

# BANYULE BABBLE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF BANYULE

HOLY SPIRIT WATSONIA ❄️ ST ANDREW'S ROSANNA ❄️ ST JOHN'S HEIDELBERG

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## DENISE'S DATELINE

### GOODBYE 2020, WELCOME 2021!

2020 has been a long year and a year of longing. Longing to see family and friends; longing for restrictions to ease; longing to be 'normal' again. A long year of longing.

LONG months of social distancing, of working from home, of missing family, friends, and planned celebrations. Long days of connecting by Zoom, of shops shut and walking our neighbourhoods for only an hour a day.

Our individual experiences of 2020 have varied; for some there have been the joys of a wedding, a birthday celebration, babies born. Some people have reported enjoying being off the 'treadmill' of too busy lives, and children told me that while they missed their friends, they enjoyed having more time with their family.

It has been a long year; and along with you, I will be glad to bid farewell 2020 – roll in 2021...but are we longing for things just as they were, or is there something we can learn from this long year of longing?

The 2020 season of Advent for me has reminded me how as Christians we are always in the season of longing, watching, and waiting. We long for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, for his glory to be revealed and for every knee to bow in homage to the King of Kings; and yet we live in this world, wanting to truly live our lives to the full, as Jesus said in my favourite verse John 10:10b *'...I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.'* How do we do this?

How can what we have experienced – as a community and as individuals – help us live life to the full in 2021? I think there are two ways. Firstly, join with the rest of our society in enjoying, relishing, and rejoicing in what we can all come to appreciate as the most important things in life: a family get together without restrictions; a cup of coffee with friends in a nearby café where we can just chat about everyday things; walking the supermarket aisle and buying only what we need; visiting family and friends in care homes or hos-

pitals whenever we want; strolling in the park and being refreshed by nature.

Secondly, as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, live our lives hearing and heeding the words of Scripture about:

**a. God's love and forgiveness:** *<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103)*

**b. Jesus' promised return:** *...In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom...' (2 Timothy 4:1)*

**c. Listening to the Word of God, even when it is challenging:** *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (2 Timothy 4:3)*

**d. God's promised reward for his faithful people:** *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8)*

Along with all Victorians, Australians, and the rest of the whole world, we have lived through the trials of 2020 in individual and societal ways, and some of us have fared much better than others. As Christians, we know that we are not immune from the sufferings of the world – but we have our Lord Jesus who himself entered human suffering to redeem us from it forever.

2020 has been a long year of longing; but as we bid it goodbye, may it also prove to be for us, a year of visceral learning as we live for the longing appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

Denise



### Baptism of Phoebe Senn

Our esteemed curate's daughter will be baptised on **Tuesday 2nd February**, the day the Church celebrates the events of Luke 2:22–38. The time has not been settled yet but it will be in the morning. All are welcome.

## APOLOGY

The *Banyule Babble* apologises unreservedly for misprinting Jacqui Albanis's name in last month's edition. It was entirely the fault of the stupid editor.

## Thanks!

Thanks to all who helped at the working bee at St John's on 12th December, despite the Editor's incorrect date. Your work made a big difference!

## Sue Ellen is leaving

Sue Ellen Smith, who has been running our office efficiently one day a week since 2018, has been given a full-time job, and so will have to leave us in mid-January. We hope to be able to farewell her properly in February.

## Catriona is coming!

**Catriona Johnson** will be joining us this year as a student minister. She is from Tasmania but studying at Ridley. We expect to see her on 31st January.

Doing a part-time placement in a real parish gives students knowledge they can't get in the lecture room; and each student brings something to us as well.

Catriona has given up other offers for us, so please make her welcome!

## Mask up!

Parish Council has decided that, until further notice, we **shall wear masks** in church. If there's ever an outbreak, we don't want to spread it. See page 8.

## More quilts!

Rosemary Bellair has more quilts for sale—proceeds to *mainly music*. See her ad on page 8.

## Last Month – December

**Thursday 24th Christmas Eve:** 5 pm Children’s service, St John’s garden; 11 pm St John’s (must book); 11 pm St Andrew’s (must book)

*Hebrews 1:1–12; John 1:1–14*

**Friday 25th Christmas Day:** 9 am St Andrew’s (must book); 10.15 am St John’s (must book)

*Hebrews 1:1–12; John 1:1–14*

**Sunday 27th Christmas 1 / St John:** 10.15 am St John’s  
*Song of Hannah; Luke 2:22–40*

## This Month – January

**Services this month will all be combined, at one centre. There will be no on-line services.**

**Sunday 3rd Christmas 2:** 10.15 am St Andrew’s

**Wednesday 6th Epiphany**

**Sunday 10th Epiphany 1:** 10.15 am St John’s

**Sunday 17th Epiphany 2:** 10.15 am St Andrew’s

**Sunday 24th Epiphany 3:** 10.15 am St John’s

**Sunday 31st Epiphany 4:** 10.15 am St John’s

## Next Month – February

**Tuesday 2nd Presentation of Jesus in the Temple / Purification of Mary:** Baptism of Phoebe Senn

## Wanted

- More churchwardens!
- Volunteers for *mainly music*

## Money: November

Income:	Giving:	\$8,522.00
	Other:	\$15,566.00
	Total:	\$24,088.00
Expenses:		\$22,855.92
<b>Surplus:</b>		<b>\$1,232.08</b>

Giving was down. We can expect less, if any, support from JobKeeper in future.

## mainly music: January 2021

Thank you for all your prayers, particularly over the past tumultuous year. We sent 41 weekly emails to all the families on our books, and in most cases managed to keep them involved. I believe one or two had problems with the technology, but at least they knew they were still ‘included’.

We were able to have our ‘gatherings’ in December, with only Rosanna having to be inside because it was wet underfoot. Everyone was so pleased to be able to connect in person, and those outside didn’t even have to wear masks! Babies were walking and toddlers now ready for kindergarten and some older ones going off to school! What a lot we have missed. Everyone was unwilling for the morning to end!

During the break we will be working on how we can keep everyone safe in the year to come and trying to create music programs which do not involve too much moving around the room or personal contact outside the family groups. There are plenty of songs we can use or adapt for use. We may be ‘going over the top’ but better that way than risk the health of team members and families.

Keep praying that the Lord will provide team members – particularly for Heidelberg.

Rosemary Bellair (9459 5394)

## Christmas and beyond

**24 Dec:** 5 pm St John’s garden, 11 pm St John’s, 11 pm St Andrew’s

**25 Dec:** 9 am St Andrew’s, 10.15 am St John’s

**27 Dec:** 10.15 am St John’s

**3 Jan:** 10.15 am St Andrew’s

**10 Jan:** 10.15 am St John’s

**17 Jan:** 10.15 am St Andrew’s

**24 Jan:** 10.15 am St John’s

**31 Jan:** 10.15 am St John’s

*No Combined Services at Holy Spirit because of the small floor area.*

## St Andrew’s Mothers’ Union

The article that was promised on the history and achievements of the (now closing) St Andrew’s branch of the Mothers’ Union will now appear in the February edition.

## Holy Spirit Mothers’ Union

For our last day for 2020, we had a business lunch at the RSL. When I phoned the numbers (6) through the day before, the RSL said could I make it 8. I said I would try, phoning up Sylvia Webb. Sylvia is the resident of Melbourne Diocesan MU, which meets at St Paul’s four times a year. Sylvia and Frank at times join in Watsonia MU meetings and outings, and they said they could come.

At our MU lunch I passed the minutes around with an extra prayer on, gave out the 2021 MU Diaries, and the minutes of the MU Council Meeting. Coral had bought a Christmas card to send to our link branch at St Mary’s Broughty Ferry in Scotland which we all signed. Business over, then we chatted over lunch. I gave Elizabeth, Barbara and Coral a Christmas card photo, with the Rosanna *mainly music* group having lunch with Andrew Bowles, Marion (our team leader) Gwen and myself. — *Elsie Storr*

## Rosanna mainly music

Rosanna *mainly music*’s last day was on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December. The plan was to have it on the lawns at St Andrew’s. *Proverbs 16:1: We may make our plans, but God has the last word.* We arrived to find the lawns were very wet, so we decided to have it in the church, where we usually have it.

I came prepared to wash chairs (following Wilma’s advice on how to do it), plus with a portable player with disc with children’s songs on. Rosemary Bellair joined us bringing a plant for Marion’s farewell gift. Marion had written on all the children’s books, and tied them with pretty ribbons. Rev’d Denise came and gave Marion her farewell gift. Then Elizabeth thanked Rosemary for all the work she has put into *mainly music*, which we all agreed to with another big clap.

After a social time, all visitors went and we cleaned everything, and then went through the boxes of toys etc. We left a good half for church children and some went to the op shop; then we took all that was on the kitchen floor and put them in the empty shelves.

*Elsie Storr*

*Brewster the teapot now has a tea-cosy:*



# Blockes Helping Blockes



The Blockes met again on Saturday 5th December, in person for the first time since March. We were in the porch area at St Andrew's, availing ourselves of the greater freedoms allowed in the open air, while still having a handy roof to shelter under if it rained, which it didn't.

Glenn operated the electric barbecue like the champion he is, cooking sausages he had made himself, and hamburgers, ditto. He even had a thermometer for sticking into the sausages and hamburgers to see if they were done, a refinement the Editor had never seen at a barbecue, where usually the test is whether there is a thick enough layer of charcoal on the outside. However in these times the instrument could do extra duty, checking whether any attendees had the 'rona. A deep internal measurement may indeed have been more accurate than the forehead check that the Blockes were subjected to, which showed them all to have recently died.

*Mr December* was Mr Len Edwards. Len was originally meant to be *Mr March*, but he was ill on the day (or said he was), and then the virus intervened. So we were happy to have him with us in December, with his hands chained around a post and his feet cemented into a suitable hole.

Len was born (he told us) in 1938 in the Sydney suburb of Leichhardt, now an inner suburb but in those days practically on the outskirts. He was an only child—there was an older brother, but he had died of pneumonia 18 months before Len was born. Len's father worked in a hat factory, making slouch hats out of rabbit fur, as they then still were, and his mother was a ladies' dressmaker. When Len was nine his parents split up, and Len went with his mother to a chicken farm in the country.

Work in the chicken farm went on 365 days a year. To escape, at 17 Len joined up with the RAAF, and became an engine mechanic based at Wagga. Eventually he was transferred to Canberra, where they had frequent visits by Important Personages. He told us that he had been eyeball-to-eyeball with Prince Philip, though what the confrontation was about he didn't say, nor who eventually blinked first. He had also been close to the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret, but apparently did not engage either of those royals in a staring competition.

The RAAF gave talks on 'moral leadership', organised by the chaplains, to the men. As a result of these Len decided to attend a Billy Graham meeting, which led to his choosing to follow Christ. He eventually joined the Gideons, who hand

out Bibles to hotels and motels, and sometimes schools, but most schools won't let them. (Len brought some Gideon's Bibles to the barbecue.)

Jet engines came in, so Len moved to looking after them. In the early days there were often problems with overheating, until a method of cooling the stator blades by blowing air through the blades themselves was developed.

The government had one of its periodic austerity drives and Len found himself out of a job. For twelve years he ran a cleaning business, but eventually moved back to aircraft, working for Australian Airlines at Essendon and then Tullamarine. He became an expert on wheels and brakes, and, later on, hydraulics, until finally retiring.

Len was thanked for his talk, which was worth the wait.

It would not have been *Blockes Helping Blockes* without a joke from Frank Webb. Glenn asked for a better joke than in November, which, he said, was a shocker. Frank rose to the challenge, but can I repeat it here? Will I get away with it?

It was December 2020 at the North Pole, and everything was going badly for Father Christmas. The pandemic had thrown the work schedule completely off, the elves were on strike, the pixies were working to rule, production was so far behind there seemed no way to get all the toys made, and Mrs Claus had left him. Stressed and depressed, he went home to find solace in the six-pack of beer he had in the fridge. When he got home he found that Mrs Claus had got rid of all his beer.

At this point a very little angel came in, dragging a very large Christmas tree. "Where should I stick this tree?" asked the angel.

And that's why every Christmas tree has an angel on top.

There was no way to top that, so the Blockes dissipated. January's breakfast, at 8 am on 2nd January, will be at Macleod. The place is just opposite the station, on the east (shops) side, where a medical centre used to be. Banyule Council are so impressed by *Blockes Helping Blockes* that they issued orders that we were to get a Big Cupboard instead of the small cupboards that everyone else gets. Please let Glenn know if you are coming, to help with catering: 0487 852 808. All blockes are welcome!

Peter McKay



Macleod Community Hall – our new location  
Blockes are invited to check out the size of our cupboard

# CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

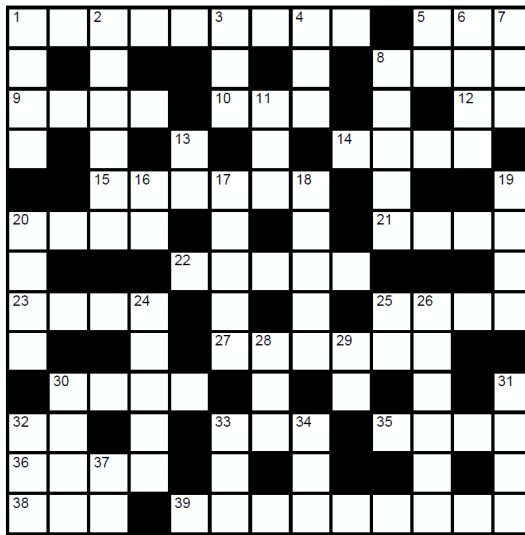
**Across**

- 1 Jesus' birthplace (9)
- 5 Herod slew the children of this age and under (3)
- 8 Peter quoted his words on the day of Pentecost (4)
- 9 "A \_\_\_ shaken with the wind" (4)
- 10 "Ye shall find \_\_\_ babe wrapped in swaddling clothes" (3)
- 12 The year from Jesus' birth (2)
- 14 Anna was of this tribe (as recorded in Luke) (4)
- 15 "Behold, a \_\_\_ shall be with child" (6)
- 20 "Fruits \_\_\_ for repentance" (4)
- 21 The wise men came from here (4)
- 22 "He shall reign of the house of \_\_\_ for ever" (5)
- 23 A female ancestor of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 1 (4)
- 25 The amount of manna to be gathered per person (4)
- 27 He multiplied the widow's oil (6)

- 30 "As soon as the voice of thy salvation sounded in mine \_\_\_" (4)
- 32 An altar meaning witness (Joshua 22) (2)
- 33 To increase (3)
- 35 Malarial fever (4)
- 36 To guide (4)
- 38 There was no room here (3)
- 39 These men went to see the baby Jesus (9)

**Down**

- 1 "Mary, of whom was \_\_\_ Jesus" (4)
- 2 Jesus' age when he was taken to Jerusalem (6)
- 3 Jesus did not do this in the wilderness (3)
- 4 Adam's wife (3)
- 5 "Mary was espoused \_\_\_ Joseph" (2)
- 6 "They that \_\_\_ soft clothing are in kings' houses" (4)
- 7 Zacharias said, "I am an \_\_\_ man" (3)
- 8 Grandson of 23 (5)
- 11 A place near Bethel (3)

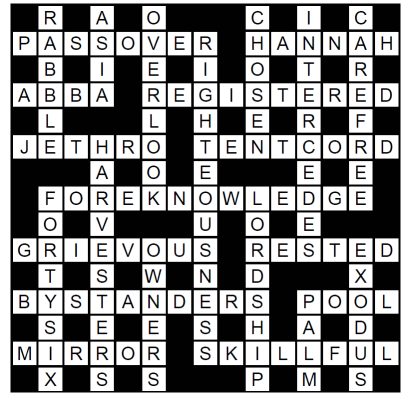


by Colin

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- 13 "A pair of turtledoves \_\_\_ two young pigeons" (2)
- 16 "That \_\_\_ might be fulfilled" (2)
- 17 "The \_\_\_ of God was upon him" (5)
- 18 Mother-in-law of 23 (5)
- 19 This went before the wise men (4)
- 20 The mother of Jesus (4)
- 24 He was king at the time of Jesus' birth (5)
- 25 "\_\_\_ that one would hear me!" (2)
- 26 Jesus was laid in this (6)
- 28 The spirit did this to Jesus in the wilderness (3)
- 29 Thus (2)
- 30 The first garden (4)
- 31 "Where is he that is born king of the \_\_\_?" (4)
- 32 A priest in the time of Samuel (3)
- 33 A tree of the olive family (3)
- 34 To put into water (3)
- 37 "\_\_\_ angel of the Lord appeareth" (2)

**Answers to last month's puzzles:**



Bible Word Search mystery answer: **KING OF KINGS**

Last month's anagram:

- eeforrv \_\_\_\_\_ forever
- aagimnz \_\_\_\_\_ amazing
- aimnoss \_\_\_\_\_ mansions
- eeltvw \_\_\_\_\_ twelve
- aeglms \_\_\_\_\_ angels
- ghilt \_\_\_\_\_ light
- cnorw \_\_\_\_\_ crown
- aderrw \_\_\_\_\_ reward
- hioprsw \_\_\_\_\_ worship
- eersstt \_\_\_\_\_ streets

## Bible Word Search – Christmas

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\\_Christmas\\_0.htm](https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_Christmas_0.htm)

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

- Advent, Angels, Beauty, Birth, Cards, Carols, Census, Children, Christ, Church, Creche, December, Family, Feast, Festival, Garland, Giving, Goodwill, Herod, Holiday, Holly, Holy, Icicles, Jesus, Joseph, Joy, Lights, Love, Magi, Manger, Mary, Merry, Music, Nativity, Noel, Pageants, Peace, Prayer, Santa, Season, Shepherd, Sleigh, Snow, Star, Stocking, Trees, Yule

Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

## Christmas Anagram



- bennorw \_\_\_\_\_
- ghiinns arst \_\_\_\_\_
- deehhprss \_\_\_\_\_
- aceefiknnrs \_\_\_\_\_
- aiinntvy \_\_\_\_\_
- aeglms \_\_\_\_\_
- abelst \_\_\_\_\_
- aegmnr \_\_\_\_\_
- acilmns \_\_\_\_\_
- ejsu \_\_\_\_\_

## 'A Different Love Song'

The Second Sunday in Advent, 6/12/2020

Isaiah 5; Psalm 32; 2 Peter 3:1–14

by Patrick Senn

### Introduction

We love love songs. Maybe you have a favourite, or there is a song that is sort of the theme of your marriage or of a past relationship. There are many famous love songs. 'Unchained melody' by the Righteous Brothers, or 'Can't help falling in love' by Elvis Presley just to name two. Our reading from Isaiah also presents us with a love song. But, this love song is unlike any other. Love songs usually focus on the good qualities of the other; the eyes, the hair, the smile, and so forth. God's love song—the Song of the Vineyard—focuses on the bad: on everything that is unfitting and ugly about God's people.

It is good for us in church to hear a different love song, as we are in a different season than our wider culture. While our culture already is in Christmas—Christmas trees are up, carols are playing, and peace and joy are announced—in church we are in Advent, fasting and repenting, looking at darkness, and getting ready for Jesus to return to judge the living and the dead.

### A very different love song

Love songs usually describe not only the beauty of the beloved but very often also the beauty of creation. So, Elvis sings "Like a river flows, Surely to the sea, Darling, so it goes, Some things are meant to be." The love song of the vineyard is similar. It begins with the image of a vineyard, an image that is especially familiar to Jews, as still to this day the Judean countryside is full of vineyards and grapes grow very easily in that climate. But, establishing a vineyard is not easy. "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well." It is hard work. First, you have to find a fertile hill. Then, you dig the ground, clear it of stones, and plant the choice vines. Hard, manual labour, not to mention in the climate of a scorching hot desert. Once that is all done, you build a watchtower to oversee the growth of the vines and to look out for thieves. Finally, you build a winepress so that the grapes can be stomped.

After hard work, you expect good results. After all this, you expect the vineyard to yield grapes. And yet, it does not. We have the saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That of course only makes sense because the opposite is true: if something *is* broke you *do* fix it. If a roof is leaky, you fix it. If a light bulb is broken, you replace it. If a fruit tree or a vineyard is unfruitful, you get rid of it. God's response to the vineyard is to tear it down. Verse 5, "I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled." With this disappointing climax of an unfruitful vineyard, and the announcement that it will be destroyed, God makes a stunning reveal: "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

### The bad fruit

God sums up all of Israel's failures with the image of the vineyard. God chose Israel, freed him from slavery in Egypt, gave him his laws and the Promised Land. He lovingly planted a vineyard. And yet, there was only bad fruit. From verses 8–23 God rebukes the specific types of bad fruit Israel has produced. You might remember from a few years ago the great strawberry scare. Different people kept finding

needles buried in the strawberries they bought at Coles. You yourself probably cut up all your strawberries for a while before eating them. The problem with that fruit was not just that it was not quite ripe, nor just bad, but dangerous.

From verses 8–23, over and over again we hear the warning 'Woe!'. The prophet warns the people that their fruit is evil, dangerous, and will lead to ruin. God does not accept it. The fundamental issue behind all of the fruit is pride. The people have ignored God and his demands, and have asserted themselves before him. This is true for the greedy (8–10) who hoard land and property to the extent that it displaces the poor. It is true for those who indulge (11–12) their sensual desires so much that they forget about God. In their pride, they worship the creation rather than the Creator. It is also true for those who tempt God (18–19) and question his authority to judge.

In each of the woes, Israel has failed to love God, and to love her neighbours. Instead, they are proud; they are 'wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight', and they make up their own morality calling 'evil good and good evil'. This is why God is angry. Even though he planted a vineyard and tenderly cared for it, it only has borne bad fruit—lots of it. This is why the vineyard is going to be torn down and judgement will come. "Therefore the LORD'S anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down." (25) "He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily!" (26) God's judgement will come in the form of another nation. A strong and fierce army will arise that will conquer and exile Israel, and it will not be stopped.

God's warnings to Israel are just as relevant to us today since human nature is still the same. Greed is as real today as it was in the ancient world. Our big banks regularly are fined for charging customers fees that are illegal. Crown Casino had so many corrupt dealings it is not allowed to open in Sydney. Union leaders appear before courts for misappropriating funds. And everyone wants to live in a bigger property, we want 'Better Homes and Gardens', not to be thankful with what God has given to us and acknowledge that everything comes from his hands. God still condemns greed. We have to guard our hearts from it.

Moreover, the warning against those who pursue their sensual desires and forget about God could not be more relevant today. The creed that everyone confesses today is: 'Follow your heart'. And the greatest sin is to dare to question someone else's pursuits. But God doesn't want us to follow our hearts, he wants us to follow him. Of course, there is nothing wrong with pleasure, all good things come from God and are his gifts to us, but if we fail to see and acknowledge God behind the things we enjoy, we commit idolatry, and worship the creature rather than the Creator.

We need to repent of our wrongdoings. Just as judgement was incoming for the people of Judah, so we know that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, and all bad fruit will be destroyed. Advent is a time of repentance, a time to look within ourselves to cast off the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light.

### To love is to show wrath

I mentioned before, during the season of Advent the church is the most distinct from the culture around us. Many are not comfortable with this. They do not like Advent and its themes of judgement, repentance, and holiness. Many modern people are not comfortable with a God of wrath and vengeance. Instead, they

prefer a God who is nice, a little bit more like Father Christmas, who wants us to be good, but certainly does not get all that angry if we are not. But this is an idea that is only sustainable for those who live comfy suburban lives.

When we are faced with the real world, the world of darkness, we realise how quickly we need a God of justice, a God who does not tolerate evil but judges it. Just two weeks ago on Monday, in the little village of Koshobe in the north-east of Nigeria, farmers were working on rice fields, when suddenly Boko Haram jihadists attacked the village and killed 110 people. Imagine saying to someone like that 'God does not show wrath. God is love.' Or think about that family of three, including a three-week old baby that died in their home, after an arsonist set their house on fire. Imagine telling them 'God does not judge evil.'

Without the wrath and judgement of God we lose a God who is able to right the world's wrongs, and to make all things good. A God of no wrath is a God of no love. Because God stands up for what is good, he opposes and condemns what is evil. This is why the Song of the Vineyard is still a love song, even though it does not focus on all the good qualities. God opposes the evil precisely because he upholds what is good.

### The advent hope

The advent hope is that Jesus will return and will judge the living and the dead. All the evil and the suffering in the world will not win out. Death and sin will lose their power. Every evil, however small and on the individual level, and however great and on the cosmic level, God will make it right. Goodness will prevail, and God will win. In the meantime, God is waiting and extending his invitation for all to turn to him. In our second reading, St Peter reminds us that God is not slow or indifferent about the state of the world. Verse 9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The only reason things continue as normal, is because God is giving time to change. For as long as it is today, God extends his invitation to the world to turn to him to be saved. This is why we must get ready. We all are sinners, we all have borne bad fruit, and we all have committed works of darkness. But, God sings his love song to us and calls us to turn to him.

### Conclusion

There are many popular love songs in the world. All of them usually focus just on the good qualities of the beloved. God's love song is a little different. Instead of praising all the wonderful qualities about us, he calls out the bad and damaging fruit that we produce and that leads to our ruin. Our society today still produces much of the same fruit that the society of Jerusalem produced over 2500 years ago. But God does this out of love. In his goodness he cannot tolerate evil, and in his judgement, he brings it to an end. Rather than being something the church should be ashamed about, the Advent hope is good news for a world of darkness and suffering. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, and when he does, he will right all the wrongs that have been suffered. St Peter tells us:

"That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

AMEN.

## Homily for Advent 3

The Third Sunday in Advent, 13/12/2020

Isaiah 25; Psalm 30; 1 Timothy 1:12–17

by Patrick Senn

### Introduction

Ethel Haines was an aged care resident in Red Cliffs, near Mildura, who died aged 89 almost three years ago. While she was still alive, she was afraid that some of her neighbours were financially going to take advantage of her, so a worker became her power of attorney alongside the CEO of the nursing home. After her death, a solicitor looked at her finances and saw that her bank account contained just little over \$9000. An investigation began and soon it was discovered that the nursing home worker had used her power of attorney privileges to steal more than \$100,000 over a period of two years. The woman was sentenced last month, and the judge described her offending as 'disgraceful'. An arrest warrant is still outstanding for the woman's abusive partner who also played a role in the scheme. Last week, we heard that God's judgement is a good thing. Unless you have a heart made of stone, hearing the story of Ethel Haines cannot but make you angry at the wrong she suffered, grateful that the offending has been stopped, and long and hope that the abusive partner will be caught and punished.

The advent hope, that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, is good news for the oppressed; and it is especially so in a world where the law and human courts do not always get it right. Just think about the scandal around Nicola Gobbo. Convicted organised crime leaders needed to be brought to justice, but as their lawyer she at the same time was informing the police on them. Even when our human courts do get it right, they often cannot undo the damage. A court may order financial restitution, but it cannot bring back someone who was killed, nor can the courts heal wounded hearts. At Jesus' second coming, perfect justice will be carried out, wounded and pain-filled hearts will be healed. Jesus is no ordinary judge, a sinner like the rest of us, but the perfect God-man who was like us in every way except sin. And this is why his return at the great day of judgement is good news, something we should look forward to, something we should long for, a hope that should characterise our lives.

### Longing for Judgement

Isaiah longed for God's day of judgement, and praised and celebrated God for it. Our reading begins: "LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name". God is not just out there doing his own thing for his own sake, but he acts specifically and wonderfully for us. This is why Isaiah praises him not just as *the* God, but *my* God. Judgement is on behalf of those who need it, and for our good. For many, these words of praise and thanksgiving seem incompatible with the words that follow right after: "You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt." God destroys human sin, pride, and oppression, described here as a strong city. All forces, however small or however great, have been brought low.

The result: "You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat." God's judgement is a good thing because he vindicates the poor and oppressed. This is why Isaiah praises the LORD as "My God". The infinite, transcendent, and Almighty God doesn't act in distant ways like we are insignificant pawns in a game of chess, leaving us to suffer a cruel and blind fate. The Almighty acts in such personal ways that he becomes a refuge for us.

We know that the weather in Melbourne is unpredictable. When you're outside, and suddenly a storm develops and rain starts pouring down, you need a refuge. When it is a scorching summer day, there is no greater feeling than walking into an air-conditioned room. God's judgement against evil and wickedness is a refuge, like a roof hiding you from the rain pouring down, or a shelter from the scorching heat. God's final judgement will be a refuge for those who trust in him, but the end of those who oppose him.

### Judgement has come

This plan of God, formed long ago, to bring judgement against the proud and fortified city, has partly been fulfilled. With the first advent of Jesus God's judgement against evil has come. Jesus' death on the cross was not just a tragic event, nor just God showing us how much he loves us. On the cross, Jesus endured the judgement against sin on our behalf. He willingly offered his life as a sacrifice to pay for the cost of sin. And because he is not just an ordinary man but the divine Son of God, his sacrifice is good enough for everyone, to cleanse all sins, once and for all.

For those of us who know we could never please God in our own strength, for those of us who have too much baggage in their past, Jesus is our refuge. When we trust in his life and death on our behalf, we do not need to fear the judgement of God. This is exactly what transformed Paul's life. As we hear in our second reading: "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." For those of us who know we are nothing but sinners, Jesus is our lifeline. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."

Isaiah's prophecy of the final day of judgement against evil has partly been fulfilled in Jesus' first advent. But, we wait for its final fulfilment. When Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, all secrets will be exposed. Those who trust in him will be sheltered and kept hidden, but those who reject Christ and God's offer of salvation in him, they are the ones who will not withstand the final day. This is the Christian life: Trusting in Jesus' death for our sins, and in so doing turning away from them in living a holy life.

### The Great Feast

I mentioned before: Human courts cannot heal broken and wounded hearts, and they cannot bring back the dead. But God can, and God will.

"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."

On the great and final day of judgement, God will host an extraordinary feast. Why? If you think about life's most special events: birth and birthdays, first dates and weddings, graduations and retirements, almost all of them involve sharing in a meal to celebrate. It is one of the most intimate things we do together, and also one of the best ways to celebrate an accomplishment. On the final day, God will undo the curse of death and he will heal our broken and wounded hearts. He will wipe away our tears, and actually right all of the world's wrongs. This

is worth a feast, this is worth a celebration. God will save us, and he will host us at his table.

On that final day, God's people will rejoice in him. Those who waited on him, who put their trust in him and did not let present circumstances take away their trust, they will celebrate. "In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'" In contrast, the proud and all who do not trust in God will be brought low. "God will bring down their pride despite the cleverness of their hands. He will bring down your high fortified walls and lay them low; he will bring them down to the ground, to the very dust."

### The Great Feast has come

This promise of the defeat of death, and of a great feast for all, also has partly come to pass with the first coming of Jesus. On Mt Zion outside Jerusalem, he was crucified, died, and was buried. And on the third day he rose again to life and thereby destroyed the power of death. Through faith and through baptism, we are incorporated and united with Christ, in his death and his victory over it. And because we are material creatures who are sustained through material things, God has given us the bread and wine of Holy Communion. When we eat and drink at the Lord's Table, we taste God's promise of eternal life. Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life ... Whoever eats this bread will live forever.' At Holy Communion, we come to a meal where God is the host, and the nourishment is not for a short time in our stomachs, but for our souls for all eternity. The shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations, death has been defeated.

But we still wait for the final fulfilment of this promise. We are guaranteed eternal life now, but we still have to die one die. We share in the holy feast already now, but we still wait for the final feast when Jesus returns. In this life, we are stuck between what God already has done, and the day when he will finally bring them to completion. This is what living an advent life looks like. Looking back to the accomplishments of his first advent, and looking forward expectantly for this second advent.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the judgement of God is good news, something we should long for, and something we should anticipate. While our wider culture is looking forward to Christmas Day, God reminds us to look forward to another day, the great and final day of ultimate joy. When Jesus returns, sin, and death, the wicked and the proud will be stopped. And like in the case of Ethel Haines, this will be something good for the oppressed, for those who have been wronged, for those looking for justice. Unlike our human courts, Jesus will have the power to raise the dead, to heal broken hearts, to wipe away every tear that has been shed in this world.

As we get anticipate and get ready for this great and final day, we cast off the works of darkness, confess and repent from our sins, and keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus. As our culture anticipates Christmas Day and all the delicious food that will be celebrated, God is calling us to keep in mind the day when he will provide for us:

"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."

AMEN.

## 'The King who Opens Eyes'

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, 20/12/2020

Isaiah 32:1–18; Psalm 103; 2 Timothy 3:14–4:8

by Patrick Senn

### Introduction

Earlier this year as we were struggling through the second lockdown, Victoria could be roughly divided into two sides. On the one side were those who stood loyally behind our Premier no matter what. To this group, nothing that the Premier did, or said could ever change their position. No matter the mistakes, no matter the lack of transparency around the failures of contact tracing and the quarantine hotels, no matter what, they decided that he is a living saint on earth. On the other side were those who loyally opposed the Premier no matter what. Nothing that he said or did could be good enough. No matter the seriousness with which he took the coronavirus, no matter that his government made economic relief payments to businesses and individuals; no matter what, they decided that he is the worst leader in history. Opinion around our Premier is obviously quite mixed, and he is far from perfect. But, considering some other leaders around the world we are still very fortunate.

In Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko rigged an election in his favour. When the people rightly protested and demanded a fair election, he set the police upon them to brutally stamp them out, as if they were criminals. In China, Xi Jinping has been committing cultural genocide against the Uyghur minorities, incarcerating people for no other reason than their belonging to this minority group. Cultural sites have been destroyed, children taken from their families, and women even sterilised by force. And then even some of our own leaders in this country try to ignore this, preferring instead to focus on the money we are losing as a result of trade wars, rather than the heinous crimes that are being committed against the Uyghurs.

Kings and rulers, leaders and officials rarely live up to what we expect of them. This was also the case in Israel's life. Human leaders sin, and as a result of their evil the nation suffers. Not only do the people suffer under their rulers, but often are also complicit in their evil as well. When the kings of Israel committed idolatry, the people usually followed suit. It is into this situation that God promises that a perfect king will arise, one who will not fail to lead the people in justice, and who will not fail to establish the reign of God.

### A Perfect King will come

The prophecy begins: "See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice." Last week, we heard that God's judgement is a refuge for the needy and oppressed, like a roof from the rain or a house from the scorching heat. In the same way, the reign of this future king will protect and support, rather than oppress and disappoint, like so many leaders do today. "Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land." But, this is in the future. Under the current kings of Israel people continue in the error of their ways. "Fools speak folly, their hearts are bent on evil: they practice ungodliness and spread error concerning the LORD". We have heard the last few weeks how this has been especially so with Israel: The nation was rebellious, blind towards the ways of God, spiritually asleep. The vineyard was unfruitful and about to be cut down.

Kings and Queens, Prime Ministers and Premiers, can improve the lives of their subjects, but they do not have the power to make them love what is good. As we endured the lockdowns, our Premier could on the threat of fines and punishment force Victorians to wear masks,

stay at home, and not go to social events. But he does not have the power to make us love obeying the rules. He cannot legislate a virtuous character, he cannot transform our hearts. But the future king whom God will raise up can and he will. The future king will awaken the people, and through him they will actually listen to God. They will affirm what is right, and condemn what is wrong not because they have to, but because they want to. "Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. ... No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected." The future king will transform Israel from a rebellious nation to a godly people.

### A Perfect King has come

As with most of Isaiah's prophecies, this promise has come to pass with the arrival of Jesus. While human leaders cannot make us love the good, nor love the ways of God and God himself, Jesus can and Jesus has. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has demonstrated his great love for us, not because we are good or because we deserve it, but precisely because we are rebellious sinners who need forgiveness. Through this gift, our hearts are transformed, and we actually start listening to God, we actually start wanting to obey his commandments, and we get sick and tired of our own sins. Just the fact that we are here today demonstrates that we want to be with God, and to listen to him speak to us. Jesus is the King who has opened our eyes and spiritually enlightened us. And this is something he works in us throughout our lifetime. In this life, we will never be perfect. We still will desire bad things and sin. But when Jesus returns again, we will be made perfect. And we will be united with God in such a way that nothing else will ever satisfy us in his place.

### Secure in Insecurity

Isaiah looked forward to the righteous king whose rule will be perfectly just. But, as good as that future was going to be, it was worlds apart from his own day. And to this situation he returns again from verse 9. The people are not yet enlightened, but still are asleep and complacent. In particular, it was a group of women who were not paying attention to God. As elsewhere in the Bible, though women are addressed, that does not mean men do not also need to be listening. The words apply to everyone equally. Isaiah charges them: "You women who are so complacent, rise up and listen to me; you daughters who feel secure, hear what I have to say!"

This group was feeling secure in their circumstances, and they were complacent. The harvests were rich and the crops were abundant. "Who cares what God's holy prophets are warning us about, with all their negative messages of judgement and disaster! We are having harvest festivals, and dressing up in our fine clothes." But Isaiah warns them, "In little more than a year you who feel secure will tremble; the grape harvest will fail, and the harvest of fruit will not come." Things may be going well now, but that will quickly change. The things around you are not an indicator of your standing before God, nor a guarantee of what things will be like in the future.

How important is this today. How relevant is this after this year. Everyone had their plans for 2020; to go travelling, to maybe finally meet that special someone, to get into shape, and to live your best life. Everyone had their grand plans, perhaps because everything already was going so well. Great job, lots of friends, and being in one of the most liveable cities in the world. But, not only were people's plans cancelled, even what they already had came crushing down, as so many lost their jobs, struggled with poor mental health, and were isolated. And now just this week; we thought everything was fine and we made our Christmas plans until suddenly a new cluster broke out in Sydney. God's people must not put

their trust in their circumstances, which always are uncertain and can change in an instant. No matter how good things are going, that is not a guarantee that it will continue this way. God's people must put their trust in God who transcends all circumstances. God alone is constant, steadfast, and unmovable in our uncertain world.

### From Wasteland to Fertile Field

The complacency of the people, in Isaiah's day, will only lead to disappointment. While the crops are abundant and everything seems ok now, in the end everything will come down and be brought low. But God's judgement is never the final word. The certainty of the judgement of verse 14 is immediately followed with the promise of verse 15 "The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever" ... "till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. The LORD'S justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field." While the current kings and leaders will only lead to ruin, God will not leave his people to their own devices. The kingdom of God will come not by human wisdom and effort. The kingdom will come only by God's initiative, when he intervenes in the affairs of this world and pours out his Holy Spirit. Then, corruption will give way to justice, wickedness to righteousness, and the barren and dead vineyard will be turned into a fertile field.

What is interesting is that the fruit of God's intervention will not be material blessings. The result of God's promise will not be material wealth, rich harvests and great crops. Rather, "The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest." The blessing transcends material benefits. The ultimate blessing for God's people is that there will be peace and quiet confidence.

This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, when God poured out the Holy Spirit upon his people, confirming and sealing within us everything that Jesus did for us. Today, we enjoy this peace. Those who receive the gift of God's forgiveness are at peace with God. God has forgiven all our sins, and he is not hostile towards us nor against us. Rather, we enjoy peace and friendship with him. We can approach him confidently regardless of our circumstances. We can look forward to Jesus' return to establish his kingdom because we already now share in it by faith. But again, we wait for the time where this is true not only in the church, between God and his people, but in the whole world. When Jesus returns to renew the whole creation, to establish righteousness, and to destroy evil.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, compared to some of the leaders around the world, we are still quite fortunate. Dan Andrews is no Alexander Lukashenko or Xi Jinping. Still, he is far from perfect. The second wave and its more than 700 deaths was not due to people disobeying the rules. Rather, it was the fault of failures in the quarantine hotels, traced back to disorganisation and chaos on the bureaucratic level. There never has been a perfect human leader, nor one that can change the human heart.

This is why God promise to raise up a righteous king, and in his faithfulness God has fulfilled this. 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, the King and Saviour was born, who alone has been without sin, has established the kingdom of God, and transformed our hearts so that we can be holy before him. We are close to Christmas, when we can celebrate his birth and reign. We are still in Advent, we can look forward to when he returns in glory to bring his work to completion. AMEN.

## Prayers for these times

From our diocese:

### PRAYER IN A TIME OF EPIDEMIC DISEASE

Lord Jesus Christ, healer and friend, come and care for all of us through the danger and uncertainty of the coronavirus epidemic.

To people who are sick, bring healing.

To people who are displaced, isolated, or cut off from family, friends or work, bring comfort and companionship.

Work with medical staff as they care for the sick, and protect them from harm.

Give skill and fruitful research to scientists as they search for treatments, prevention and a cure.

To public health authorities, give wisdom to decide the best ways to manage both this crisis and our anxieties.

When communities are fearful, give a calm spirit, and kindness to neighbours and strangers.

Through this testing time, and through all the risks we face together, teach us once again how we can love one another as you have loved us.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

From Bishop Philip Huggins:

### A prayer for each day at 1900 hours as we offer prayers for our nation, amidst COVID-19

Gracious God,

We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.

We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.

We pray for those in need of healing.

We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.

We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain all those who are serving in response.

We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment amidst the many choices and decisions facing our national, community and medical leaders.

We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do to help those who are vulnerable.

This prayer for our nation in the family of nations, with all that is on our hearts, we gather now and pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

### Prayer from our Advent 4 service:

Lord, a year ago we were complacent. We have learnt better; yet still we have not learnt enough, still we are complacent. Teach us not to feel secure in a noisy city, but to look ahead to the fullness of your life-giving Spirit.

For the church

Lord, drench us in your Scriptures. Keep us from bubbles, hearing only what we want to hear, the little that we already understand. Challenge us, but have compassion on us. We are but dust, though dust that you have formed. Open our eyes, give us listening ears and understanding hearts, and tongues that teach and encourage and give thanks and praise you.

We give thanks for the work of *Blokes Helping Blokes*, and we pray for encouragement for our op shop volunteers, back at work again; and for our new Parish Council. We pray that you will give strength to Patrick and Beth in dealing with all the changes they have to face; and to Denise, who has lost two holidays and now faces new uncertainty about her upcoming leave.

We pray for your blessing on our plans for the coming year, that, whatever may happen to those plans, your kingdom will be advanced.

Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer

For the world

Lord, how we long for water in the desert! And how we long for wisdom and righteousness in our politicians! But we need to learn by your Spirit to value justice and righteousness ourselves, and stop respecting what is bad. Open our eyes, give us listening ears and understanding hearts, and guide us in your way.

We pray that the outbreak in Sydney will be contained and controlled, and for the rapid roll-out of vaccines. We give thanks for the recovery of the Nigerian schoolboys, we pray that you will uphold the people of Fiji as they recover from the cyclone, and we pray for a peaceful transfer of power in the United States.

Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer

For our community

Lord, we pray your blessing on those who support and help us; may we likewise support and help others. Open our eyes, give us listening ears and understanding hearts, and lead us into love. We pray for a moment in silence for someone close to us.

Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer

For those in need

Lord, you do not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities. We pray for all those in trouble and hardship, for those without food or shelter, for prisoners and addicts, for those who are ill, stressed, or in despair, for those who mourn. Have compassion on your children: give them what they need, heal them, comfort them, and let them know your love. We bring before you especially . . . and those we pray for in silence.

Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer

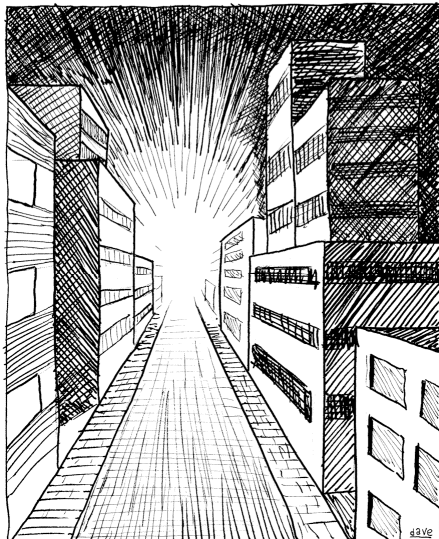
For the departed

Lord, pour your Spirit on us from on high, so that as our strength declines, your Spirit in us may increase. May we see the desert become a fertile field. We give you thanks and praise for your servants who have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. Bring us all to the fruits and crown of righteousness.

Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer

Almighty God, you have promised to hear our prayers.  
**Grant that what we have asked in faith  
we may by your grace receive,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

in the dark streets



Shines the everlasting light

## FOR SALE

This is how I filled my time during lockdown.

Any sales will go towards *mainly music* funds. Setting up in a COVID-safe environment is going to cost – not a lot maybe, but something.

**Hexagon quilt 104 cm x 130 cm – \$100:**



**Hexagon quilt – approx. 90 cm x 180 cm  
(hand pieced and quilted) – \$100:**



— Rosemary Bellair, 9459 5394

### Why are we still mandating masks?

Now that we are able to have real-life services, we want them to be as safe as possible. The situation at present is good, but we want to keep it that way. We lost one former parishioner to the virus, and another is still feeling the effects of the damage it causes several months later.

So we shall wear masks all the time in church, except when reading or leading from the front. Because transmission is much lower in the open air, masks can be removed outside.