the MAP: the Mission Action Plan! He is on a rescue mission to bring God's children home to the family.

The question is: *will you be part of the mission?*

Part 2: Remember Jesus' mission: 'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.' (Luke 19:10)



Jesus and Zacchaeus
By Kunz, Anne-Anne Mérimée
Language: Yankunyljajara
Adelaide, SA

Jesus' mission:

'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost'

(Luke 19:10)

That verse in context is Jesus' mission in action, as he proclaims redemption/salvation to Zacchaeus, a tax collector. An outcast and a sell-out to his fellow Jews, but when he meets Jesus he responded with repentance. The Jewish community were shocked!

Q: *Have you met Jesus?*

When you meet Jesus you might be surprised and shocked that Jesus says he came to earth 'not to be served but to serve'. Though he is the King of kings he came to serve.

This is what the Archbishop of Canterbury highlighted in his message when this passage was read at Charles' coronation. Recognise we are called ultimately to serve in some capacity regardless of our status:

Seek and save the far off, the lost

Serve in the mission of the King of Kings: Jesus

There are various marks of mission that are suggested as marks of local church health in the context of the Vine teaching series:

TELL: proclaim, as the disciples did, the good news of God's kingdom

TEACH: baptise and nurture new believers

TEND: caring for those in need

TRANSFORM: to challenge the unjust structures of society and violence of every kind: to pursue peace and reconciliation

TREASURE: to be good stewards of creation (All T words: easy to remember.)

I want to just focus on the second one today as it is relevant to baptism: we are to teach, baptise and nurture new believers (as explained in the Vine series notes).

Now babies cannot spiritually raise themselves in their journey of faith in Jesus: parents and godparents play a pivotal role. I am glad you parents and godparents are taking this seriously by saying YES! when a person is baptised. And we as the church, for that matter, must take this seriously too as we commit to support you.

Share: I am not traditionally an Anglican: I was raised as a Roman Catholic. But I was grateful upon reflection for the way God gave me the gift and knowledge of Jesus in my Catholic schooling. It was later in my teen years I was 'born again' where other Christians saw it as essential to *not just know of Jesus but to encourage me to have a living and active faith.*

We simply call this, as the first believers were called: **discipled**.

Discipling is essential to mission. If we don't disciple then we'll just be playing a number game! We won't be allowing God's love in Jesus to take deep root in one's life. We want people to grow in faith so they can fully realise the ongoing mission God has: to seek out his children.

What is discipling? It begins with knowing Jesus and that we can, like Zacchaeus, meet and encounter him.

We too can encounter Jesus in spirit and truth. (Don't believe what I say but what Jesus says in John 4:24 – Jesus says God is looking for his children who will worship him in spirit and truth.)

- Asking Jesus into our hearts, encountering Jesus personally
 - Knowing and living out God's truth in Scripture
- These are essentials to God's mission as we journey to mature in faith and pass on the faith.

Conclusion

In Bible studies or reflecting on mission:

1. Which of these marks are we needing to get better at?
TELL TEACH TEND TRANSFORM TREASURE
2. What are our gifts, our charismas as a church in mission? BCA, Mission to Sea farers, CMS? Op shop in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence?
3. What are areas of opportunity in mission? Perhaps supporting those here today who desired to abide in the vine, the church? Are we being generous with our time and resources to support God's mission?

Pick up your cross

2nd July 2023

Genesis 22:1–14; Matthew 10:32–42

Sermon by Jonathan Lopez

Matthew 10:32–42

³² 'Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

³⁷ 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.'

Intro: Crosses and what they represent

Have you ever wondered why there are so many different designs of crosses?

We see many of them in churches in different shapes, colours and sizes.

Growing up in a mostly Maltese community I would see this cross in most houses I visited and in the parish I grew up in:



This was mostly red and white to represent the colours on the national flag of Malta. It's called the *Maltese cross*.

Perhaps some of you who come from Irish heritage might have seen this cross growing up:

The *Celtic cross* → Can anyone tell what cross is this?



The *Canterbury Cross*: representing the Anglican & Episcopal church.

How about this? → The *Jerusalem Cross*.

You might notice I sometimes wear a colourful cross. It was given to me by an Episcopal Priest in the Philippines as a gift. It says E.C.F.—the Episcopal Church of the Philippines. I wear this as a representation of friendship and my ethnic background.



Certain religious orders have their own crosses like this one: The *Tau cross* that is often worn by Franciscan monks.



In my religious community, the Community of St Anselm, we have this cross:



We were asked to wear this cross as part of our uniform, in the work we did in the welfare organisations, hospital chaplaincy, social gatherings, worship services for a whole year.

But I am in no way a cross wearing person! Neither were a few of my fellow community members. Oh, we heard every possible reason for why we shouldn't wear it but we all eventually did.

As we all did some would comment on how it was comforting to hold the cross, kind of like a 'fidget' toy the young people have today. But there was something more to it. It helped us contemplate in times we studied. In times we were in public it was a unifying thing we all wore together.

Part 1: What does it mean to 'take up your cross'?

i. To the disciples?

ii. To us?

I am going to focus on the gospel reading in Matthew 10 today, and in particular v 38, when Jesus said:

³⁸ *Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

i. To the disciples

Now obviously the disciples did not walk around with crosses around their necks or anything visually distinct that made them 'stick out' to indicate that they were followers of Jesus.

The disciples were just regular Jews outwardly. They had to be, as you might recall earlier in Matthew 10 they were instructed to first go to Jewish towns to proclaim the gospel.

Did the disciples know what Jesus meant?

For Jews, and anyone in the Roman Empire at that time, the cross, quite simply put, meant *that person is on a one-way journey: they will not come back*.

The cross meant death, and metaphorically and literally it is also a death to self.

For Peter: leaving his way of income as a fisherman

For Matthew: quitting his job as a tax collector

But you might be asking yourself: what was so convincing about Jesus in the short amount of time they followed him, that they would give up their way of life and choose to live a life as a disciple?

The disciples have

- seen,
- experienced, and
- heard

who Jesus is: the Son of God.

- They have **seen** the miracles which they in turn performed (healing a paralytic: Matt 9:2).
- They have **experienced** for themselves his power (Jesus commands the storm: Matt 8:23–27)
- They have **heard** his teaching (the Beatitudes: Matt 5–7)

What would have been your reaction to all the things they, the disciples, saw?

I would have loved to see the healing Jesus performed. I have had a few people of late ask me to pray for them as they suffer through cancer. I was just relating to a friend how much of burden it is, as we pray and hope for healing and God hears, he knows, he sees the tears. It was good for this friend to remind me of the times we did minister to friends who had cancer and they had been healed, so it gave me hope (because honestly I was feeling hopeless!)

Q: What burden of prayer is on your heart?

ii To us

Which leads us to the next point: what does it mean for *us* to pick up our cross?

Pause: Take a moment of silence now to think and discern:

- Who are those people in need you know?
- What has God given in your hand to help?
- Will you pray for the way God might use you in this circumstance?

Conclusion:

What are the things in your hand or in your life that stop you picking up the cross?



In a one-week silent retreat I found myself drawing pictures, and this one was similar to one I drew. In a little English, the French person teaching at one of the silent sessions used a metaphor of a monkey who wants the item in the jar so much that the monkey is not willing to let go of it and therefore is captured!

Picking up the cross often means we need to let go of some things.

- There might be sin still gripping you
- There might be things we worship more than Jesus
- There might be unforgiveness that we hold onto that we won't let go of

What is it?

Remember that although the cross is a symbol of death—a one way journey—it is through Christ's death on the cross that we live, so therefore it is not a one way journey (a physical death) *but the way to the Father's house*.

Jesus says:

³⁹ *Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

Matthew 11:15–30

9th July 2023

Sermon by Sarah Coe

¹⁵ Whoever has ears, let them hear.

¹⁶ 'To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others:

¹⁷ "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.'

²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹ 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.'

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷ 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

Jesus' words in Matthew 11 are a bit difficult, aren't they? Let's pray and ask him to help us understand what he means and what he wants us to learn.

Lord Jesus, you spoke these words, and you alone know in every respect what you meant then. You know us, Lord, and you know what we need to hear today. Send your Spirit to illumine our hearts, that we may be encouraged and corrected and be built up as members of your body the Church. Amen.

To get a better understanding of what Jesus is saying, we need to look back earlier in the chapter. Right at the start, Jesus' cousin John the Baptist is in prison. John is bothered that perhaps his whole ministry of announcing and preparing for Jesus is wasted. He sends his disciples to Jesus to ask, 'Are you the one we're expecting? Or are we still waiting for someone else?'

Now, pay attention to Jesus' reply. From verse four: *Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."*

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Then Jesus talks to the crowd around him. First he discusses John and his ministry, before launching into the rest of the talk we've had read to us.

Let's recap.

Jesus expresses his frustration at the crowd's behaviour by comparing them to children playing in the marketplace. One group calls out to another: 'We played the flute for you. You wouldn't dance! We sang a dirge for you. You wouldn't mourn!' And Jesus points out that no matter what he and John do, the people won't respond. They keep finding excuses to avoid God's messages to them. John, they say, has a demon. Jesus, they say, likes feasting and hangs out with the bad guys. They keep finding excuses.

But it's not just God's words they're rejecting! Jesus goes on to mourn for them. He's just been touring the towns of Galilee and now he grieves over those towns. Woe to Chorazin! Woe to Bethsaida! Woe to Capernaum! Jesus isn't skiting – he's heartbroken.

Remember what Jesus has just told John? "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."

Why is Jesus upset? This is what Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum have seen! These towns have experienced a lavish outpouring of God's supernatural care that has never been seen before. They have not repented, even though Jesus has performed so many miracles in them (11:20,21,23). And Jesus says that if other towns, which were destroyed for their wickedness, had seen the miracles Jesus had done, they would have repented, they would have turned from their evil, they would have accepted Jesus' teaching – they would have been saved from judgement!

But the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are not responding. They are not repenting. They are not following Jesus – they are indifferent, contemptuous, making excuses and trying to justify why they are not turning to God in spite of all the miracles and proclamations of God's good news.

John the Baptist is struggling and having second thoughts about his ministry for Jesus.

The crowds are working out how to respond to Jesus and are deciding they know better and can disregard John and Jesus' calls for repentance and turning to God.

For both John and the crowds, Jesus isn't fulfilling their expectations.

And we? Where are we at?

Are we confident in trusting Jesus? Repentant, obedient, responsive?

Are we struggling like John? Are we having second thoughts about placing our hope in Jesus?

Are we deciding we can disregard Jesus because we believe we know better?

Are we making excuses to justify not listening to God, not doing what he asks of us?

Are we missing out on what God is doing and has done because we are too focused on our own expectations?

Perhaps we are saying, deep down, "God, you didn't respond as I expected. Why

didn't you do this? Why do you ask this of me? You're not who I thought you were."

Holy Spirit, search our hearts and reveal to us our hidden attitudes, our hurts and disillusionment, our indifference, anger, pride, or contempt; anything that we need to bring to you and confess. Anything for which we need your help.

What does Jesus want for the crowd that refuses to respond to him?

Verse 25: Jesus says: 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'

Then he says, and this is also very important: *All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* (11:27)

This point is important because the crowds, including the wise and learned, cannot truly know God until they learn from Jesus. They've decided they can disregard Jesus, and they make a terrible mistake. 'For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding', says Proverbs 2:6. But we are given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

Now let's look at that beautiful call of Jesus.

Verse 28 to 30: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is kind and my burden is light.*

There are different meanings for yoke: sometimes it refers to being oppressed and treated as a slave, having to carry crushing burdens. But in this case Jesus uses it in the context of learning. The Jews talked about the yoke of the Torah; how learning God's commands makes life easier.

About a hundred and fifty years before Jesus, Joseph Ben Sira wrote: *Come to me, all you that need instruction, and learn in my school. Why do you admit that you are ignorant and do nothing about it? Here is what I say: It costs nothing to be wise. Put on the yoke, and be willing to learn. The opportunity is always near. See for yourselves! I have really not studied very hard, but I have found great contentment.* Sirach 51:23–27 (GNB).

Jesus isn't just inviting us to join his school and study his interpretation of the Torah, the laws of God. Jesus is inviting us to learn directly from God himself, the source of true wisdom and full knowledge. Only God can fully reveal who he is, and Jesus the Son is that revelation.

If you have not believed in Jesus, come to Jesus. Bring him your expectations of who God is. Who Jesus is. Bring him your burdens, your searchings for truth, your griefs and struggles, your confusion, your anger, and your pain. Pray and ask him to reveal himself and help you to repent and believe.

If you are a Christian, come to Jesus. He already lives in you, so talk to him and ask him to clear away any misconceptions and false expectations. Remember that he is gentle and humble, not harsh and oppressive, and he is right now in heaven praying for you to the Father.

How do we come to Jesus? Pray. Pray, and read the Bible, especially the Gospels, asking Jesus to guide you and help you learn

from him. Remember too that we are the body of Christ, and learning and sharing with other Christians can often give you a bigger understanding of who God is, as his people experience him working in their lives.

Come to Jesus. He is calling to you. You will find rest for your souls, for his yoke is kind, benevolent, and brings relief and rest for your weariness and confusion and fear.

Come to Jesus. Through Jesus you learn to know the Father as he really is, the Father who runs to you and lavishes his love on you. *Father, Lord of heaven and earth, we praise you, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. We are your children. Thank you for teaching us, thank you for revealing yourself to us through your Son. Lord, send your Spirit to bring joy and rest and peace to our hearts, keep us from backsliding and help us run trustfully into your loving arms. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Forgiveness: Not a Word We Often Hear

16th July 2023

Acts 7: 48–60; Ps 103:1–12; Luke 23:32–43

With thanks to Craig and Merle Broman

Sermon by Adrian Lane

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Luke 23:32–43

³² *Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.* ³³ *When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.* ³⁴ *Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

³⁵ *The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.’*

³⁶ *The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar* ³⁷ *and said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’*

³⁸ *There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

³⁹ *One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’*

⁴⁰ *But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence?’* ⁴¹ *We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’*

⁴² *Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’*

⁴³ *Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’*

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Today I’d like to look at one of the life-changing consequences of the Easter events – forgiveness – not a word we often hear in our self-centred, blaming society.

I know I find it very hard to say, “Please forgive me,” especially to those close to me. Indeed, the closer the relationship, the harder it is for me to say, “Please forgive me.” But I find it even harder to forgive those who have plainly wronged me. And the wrong they’ve

done against me eats away at me, embitters me, as I rehearse that wrong, over and over in my mind, and speak about it, all too often, with others. I’m not sure that others always understand how they have hurt me, but nonetheless, again, all too often, I keep a list in my mind, to bring up later, in an argument.

In our passage today we meet three strikingly different people. And from each we learn so much about this crucial issue of forgiveness. It’s a powerful passage – a story many of us are familiar with, and seen pictures of, a story that can even overcome us emotionally, as we better understand it.

It comes at the climax of Luke’s gospel, his good news history of Jesus. Jesus has been training his disciples for three years. Crowds have followed them, as Jesus has taught, worked miracles and healed many, to show the nature of his true identity.

But the Jewish rulers haven’t understood. Indeed, they haven’t wanted to understand, and ultimately, on false charges, and in a terrible travesty of justice, Jesus is executed, with two other men, both criminals.

And the first thing I’d like us to notice is Jesus’ extraordinary prayer for those executing him. Even as they are driving the nails into his wrists and feet, even as they are raising him on the cross to die ultimately of suffocation, he is praying for their forgiveness: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (23:34) This is unimaginable selflessness and is worth our pondering on, again and again.

But despite such magnanimity, despite such graciousness, indeed, plainly in the face of it, some of the rulers even sneered at him. “He saved others, let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” (v 35) If only they knew! If only they had a teachable heart!

The soldiers also mocked him, as they divided up his few remaining possessions for themselves – a few clothes – an action, incidentally, prophesied centuries before by King David, one of Jesus’ ancestors, in Psalm 22:18. It’s like stealing from a homeless man. “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself,” (v 37) the soldiers say. If only they knew.

Pilate, the Roman Governor, had also mocked Jesus by having a notice placed above him. “This is the King of the Jews” (v 38), it read. He’d show them who’s king. “There is no king but Caesar!” Look at your king! If only he knew.

And what does Jesus do? He prays for them! Not in a spiteful, vengeful prayer – “God, bring down your judgement upon them.” That’s the sort of prayer I say. But in a prayer full of compassion: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

One of the criminals who hung there beside Jesus also hurled insults at him. “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” (v 39). This man’s obviously an angry man, a shouter, a man who quickly loses his temper and never stops to think. And we’ve all come across people like him, especially since the pandemic – on the roads, for example. They shout and they bully us. They blame others for their troubles. And then they put it on others to clean up the very mess they’ve created. And their anger leaves a stain on us, if we’re honest. It bruises us, and wounds us, and leaves a scar. If only this criminal knew.

But there was another man there on that

hill called the Skull, wasn’t there? And this man realised that this world and its powers were not all that there is. He realised that this world is but a foretaste, a precursor, of a much more substantial world to come, and that life didn’t revolve around us.

“Don’t you fear God?” he said to the other criminal. “We are punished justly, because we are getting what our deeds deserve...But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Wow! Did you get that? *“This man has done nothing wrong.”*

We have so much to learn from this criminal. He well knows that there is a God. He well knows that wrong needs to be punished and atoned for – paid for. You can’t pretend wrong hasn’t happened and try to just get on with life – it needs to be dealt with. This second criminal well knows that he and the other criminal are being punished justly. He’s not making excuses for himself. Or blaming anybody else. And he well knows that Jesus is innocent. This second criminal’s been around. He knows a criminal when he sees one. And he well knows that Jesus is no criminal.

Some of us are very aware of our need for forgiveness, aren’t we? We know we’ve done the wrong thing, by God and by others, and we carry a burden, just like the Prodigal Son in the parable Jesus told earlier, in Luke 15. But others of us can’t see that we need forgiveness. We blame others, and are self-righteous – like the older brother in the parable. And you know what? God loves us both. And He is longing to forgive.

Ironically, this second criminal was a very fortunate man. He could have been crucified in the last batch, or the next. But God obviously had his hand on him, because he was crucified with Jesus. And he’d been with Jesus on that journey to the cross, and he’d heard Jesus praying for his executioners, and he’d come to know that Jesus was like no other man. And by God’s grace he’d come to know something of Jesus’ identity – that he really was the Messiah, the Chosen One. And this criminal comes to put his trust in Jesus, in the last moments of his life: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (v 43)

And Jesus responds with these wonderful, famous words, “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Isn’t that magnificent? This criminal is forgiven. He is incorporated into Christ’s kingdom: not through anything he has done – he hasn’t had time to do anything – but through Christ’s work, right there, on the cross beside him. Because, when Jesus died, he paid the penalty for sin – wrong – which is death. But he didn’t pay the penalty for his own sin – no, the criminal’s already told us that Jesus has done nothing wrong. And indeed, just a few hours later, the tough centurion in charge of that death squad, after seeing everything that has happened, ends up praising God himself and saying, “Surely this was a righteous man.” (v 47)

So Jesus doesn’t pay the penalty for his own wrong – but he still pays the penalty of death. That penalty is for you and me, for the criminal and the centurion, and indeed, for all who cry out to Jesus, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

That’s why Jesus had to die. That’s why Jesus didn’t save himself, even though he could have, just as he had saved others from death throughout his ministry, to demonstrate his power over death. No, Jesus didn’t save himself,

but gave himself up to death, so that the penalty for wrong would be paid through his death, the sacrificial death of an innocent one.

That second criminal died knowing he was forgiven, looking forward, with certainty, to seeing Christ come into his kingdom. We don't even know his name, but we know we too will meet him in paradise, if we also put our trust in Jesus.

When Jesus rose from the dead a few days later, with a new body, he proved that that penalty for sin, death, had indeed been paid, fully. He has indeed saved others, but only at unknowable cost to himself. He is indeed the Messiah, the Chosen One. He is indeed the king of the Jews, and not just the Jews, but the king of all kings, of all emperors and governors, and the king of all peoples. Who but the Messiah, the Chosen One, could promise to another, would dare to promise to another, in such terrible circumstances, "Today, you will be with me in paradise," and then rise from the dead, with plenty of witnesses, to prove that the penalty of death for sin had indeed been paid?

Forgiveness: Not a word we often hear. So many people, all around us, are labouring under the guilt of sin. This message of forgiveness, through Christ's completed work on the cross, and by no other means, has been transformational for me. To know that I am forgiven. To know that when I die, I too will be with Christ in paradise. To know that there's absolutely nothing I can do to earn my forgiveness: "Nothing in my hand I bring... simply to the cross I cling."

That's amazing news! And that's why I'm so thoroughly committed to Bush Church Aid, because I long for everyone, in every corner of Australia, to hear that news, and be relieved of their burden.

Because it's not just great news for the future, is it? Because as I begin to understand Christ's love for me on that cross, despite my unworthiness, I can begin, with God's help, to have patience and love for others, "who know not what they do" to me. And I can begin, with God's help, to be honest with myself, as to how I might be hurting others.

When that first crowd at Pentecost learnt from Peter that the one they had crucified was both Lord and Messiah, they were cut to the heart and asked Peter what they should do. "Repent" – turn back – he said, "and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) That promise is for us as well. May we, today, know Christ's love and forgiveness, and may God equip us to share that love and forgiveness with others.

Matthew 13:24–43

23rd July 2023

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

²⁸ "An enemy did this," he replied.

'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

²⁹ "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

³¹ He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

³³ He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'

³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

'I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.'

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.'

³⁷ He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ 'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Good morning, everybody! It's lovely to see you, and it's lovely to be back preaching to you! It's weeks and weeks and weeks since I've been able to be here, in this role of bringing God's teaching to you. The Bible reading that I'll be speaking from today is the Matthew reading that we just had read by Allan—thank you so much—and this is just some warm black coffee in case I get a bit of a tickle in my throat.

Well, when I was growing up, after school my brother and I couldn't wait to get home to see who could get to the—not the fridge, but—the television first, because whoever was there first, they had prime position to claim the show they wanted to watch. Cartoons—always a favourite; Gilligan's Island; and lots of others. These stories—these great stories

from my childhood—taught us great truths, such as: from the cartoons of Bugs Bunny, we learned that opera never has a happy ending; from Gilligan's Island, we learned that the most unlikely person, Gilligan, was often the hero. It wasn't the professor, it wasn't the rich person, but it was often the person who was seen as the sort of least in their little community.

We still like stories, don't we? And listening to them. Your grandchildren probably love to hear the stories of what it was like for their parents growing up; and they like to hear the story of when Dad or Mum were naughty. They love those sorts of stories!

I saw two movies last week. One was an action film, and it was really fun: it was just action, action, action, action, action . . . breathe . . . action, action, action! Not much acting, but a lot of action. It was lots of fun: didn't have much of a story, just had lots of cool action! The other one that I saw was a film of a one-woman play from the National Theatre in London. It was challenging: it was one woman and a chair. And the play is called *Fleabag* and it's been made into a TV series now too, with that same woman. It was challenging: after five minutes I thought, 'I don't know if I can stay and watch this'; but it was engaging, and the story wove in and out, and challenged us to think about what we thought of her, what we thought about ourselves, what would we do in that situation.

Stories are important to us. All human societies have stories that they tell and pass on, and these tell us a lot about themselves. We as European Australians tell stories—sacred stories—like the Anzacs, and Gallipoli, and the Kokoda Track. Some of those stories are funny ones like the lamb ads on Australia Day—they tell us a little bit about ourselves too. Our indigenous brothers and sisters: their stories about the land and creation are so important to them. It tells about who they are, and how they live with the land. Stories are important for all cultures.

Jesus used lots of stories, we know. In this section in Matthew's gospel is a whole selection of the parables that he told. Parables were stories that were quirky and are designed to engage the listener—draw them in, push them in their thinking; but also reveal truths—if we work at it. They often have meaning on a number of levels: a very simple level about somebody sowing seed into a field and there being weeds there—oh yeah, that happens: we know that, don't we?—; but then some spiritual teaching underneath.

We had three parables read for us today, but I'm going to concentrate on the one parable that's found only in Matthew, and that's the parable of the weeds. In this parable Jesus teaches his disciples something really profound. He teaches that God's people are God's good seed in God's world.

It's an important message, and sometimes a surprising one, because we're used to the parable of the sower who goes out to sow seeds, and people's responses to the good news of Jesus; but here it's talking about God's own children—his people who trust in him, like us—we are God's seed in the world. We are God's seed in God's world.

And especially for us here at Banyule, though we are small in number but wanting to grow. As you know, we've been praying for over a year about the possibility of starting a



new worshipping congregation at Watsonia on Sunday mornings, and we're thinking, 'Can it happen? There are so few of us! Can we do this?' Well, I pray that this talk today—this short talk (please God it'll be short)—will encourage us.

Let me pray: *Heavenly Father, encourage us with your words today. Challenge us, engage us with your big story of loving the world so much that you gave your only Son. Help us to know our part in your story, and your story in our lives. Amen.*

Well, you might want to turn to the parable of the weeds. This comes in a section where there are lots and lots of parables, in these few chapters of Matthew's Gospel. We know that Jesus told parables, not to make things easier for people to understand—he says that very clearly in Chapter 13 verse 10, when the disciples said, you know, why do you speak in parables? He said, no, it's not to make things easy, it's to cloud an issue, so that people will dig and look for real spiritual truths.

The disciples themselves asked Jesus in verse 36, 'What do you mean by the parable of the weeds?'

Another reason that Jesus spoke in parables was that it was in fulfilment of Scripture. That's what it says in verse 35 there—he spoke to fulfil the scripture; and that scripture is in Psalm 78:2: *My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old.*

Throughout Matthew's gospel Jesus talks a lot about the 'kingdom of God' or the 'kingdom of heaven'. It's a phrase that occurs again and again, and he's saying to people the kingdom of heaven is *like this*, or it's *like that*. God's reign on earth, and in people's lives, is compared to things that were familiar in an agrarian society—a farming society—and also familiar to us, as we have heard so many of the parables of Jesus; especially that parable of the sower in chapter 13 about good soil and good seed.

But here in this parable, it's a bit different from the parable of the sower. In this parable the good seed is put into soil, an enemy puts in weeds, the servants of the master say, 'Oh, we'll go and pull out the weeds now' and the master says very clearly, 'No, because you might pull up some of the wheat'; and the planned crop is so important, he doesn't want to lose any of that. 'Wait until harvest time', because he does not want the wheat to be lost.

This parable is talking about: how can God's kingdom and reign be present in the world when there is still opposition? How can we as Christians affirm that God reigns, that God is good, that Christians hold on to those truths about Christ and proclaim them as true, amid opposition to God in our world?

The two little parables that Jesus uses talk about that you only need a little bit for something to be powerful. As the disciples, so things like the leaven in the bread, and a tiny little seed. Have you ever mixed up a measurement for a spice in a recipe? Well, I have. I like things spicy, but I mistook a teaspoon recipe for a tablespoon. Now I really like spicy *chilli con carne*. Let me tell you, I had to put so much yoghurt in that batch of *chilli con carne* because I had mixed up the measurement of chilli, and it made the whole batch really hot! Something so little had such a profound effect.

As Jesus' disciples asked him to explain the parable of the weeds, Jesus spells it out clearly to them. These people, because of their question, they *are* engaged, they *do* seek after God, they *want* to know. And Jesus' answer is surprising:

The one who sowed the good seed—you can read that in verse 37—is the Son of Man himself, Jesus speaking. The field is the world. And the good seed stands for the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the Age, and the harvesters are angels.

As I was preparing this sermon, it was good for me to sit and ponder on this passage, because often we think about the seed of God's word, but here Jesus changes it a little, and says the seed is not the word, or the gospel; but the seed are the sons, as it says in the original, meaning the *children* of the Kingdom—those who belong to God. That really struck me afresh when I read it this week.

Let's let that sink in. The seed is you. **God's people are the seeds sown in the world.** We are the seeds of the Kingdom. Though small in number, in relation to those who attend the footy this weekend—who's going again? Who's going to the footy this arvo? Put your hands up! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—Sarah, you're going too. How many can the MCG hold? About 100,000? Just shy of 100,000!¹ Can anyone tell me, did Collingwood make their one million member attending record yesterday? Did they?? Did anyone see the news, did it happen? Who are the Collingwood supporters here? Come on, be brave! Oh, we've got a few! Did you watch the game? Yes? And did they say whether they'd reached a million people just this year—a million visits to watch Collingwood play. Frank, did you hear that? No? No? Well, they were thinking this weekend they would hit one million Collingwood supporters at games.² I don't think there's a million of them in Melbourne, but you know what I mean, you know, the visits. Sorry, Collingwood supporters, you'll need to forgive me.

But that's a huge number, isn't it? A hundred thousand people at the MCG. There might be thirty, forty thousand, especially with Adelaide playing and Melbourne—there'll be a few people there this afternoon. And we can be tempted to look at—wow, look at our little church. We're not full, we're small in number, and increasing numbers of people in our society pay no attention to God or God's Kingdom.

As we've been thinking and praying and planning towards a new congregation at Watsonia, when we're the only church building in that whole Watsonia area; when we know the statistics that over 40% of the people in Watsonia tick the 'No Religion' box—none at all. Yes, there are about 48% who say that they come from a Christian background.

What does that tell us? For me, this parable is an encouragement. It tells us that we are the people of God, sown into our community. Yes, we gather together here on a Sunday, or a Bible study during the week, either here or at Watsonia; but we are the

people of God sown into our community. We've been planted here and into our friendships, and the people that we shop with, and have coffee with, that we get to know. We've been planted here to be the people of God in our community.

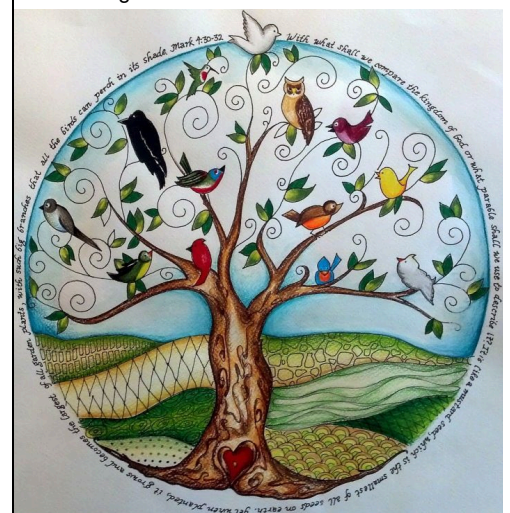
Sometimes we can think about evangelism, of sharing the good news of Jesus, about being something that we do. But it's more than that, isn't? It's about who we are. Yes, evangelism is sharing the good news about Jesus and God's love shown in Jesus Christ; but it's first about *being* God's people. Yeah, sharing too—but we can't just be mouths, if we're not engaged with our communities.

This parable is about the kingdom of God, and answering the question on earth now, why aren't all people believers in Jesus? Is God's word defective somehow? This parable says no: the kingdom is here, the kingdom is growing. And yes, it's sort of mixed in with everything in the world—all the joy that we experience, all the pain in the world—but God's kingdom is here. And the harvest of God's kingdom, coming into his palace, being welcomed with open arms, will be shown at the end of time, when God's kingdom is revealed.

A parable has many layers, and the truths of the parable we need to dig through. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a little mustard seed that turns into a massive tree. You only need a little bit of sourdough starter that can go on and on and on and on, and that you put into your sourdough and it rises. In the parable here it's about the woman putting a bit of that starter from the original one, the leaven, and putting it into about 30 kilos of flour—enough bread to feed about a hundred people. Something small, even very small, can become something large, because it is God's work, and God will grow huge his kingdom, because it is from God.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like being seeds sown in the field. It doesn't matter how small we are as a church at the moment: we are the seeds that God has sown into this place, and will continue to sow. It will grow. It will grow.

So my encouragement to us, is to trust in God. Continue to be the people of God. Seek for opportunities to let people know that you are God's person—that they know that you go to church; to be a blessing to the communities and the families of which you are a part. The story of the growth of God's Kingdom is a joyous story. And you know what's so exciting? We're part of that story. May God bless us and use us for the growth of his kingdom. Amen.



¹ Actually 100,024. Supposedly every single place was occupied for the 2022 Grand Final. In 1959, when there was much more standing room, 143,750 attended a Billy Graham crusade.

² Indeed they did.

Parish Council Notes

Meeting of Monday 17th July

Business arising

- Diocese given our assessment of our Land Tax liabilities, receipt acknowledged. Relevant staff member on leave: still waiting to learn what next.
- Still no response to email to Diocese about our monthly Diocesan Assessment. Follow up.

Deconsecration service for St Andrew's

- 2 pm Sunday 20 August: bishop available then.
- Information about the service to parishioners and former parishioners.
- Denise will prepare a suitable service.

The VINE series

- Ca 10 responses to survey: more sought.

Watsonia revitalisation

- Jonathan or Denise to attend future *mainly music* sessions to build relationships with families.
- Jonathan and Denise will meet weekly at Watsonia at 11 am on Thursdays to pray about and plan activities at Watsonia.
- Focus Group to be expanded—will meet monthly at Holy Spirit: time yet to be decided.
- Jonathan's report 'Café and Play in Watsonia' reviewed church-run venues with child play areas that provided opportunities for passers-by, who wouldn't otherwise come in contact with Christian groups, to drop in for coffee or a meal—possible relevance to proposed development.
- An article on Watsonia by Di Websdale-Morrissey contained interesting insights into changes in Watsonia over the past 70 years.

Finance report

- Reports for June 2023, and year-to-date. June: deficit \$41,207, due to substantial outlays on capital projects; much of the money will in time be recovered from other funds. Year-to-date: surplus \$83,126.
- Information on status of Parish's other funds.
- Agreed up to \$40,000 be withdrawn from the Crystal Dunn Bequest fund to cover expenses incurred on St John's project work.
- Our share of op shop income for April and May now received.
- Contracts with Dance Artistry Australia and St Peter's Knanaya: move to an annual fee arrangement with DAA from the start of term 3. Talk to DAA and St Peter's about updating contracts.

- See if account presentation can distinguish more clearly between funds earmarked for specific purposes and funds available for running costs.

- Preliminary tentative budget projections for the 2023–24 financial year. We shall need to wait for at least another couple of months to get a clearer picture, but projections suggest money will be tight next year.

Submission to Diocese re Rosanna

- Discussions with Diocese about how proceeds from the future sale of the Rosanna property might be allocated and used. Diocese wanted considerable modifications to our proposal, and requested further information.

Watsonia op shop

- BSL have now paid parish its share of the April and May op shop income.
- Informal discussions with op shop staff indicate shop is going very well this year.

ADOM compliance calendar

- July extract circulated.

Child safety

- Continuing to follow up those who still need to complete aspects of Safe Ministry Training.

Vicar's report: No report

Associate's report

- *Summary:*
 - Follow up issue with St Peter's kids and the tennis court equipment.
 - Discussions reviewing & re-assessing Watsonia revitalisation with Denise: 'local' church and playgroups ideas emailed.
 - Covering weeks of leave (personal and sickness) 11/06 and 02/07 preaching and services.
 - Regis, mid-week, Iris Grange, Strathalan services.
 - Plan and organise spiritual retreat in coordination with Rev'd David Jones 01/07.
 - Youth outing, Ambrose Archery 02/07: 4 youth (2 new).
 - Organising memorial and interment service for Mon 14th Aug.
 - Prayer Day 04/07.
 - Met Amanda Linke (St Hilary's Kew, Children's and Families Associate minister) 05/07, follow up clergy conference talk on children's ministry: opportunities & approaches for Watsonia.
 - Planning Term 3 Youth: AFL, basketball, bike ride ideas.
 - Finalised café research.

Thanks:

- God sustaining grace during Denise's leave.
- Denise's healing and recovery.

Prayers:

- Re-assessed plans for Watsonia revitalisation.

Goals next month:

- Weekly Launch Team Bible studies.
- Discussion with Denise about future plans for Watsonia revitalisation.

Goals next quarter (July–Aug):

- Further prayer and planning for Watsonia.

Wardens' report

Heidelberg:

- Banyule Council have started to clear Salt Creek below our property.
- CCTV footage of sewer pipe performed.
- Planning permit application for car park (incl. bollard lights, stormwater drainage revision, sign) and halls submitted to Banyule Council.
- St John's restoration plans received from architect David Wagner.
- Dance Artistry Australia have installed the acoustic flooring in the lower hall.
- Gutters of the halls and the church at Heidelberg have been cleaned out.

Rosanna:

- Parish Hall has been demolished.
- All the papers for our submission to Diocese re our claim for a share in the proceeds from the sale of the Rosanna property were completed. Thanks Katrina.
- Identifibre visited St Andrew's: there is a pile of asbestos sheeting by a tree and the soil is also contaminated—advised to inform the insurer.
- Vicarage: Yarra Valley Water contacted to fix broken pipe in adjacent easement from which fresh sewage was flowing into the property. YV fixed it; asked to move sewage pipes from adjacent houses so don't run through vicarage.

Watsonia:

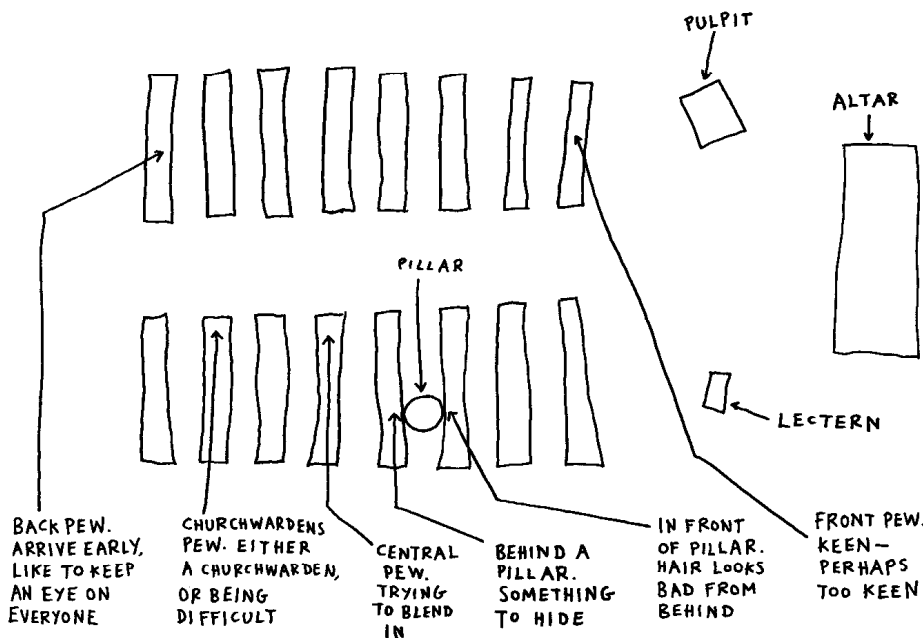
- Vicarage kitchen tap was replaced.
- Vicarage rusted gutter has been resealed.

General business

- Firm ready to install heating/cooling system in St John's Lower Hall, but \$10,000 grant not yet received. Ask not to start work until we have the grant money.
- Quotes for mowing and garden maintenance from several suppliers: comparable with current arrangements, so won't change. Rhonda thanked.

Minutes by Mike Connor, précis by Editor

WHAT YOUR PEW SAYS ABOUT YOU



Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth

SAY not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here, no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.

Arthur Hugh Clough