

# BANYULE BABBLE

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

MARCH  
2026

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## THE X FACTOR

As we hurtle towards yet another Easter, and as many of us take up the practice of Lent, does it feel like things are changing too fast for you? In a conversation with another pastor just a few months ago, we commented to each other how we always end up so 'surprised' that it's Easter again! Or how Christmas, strangely enough, will sneak up on most clergy.

With so much happening in the world, yet so much staying the same too, how does this Easter feel to you? Is it just another repeat, or is there a new appreciation of Easter for you this year?

This year, I haven't marked Lent with anything particularly special. With the busyness of ministry across a few different sites, and children getting taller at an alarming rate, it's been hard for me to take time to sit and reflect on the journey that Jesus took as he 'resolutely set out for Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51). How dangerous for me! It makes it easy to lose perspective in the busy-ness of everyday life, and forget how great a sacrifice Jesus makes for me; and it becomes easy to forget how daunting the choice was for Jesus as he did indeed turn His face resolutely towards Jerusalem with the knowledge of His impending death on a cross for all of us.

As I've been reading through Exodus in my own personal reading time, I've been reminded of how life-changing leaving Egypt was for the Israelites. This one act became the marker for the Israelite year: when everything would stop and they would celebrate Passover. As we contemplate the intentional choice to 'turn his face to Jerusalem' and how significant that choice was for Jesus, I am reminded yet again, with reverence, how thankful I can be! In the face of such suffering, unlike this girl (points to self) who finds it hard to even give up such as small thing like not eating a particular type of food, or taking time from eating, Jesus did not give up so easily. Unlike me, his intentional task for the world wasn't an accident that just 'snuck up on Him'. Indeed, I can celebrate Easter knowing that my Saviour knew VERY well exactly what He was doing, with full knowledge that I needed His sacrifice to save me. I'm in no way ready, and will likely never be, to comprehend the salvific act of my Saviour Jesus. I can give thanks and rejoice that in the small acts many of us take part in during Lent, we are reminded of our desperate need, and the great thankfulness that we can experience. Indeed, Jesus has knowingly given His life in my place. Whether by habit; or with fresh knowledge, this Lent, and this Easter, I can give thanks knowing that my Saviour Jesus never died for me by accident or by habit. I can look to HIS perfect salvation, despite my own failings, and give thanks. And just as the Israelite community did, I can mark my year not by the Passover, but by Easter: the high point of God's salvation plan, when Jesus gave His life.

Xiaoxi



Sarah Coe and Michelle Loveday were ordained at St Paul's Cathedral on Saturday 7th February:



ANGLICAN  
DIOCESE OF  
MELBOURNE

## Ordination of Deacons 7 February 2026, 10.30 am

Sarah Elizabeth Coe  
Callum Robert Dawson  
Patrick Donohoe  
Joel Daniel Henderson  
Samuel Subhash Jabro  
Julie-anne Kay Laird  
Ying (Simon) Li  
Michelle Suzanne Loveday  
Amanthi Menaka Lynch  
Andrew Stuart Murray  
Don Hong Dang Nguyen  
Anh Khoi Phuong  
Peter Ross Steven  
Brendan Robert Wright



### This Month – March

**Sunday 1st Lent 2:** 9.30 am St John’s (all-age); 5 pm Holy Spirit  
*Genesis 12:1–4a; John 3:1–17*

**Wednesday 4th:** 11 am Iris Grange; 3 pm Strathalan

**Sunday 8th Lent 3:** 9.30 am St John’s; 5 pm Holy Spirit  
*Exodus 17:1–7; John 4:5–42*

**Sunday 15th Lent 4, Laetare Sunday, Mothering Sunday:** 9.30 am Combined, St John’s  
*1 Samuel 16:1–13; John 9:1–41*

**Sunday 22nd Lent 5:** 9.30 am St John’s; 5 pm Holy Spirit  
*Ezekiel 37:1–14; John 11:1–45*

**Wednesday 25th:** 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers’ Union; 3 pm Roshana Macleod

**Sunday 29th Palm Sunday:** 9.30 am Holy Spirit  
*Isaiah 50:4–9a; Philippians 2:5–11; Matthew 26:14–46*

### Next Month – April

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

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

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

### Wanted

- More op shop volunteers

### Money: December–January

Income: Giving: \$32,614.49  
Other: \$58,386.72  
Total: \$91,001.21

Expenses: \$39,547.49

**Surplus: \$51,453.72**

Giving was up, thank you very much. There were strong direct donations, but ADF + collection was also up.

Most of the expenses for January were held over until February.

The Installation Service of Bishop Brad as the Archbishop of the Diocese of Adelaide will take place at 10 am on Saturday 7 March 2026 in St Peter’s Cathedral Adelaide. The service will be live-streamed: please check <http://www.stpeters-cathedral.org.au/>

**145L Chest Freezer  
H 894mm W 625mm D 559mm**

Free to a ‘good home’

Four years old,  
in good condition.  
I just don’t need it.

Rosemary 0428-595-394

### Lent and Holy Week

Ash Wednesday February 18 .....	7.30 pm	St John’s
Lent 1 February 22 .....	9.30 am	St John’s
	5 pm	Holy Spirit
Lent 2 March 1 .....	9.30 am	St John’s
	5 pm	Holy Spirit
Lent 3 March 8 .....	9.30 am	St John’s
	5 pm	Holy Spirit
Lent 4 March 15 .....	9.30 am	St John’s
Lent 5 March 22 .....	9.30 am	St John’s
	5 pm	Holy Spirit
Palm Sunday March 29 .....	9.30 am	Holy Spirit
Maundy Thursday April 2.....	7.30 pm	Holy Spirit
Good Friday April 3.....	9.30 am	Holy Spirit
Easter Day April 5 .....	9.30 am	St John’s

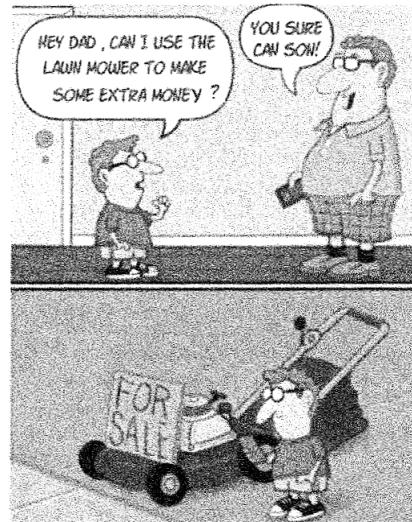
### Holy Spirit Mothers’ Union

Our **March** meeting for 2026 will be on Wednesday 25th at 10 am. After our usual cuppa, we will have our M.U. Service (page 10) with two songs from *Covenant Songs*.

The **February** meeting: We paid our subs of \$45.00 each, which covers our prayer diaries and our national magazine, called *Mia-Mia*. We give \$2.00 each for morning tea. This adds up enough to donate hundreds of dollars each to the Karen Nursery School and the Victoria Disaster Fund.

We usually have an in-house speaker, then close our meeting with Midday Prayers.

*Elsie Storr*



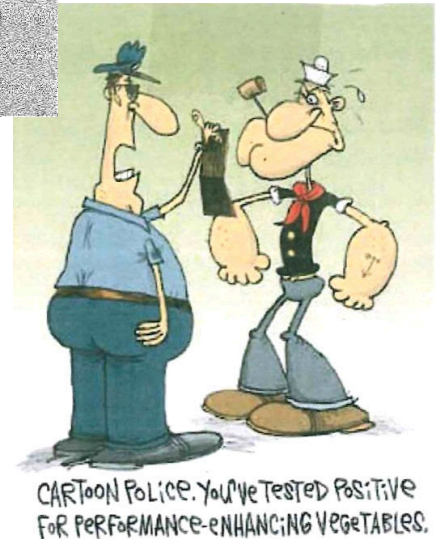
Above and right: Submitted by Denise Nicholls

The Editor has arrived back safely from his travels, so thanks God and those who prayed for him. He is glad to be back in harness!

**STOP PRESS:** Bishop Kate Prowd’s husband, Rev’d Roger Prowd, died from his brain tumour last week. Prayers for Bishop Kate and her family.

**Ivanhoe Uniting Church**  
Regathering and Celebrating  
100 years of worship  
**15th March 2026**

10 am Service  
2 pm **‘Music for Celebration’**, featuring *Heidelberg Brass*, chamber choir *Colla Voce*, the classic 1920s pipe organ and *Heidelberg Dance*  
Please register online  
<https://www.trybooking/DEGMN>  
Enquiries: [ivanhoeecentenary@banyuleuc.org.au](mailto:ivanhoeecentenary@banyuleuc.org.au)





## Mission News

**Jude & Andy Benton, Croajingolong Parish, East Gippsland**

(Parish picture above)

**Dear Supporters, as we write our final edition of *Croajingolong Calling* we do so with grateful hearts for your prayers, emails, visits and support for us over our six years with Bush Church Aid.**

*Hey Jude, we're feeling sad, You've made our lives here, So much better. Remember, you'll always be in our hearts – As you go on, to make a new start.*

*Hey Jude, you're not afraid, You have courage, and you have wisdom, You've steered us through dark and stormy days, With grace and humour – And very quirky ways...*

So sang a packed lunch gathering of community members, congregation, op shop team, returned holiday makers, parish partners, the partnering Seventh-day Adventist congregation from Cann River and friends that made up the crowd for our farewell from the Cooperating Parish of Croajingolong.

The formal farewell began with a full-house church service at St Peter's Mallacoota. Bishop Richard, The Revd Vic Haywood (UCA), representatives from Bush Church Aid, as well as The Revd Ken Spackman each spoke about Jude's ministry in Croajingolong – leading to both tears and laughter from the congregation as both good times, and hard times were reflected upon.

Over the previous four Sundays Jude had been leading the congregation through a handover series, based on Philippians. Seeing how the advice from Paul to a congregation he loved and was separated from, could speak to the congregation that Jude loves and was about to be separated from.

Jude's final sermon was delivered as a letter in the form of Paul's to the Philippians, "To God's Holy people in Croajingolong" and reminding them to walk in unity and love, with an attitude of prayer and rejoicing as they continue to proclaim the Gospel.

Following the service everyone moved to the community clubrooms, where local band 'Far Out' was already playing. The Lions Club were cooking a barbecue, and the tables were laden with everyone's offering to a pot luck lunch. Poetry, grace, speeches thanking both Jude & Andy for their roles in the community, a children's book, cake cutting, and the communal singing of *Hey Jude* wove around the lunch.

Although the congregation of St Peter's is small, and tidal in number as it fluctuates throughout the year, the festivities showed the true engagement of the Parish of Croajingolong. Throughout the day it is estimated that around 250 people drifted in, which is about a quarter of Mallacoota's population. As people gathered, laughed, cried, and shared memories and reflections together, the impact that Jude & Andy made on the town over the last eight years was made clear – but so too was the impact that living and loving in this town and region has made on Jude & Andy, and their future ministries.

The final words Jude shared to conclude the day were from Philippians 4:4-9:

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with*

*thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

And dear supporters may the God of peace be with you too as you continue to serve Him and support the work of BCA.



(Above: The Bentons are prayed for)

### Rowan in Indonesia

The Editor missed Rowan's December report, and there has since been a February one.

Rowan noted that December had been a difficult month for many. In Indonesia, there were floods and landslides which affected people in three provinces on the island of Sumatra. More than 1000 people lost their lives, over 600,000 people became homeless, and infrastructure including schools, bridges, roads and communication networks were destroyed.

Members of Rowan's congregation lost contact with family members and friends in the flood-affected areas.

The five *Gereja Anglikan* Indonesia churches in Sumatra were caring for and supporting not only their own members affected, but also other people near their churches.

Rowan was the celebrant at the wedding of two church members. He noted that the time of the wedding was set by when the roads were least congested.

He also noted: 'I was also the celebrant at the baptism of an asylum seeker. He has been living in Indonesia awaiting resettlement to a third country for more than ten years after fleeing his homeland. In his testimony, he shared how the

love of Christians opened his eyes to the hope that is found in Jesus after he became discouraged and disappointed that his former religion offered him no hope and only darkness.’ Rowan asks for prayers for this person in his walk as a follower of Jesus, and as he continues to wait for resettlement in a third country.

Rowan asks us to thank God for the opportunity he had to celebrate a wedding and a baptism.

Rowan’s visa renewal process is underway. He has to get a new visa every year, and as it has to be signed off by three government departments it is a long and complicated process, often taking three months or more. He reported that it was underway in December; in February he reports that it is still going on. He also needs a new passport, but that is dependent on the new visa. He asks for our prayers that these matters would be completed smoothly and in good time.

When these are done, Rowan hopes to get back home to Australia for a bit later this year, but the timing will depend on when the new visa and passport are ready. When he does get back, we hope to see him one Sunday.

Christmas services went well. The church was close to capacity for the services of Nine Lessons and Carols, the bilingual Christmas Eve midnight service, and the Christmas Day services. There were a large number of young adult visitors and visiting families at these services who are being followed up.

Rowan gives thanks, and asks us to join him in giving thanks, for the good connections being made with visitors at the Christmas services, and for the good news that the Light of the World shines in the darkness, and that the darkness has not overcome it. He asks us to pray for good follow-ups.

In February it is still the wet season, and Rowan needs heavy-duty gumboots to manage the pools of flood water surrounding his house. The water also affected the wildlife, and there was another encounter with a python, and also a civet cat that became stuck in the guttering of the church office.



Above: The unhappy civet cat.

Left: The python is handed over to a local city council worker for eventual release back into the wild.



### Thank-you letter

Many thanks to the people of the Anglican Parish of Banyule for sharing musical resources, mostly from St John’s Heidelberg. They will form the basis of a library of church music being collected from many places throughout Melbourne to provide a music library for a burgeoning choir in the parish of All Saints’ Newtown in Geelong. Worship styles change, and as part of the celebration of renewal by the Holy Spirit, it’s so wonderful that we can share resources we use no longer with those who are developing in other directions. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if I can ever help you find resources that would be useful in your worshipping communities.

Philip Nicholls, St Paul’s Cathedral.

Editor’s Note: All Saints’ Newtown was where Philip Trowse went to after us, and it was also the Editor’s parish when he lived in Newtown Geelong 1984–1988.



## *Bishop Brad Blesses*

Bishop Brad, in one of his last official acts in the Diocese of Melbourne before he moves to Adelaide to be its new Archbishop, consecrated the new St John's and St Andrew's Memorial Garden, after a packed service at St John's on 1st February.

The service started with the clergy processing down the aisle to the first hymn, except that the words to the hymn ('Come, you people, come adore him') failed to appear on screen. Katrina, who was manfully wrestling with the organ, had to improvise, and eventually decided to play the tune though no-one could sing it, and the clergy processed to that.

Eventually the missing dongle that was the cause of the trouble was located and put in place, and we all sang the processional hymn even though everyone had already processed.

Bishop Brad gave an excellent sermon (p. 9), and then at the end of the service we all gathered around the Memorial Garden for the episcopal benediction.



Above: Denise shows the way to the Memorial Garden (or possibly Adelaide)



Inscription originally at St Andrew's Memorial Garden. When the Editor first saw it, the initial 'I' was missing, but it was later found buried.

# Community Garden



## Learn to garden for joy and health

**Gardening is a simple, joyful way to nurture body and mind. It gets you moving in the fresh air, reduces stress and boosts wellbeing through connection with nature.**

Whether you're planting, harvesting or simply hanging out, gardening offers a powerful sense of achievement and calm. When shared with others, it brings people together, building community and connection.

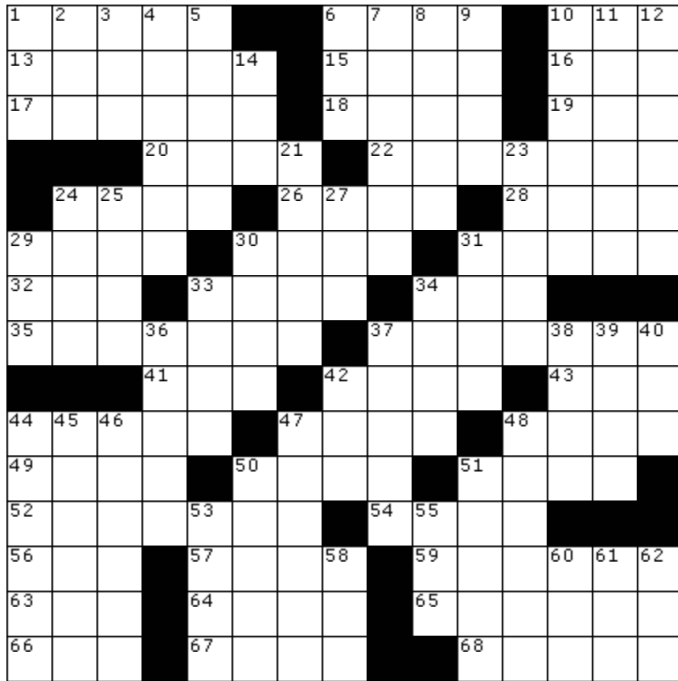
St John's Riverside Community Garden received a Council Environment Grant to hold a series of workshops to help people get into gardening. Starting mid-March, six sessions for beginner gardeners will be held at the garden in Heidelberg. Three presenters will run the hands-on workshops:

- Kat Lavers: small space food production specialist and permaculture designer
- Connie Cao: urban permaculture homesteader, who has appeared on Gardening Australia
- Kayte Kitchen: counsellor, educator and horticultural therapist.

Find out more and sign up at [tinyurl.com/learn2garden](https://tinyurl.com/learn2garden)



*Above from Banyule Council's Banyule Banner, January 2026*



**ACROSS**

- 1 Light makers
- 6 Bunches
- 10 Dad's mate
- 13 Major Jewish prophet
- 15 Margarine
- 16 Government agency
- 17 Work lightly
- 18 Gumbo
- 19 Dickens' Tiny \_\_\_
- 20 Glasses part
- 22 Father of Ishmael
- 24 Excuse me!
- 26 Aptly
- 28 Dorothy's dog
- 29 Avails
- 30 Decorative needle case
- 31 Weighed down
- 32 Evergreen tree
- 33 Father of Abel
- 34 Crony

- 35 Rowers
- 37 Of the chamber of a judge
- 41 X
- 42 Foul-up
- 43 Genius
- 44 'The Jungle' author Sinclair
- 47 Cain's brother
- 48 Quote
- 49 Formal
- 50 Opera solo
- 51 Girls
- 52 Uganda capital
- 54 Biblical weed
- 56 Look
- 57 Old Italian money
- 59 Bun topping
- 63 Conger
- 64 Repast
- 65 Paradise
- 66 Open forcefully
- 67 Negative (prefix)
- 68 What's 'in'

**DOWN**

- 1 Offer
- 2 N American country
- 3 Scientist's office
- 4 Collections of sacred books
- 5 Capital of Oregon
- 6 Court
- 7 Strong chem base
- 8 Plug hat
- 9 Fly
- 10 Plan of action
- 11 Narcotic
- 12 KJV word for wealth
- 14 Egg layer
- 21 Prince of this world
- 23 Dickens' \_\_\_ of Two Cities (2 wds)
- 24 Land mass
- 25 Frau's husband
- 27 Tramp
- 29 Flying saucer
- 30 Garden of \_\_\_
- 31 The \_\_\_ of God (Jesus)
- 33 Last word of a prayer
- 34 Author of Philemon
- 36 High School dance
- 37 Shoe projection
- 38 Train support
- 39 Book after Gospels
- 40 Downwind
- 42 Federal Bureau of Investigation
- 44 Support
- 45 Talking to God
- 46 Punctual
- 47 Where Noah's ark landed
- 48 Roman title
- 50 Extraterrestrial
- 51 Say 'hello'
- 53 \_\_\_ mater
- 55 Tree
- 58 Boxer
- Muhammad
- 60 \_\_\_ Maria
- 61 Women's partners
- 62 Goal

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

HOPEFULGFYGGNER  
 HEALDRJANNVOWI  
 THIRTEENIIININ  
 CENRASVRTARCSCN  
 SAFTUUEAHGOTTKO  
 EVUSNFROFATOEC  
 UELJFTLSUNSRPDE  
 NNUUSYASLREYETN  
 ISSUMRSENRREET  
 TORMSETLEBORSTN  
 NFLALTIDSTNDAES  
 OAVEGSNNSIAAVRA  
 CEPCEYGETORMENT  
 DOUBTMRYGNIKSAA  
 HEALINGNIOGNOLN

**Bible Word Search: Trials & Tribulations**

[https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws\\_TrialsTribulations\\_0.htm](https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_TrialsTribulations_0.htm)

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

- Asking, Born again, Calm, Continues, Doubt, Endless, Eternal, Eternity, Everlasting, Faithfulness, Frustrating, Great, Healed, Healing, Heaven, Holy, Hopeful, Hopeless, Innocent, Jesus, Mystery, Nonstop, No suffering, Ongoing, Painful, Restored, Restoring, Satan, Saved, Saves, Thirteen, Torment, Unjust, Victory, Wicked



Answers to last month's puzzles:

Bible Word Search mystery answer: FARMER

Last month's cryptogram:

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY WILL INHERIT THE EARTH.

Matthew 5:5

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

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
22				23				26						17						14					

O \_ E    \_ \_ I    \_ \_    I    \_ O    \_ \_ O \_ .    I    \_ A \_  
 17 21 23    3 19 26 21 1    26    4 17    25 21 17 20    26    20 22 6

\_ \_ I    \_ \_    \_ U \_    \_ O \_    I    \_ E E !  
 15 10 26 21 4    15 14 3    21 17 20    26    6 23 23

## Setting up the right plan

25th January 2026

Isaiah 9:1–4; Matthew 4:12–25

Sermon by Xiaoxi Lou

### Isaiah 9:1–4

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan –

<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

<sup>3</sup> You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

<sup>4</sup> For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

### Matthew 4:12–25

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – <sup>14</sup> to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>15</sup> 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles –

<sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.'

<sup>17</sup> From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

Jesus began with the same emphasis as John the Baptist had. The two go together: if the kingdom of God is near, then clearly people cannot be complacent. They must prepare for that kingdom, and that means repenting of their sins. Jesus calls on them to realise that they are unfit for the kingdom of heaven and to repent accordingly. Such preaching is a clarion call to action, not a recipe for slothful complacency. We should not overlook the importance of this call to repentance at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry; everything else follows from that. Matthew has often been seen as one who stresses the importance of good works, and of course he does. But this must not be held in such a form that his emphasis on grace is missed. From the beginning Jesus took it for granted that people are sinners, and accordingly his first message was that they must repent. Only so would they know the forgiveness he came to bring.

There has been a great deal of discussion on whether we should see the kingdom as having arrived in the person of Jesus or whether he proclaimed a kingdom yet to come. But a good deal of this is misplaced ingenuity, for both surely have a place in the teaching of Jesus. That the expression does not mean that the kingdom is already here is surely indicated by the fact that John the Baptist used exactly the same verb and on his lips the expression cannot mean that the kingdom is a present reality. There is a sense in which God has acted decisively in sending his Son: the kingdom is here in his words and deeds. But there is another sense

in which the culmination of the kingdom in all its fullness is a future reality: the best is yet to be. Both truths are important.

### Jesus calls his first disciples:

It is noteworthy that Jesus called those he wanted; in Judaism the disciple chose his rabbi.<sup>†</sup>

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus calls them (Matthew uses the present tense), saying something like 'Here, after me.' This call clearly points to a lasting association; Jesus is not inviting them to a pleasant stroll along the seashore but inviting them to discipleship; there is the thought of personal attachment. Jesus adds a promise, 'I will make you fishers of men.'<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

### Jesus heals the sick

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people. <sup>24</sup> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed; and he healed them. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Matthew emphasizes healings of a variety of kinds and speaks of people coming from a number of places to be cured. This was a period when Jesus was popular and greatly sought after. He went about in all Galilee, which points to a wandering ministry where all makes it clear that Jesus did not confine himself to any particular area: he was active throughout the region.<sup>§</sup>

Carson reminds us that 'both Scripture and Jewish tradition take sickness as resulting directly or indirectly from living in a fallen world' (on v. 24). Jesus' defeat of sickness is part of his overcoming of evil. Here Matthew speaks of healing from every disease (a very general term) and every illness (which basically means 'softness' and comes to signify 'weakness, sickness'). Matthew does not say how Jesus healed, only that he did, and this puts him (this Jesus Rabbi) in contrast with various 'healers' of antiquity<sup>¶</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 83.

<sup>†</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 84.

<sup>‡</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 85.

<sup>§</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 87.

<sup>¶</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand

?Tri-focal vision? The full cycle of our tree? Matthew speaks of a triple function: teaching, preaching, and healing. Jesus' teaching was carried out in their synagogues.

The word means 'a gathering place' and could be used for gatherings of various kinds. It could, for example, be used of the gathering together of waters (Gen. 1:9), but predominantly in Scripture it means the gathering together of people. The synagogue was in a special sense the place where people came together to study the law of God. It was the centre of Jewish life: the place where Jews assembled, where Jewish law was administered and punishment was inflicted (10:17), and where Jewish teaching was given. Somewhat later the word could be used of Christian assemblies (Jas. 2:2), but in the Gospels it always refers to Jewish assemblies.<sup>††</sup>

Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 87.

**OK, so WHAT'S THE PLAN?** What holidays are you taking this year? And what new project will you be starting? How many days will your grandchild be seeing you each week? And how many days will you be working? Most importantly of course, which days will you be bringing morning tea to church?! 😊

Having just returned from leave in Singapore, of course we've jumped straight back into plans for the year: do my children have shoes that still fit? What about which day we'll go to Bible study? And of course most importantly: when is the next holiday?! Interestingly enough, we have some 'planning' in today's reading.

Have you ever noticed? We'll often have passages from the Gospel each week, and one of the staff will preach on it, and kind of usually focus on one story: one parable, or teaching moment of Jesus.

Today, we get instead:

1. *A prophecy of Jesus*: preparing and looking forward to where Jesus wants us to be.
2. *Jesus calling his disciples*: Reminding ourselves of our own call: reminding ourselves of our regular work.
3. *Jesus healing people*: the regular work of bringing our brokenness to Jesus.

It's a very bitsy sort of passage. I was doing the usual approach I take, trying to think through 'what's the main point', 'is there a theme?' And I think this is a great way to start the year! The theme is actually: what Jesus did. What did his work on earth actually consist of? Focussing on how Jesus actually did all these things together. A 'refocusing' if you will, of our year for both Jesus and our selves.

You see, we can often sort of get caught up on one element/one aspect. We forget the actually, we need to be doing a few things at a few times. Jesus wasn't *only* healing, *only* discipling, and *only* speaking truth to those around Him, all the time, at the same time.

As Jesus reminded those around Him: there is a bigger picture: God's picture. And just as we read in Isaiah, and as Jesus reminded his listeners:

Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 88.

<sup>††</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 87.

<sup>2</sup> *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

God has a bigger plan for all of mankind, including you and me. It's easy to get caught up in the everyday: the reminder 'oh yeah, I need to buy more milk' and forget to look up, to look at the great light that is God's plan for each of us.

Leon Morris points out too, how Jesus' ministry isn't like that of the usual Jewish teachers/rabbis. Jesus is very intentional, and Jesus calls his first disciples. 'It is noteworthy that Jesus called those he wanted; in Judaism the disciple chose his rabbi.'

Now, I'm not saying we should go and find some followers! But rather it's a reminder to all of us, to keep learning from others and reaching out to others to help them too.

The other amazing thing that gets a mention in today's passage is how Jesus heals. It always made me feel a bit tired whenever it's mentioned how Jesus healed everyone in the town. It kind of always just gets a sentence, but imagine the line! As D.A. Carson points out: 'Jesus' defeat of sickness is part of his overcoming of evil. ... Matthew does not say how Jesus healed, only that he did, and this puts him in contrast with various 'healers' of antiquity.'

Now all of these things get a mention because they are all part of Jesus' ministry: prophesy, making disciples, healing. Why is this so important? I think it's a great reminder to all of us, as we set up our patterns, our schedules for the year. We all tend to want to focus on only one thing: to maybe make this the year of 'planning my future' or of helping out a bit more in this area. This can be dangerous though, we can get into a rut...

It isn't like my friend Jemimah, a speech therapist friend who told me one year: *this is the year of Jemimah!* And that year, she did all the fun things she had always wanted to do: dye her hair red and orange; travel more; buy some more clothing that was 'goth' coloured. You get the picture. She was taking a year not to indulge herself, but to remind herself of who she was after a difficult relationship. The unhelpful thing was when Jemimah the next year told me: 'Oh, *this is the year of Jemimah!*' It had changed from 'healing' and building up Jemimah's self-confidence into self-indulgence.

I think for many of us who have been Christian for a long time, we get really good at one thing: maybe it's pastoral care, helping others' hearts to heal? Maybe it's seeing and reminding others of the larger plan, the prophecy of who Jesus is and his plan of coming to earth and saving all.

Maybe it's being a good friend walking alongside another, encouraging them, and reminding them of who Jesus is: whether through the Bible, through your actions, or in other ways. All of these are beautiful gifts that God has given us and that God grows in us.

At the same time, today's passage is a reminder that we can't only get good at one thing and ignore the others. Instead of making this a year of 'Xiaoxi' or the year of 'Rhonda', let's make this a year of Jesus, where we emulate his serving of those around Him:

- Speaking truth in love so that others may know Jesus;

- Sharing Jesus' truth with those who don't know Him yet and walking alongside them: providing discipleship, discipling one another;
- Providing whatever kind of healing we can to one another, as our gifts enable us to.

*The challenge to all of us is not to neglect any of these parts: let us keep looking to Jesus as the fulfilment of the Kingdom; let us keep calling others to know Jesus; let us keep looking to care for and heal those around us.*

*Jesus fulfils all three elements of our reading today. And he did them all at the same time. We are only humans following His example, but it's a good reminder as we plan for this year, to make sure we're living our year for Him; following His example; not only staying in the lane that keeps us comfortable. May we emulate him and not neglect one gift or need for the other.*

*Setting our lives up in God for the year: Let us commit to reading our Bible, joining a Bible study, spending more time with God's people. May we remember to invite our friends and family to join us on Sundays; to keep sharing with others the exciting news of how Jesus has saved us. At the same time, let us not forget about showing God mercy to those who are unwell, OR about God's greater plans for the world.*

The whole program of the Christian life is

1. Repent
2. Come fish for people
3. Bring healing.

We always need a reminder that Jesus did all three, all the time, and that while we are definitely NOT Jesus, we need to keep recalibrating our actions to make sure we are doing all three, with the knowledge that having more people know Jesus is indeed the greatest gift we can take part in.

## Blessings

1st February 2026

Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon by Bishop Bradly Billings

*5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,<sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them.*

*He said:*

<sup>3</sup> *'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

<sup>7</sup> *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>11</sup> *'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

I have on my book shelf at home a volume called 'Speeches that changed the world'. Actually it's not on my book shelf – I was going to bring it today to show you – but it's in a box somewhere now, among the many boxes of books now accumulating in my Study. Nonetheless, you can probably guess what you might find within a book called 'speeches that changed the world':

- The Gettysburg address is there;
- Martin Luther's 'I have a dream' speech is of course there;
- Winston Churchill is there several times;
- Shakespeare features often, in great speeches he composed for historical figures like Julius Caesar and Henry V;
- And many others...

And, among the speeches that changed the world – according to this book – is the Sermon on the Mount.

The narrative setting for this speech is outlined by St Matthew at the beginning of chapter five of the Gospel, where our reading for today commenced:

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them...*

The place identified by long tradition for this speech is a very beautiful plain at the top of hilly ground overlooking the Sea of Galilee. If you go there you can picture Jesus and his disciples reaching the level ground at the top of a hill and sitting down there, as described by Matthew, and the crowds who were following him filling the plain and the gently sloping hillside, all the way down to the sea.

The terrain forms a natural amphitheatre.

Whether in this particular place or not, there are many such places around the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Here Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew's Gospel, it continues until the end of chapter seven, occupying three whole chapters, and it contains some of the best known teaching of Jesus and most loved passages in the Gospels:

- The Beatitudes – our reading for today;
- The so-called Golden Rule – to do to others as you would have them do to you;
- The command to not store up earthly treasure for yourself, but treasurer in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;
- And the teaching on prayer, which gives us the Lord's Prayer.

There are many ways to interpret and understand this speech – or better, this teaching – of Jesus.

- Many have seen this passage as Jesus representing the new Moses, going up to the mountain to proclaim a new way of following God's will, as Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the law.
- Others have seen here a manifesto for Christian living in the world, an exhortation to Christian character and behaviour in the world;
- Or as the ethical duties required of God's church;
- Or a description of what the still future Kingdom of God will be like.

We could spend a lot of time interpreting the passage and unpacking the theology within it – but we won't attempt to do so this morning.

Instead I will focus simply on the single word that recurs frequently throughout the narrative: 'blessed'

I do that for two main reasons: because each of the verses, from v 3 until v 12, begins with the invoking of a blessing on a group of particular persons; and because in our service here today we will be commissioning and setting apart persons for particular roles, and dedicating and setting apart a particular place of remembrance, being the new St John's and St Andrew's memorial garden. The key moment in all of that will be seeking God's blessing on those persons and on that place.

What does it mean then to be blessed?

Over the course of the 25 years I have served in ordained ministry I have been asked to bless many things:

- Lots of people for various reasons;
- Places – such as the memorial garden we will bless and consecrate today;
- Many animals, at the annual Blessing of the Pets which was a much loved service I always held when I was a vicar, partly so my own beloved dog could be blessed;
- In my first parish Gisborne, with its rural heritage, there was a custom of blessing the plough at the time of the spring harvest, that I think might survive still today;
- I once blessed a new truck for one of our parishioners who was an interstate truck driver, asking the Lord watch over him whilst out on the roads;
- And there have been blessings of homes and rooms within homes;
- And objects;
- And I could go on, but won't...

Often, when presented with a request to bless someone or something, I would pause and think through that request and reflect on it, and ask myself – what are we actually doing when we pray for God to bless someone or something? What is happening when we do that, or what do we think is happening?

This passage from Matthew 5 at the start of the Sermon on the Mount is the place in the Gospels where we start in understanding the concept of blessing. Not only because the repeated refrain here is 'blessed are', but the whole of the context.

There is a pastoral element to the setting. The crowds are seeking Jesus, many out of desperation: among them are the sick, the afflicted, and the poor and broken. Jesus does not turn away from them, but turns toward them, and begins to address them on the level place at the top of the mountain. He then speaks words of blessing over them.

I read this scene to be a picture of the God who turns toward, and not away from, those who seek him, and he reaches out his hand in blessing. And so my instinct has always been do the same, to turn towards those who come seeking God's blessing, and to bless.

A short story comes to mind when this became more than a matter of personal conviction and theology for me, but a very public matter.

When Vicar of my last parish, St John's Toorak, I often travelled into the Cathedral for meetings and for Synod and things like that by public transport. There was a tram stop right out the front of the vicarage and church, and it avoided traffic and having to find parking.

Most of the time this was very uneventful. But on one occasion, early evening, I was on a tram, dressed in black clerical attire, so looking very much a priest, minding my own business, when I heard a voice calling 'Father, Father'.

It was a young man – somewhat dishevelled, approaching quickly.

'Father, I need to confess my sins', he said.

'This is not the place', I told the young man.

Nonetheless he sat down opposite me and said again, 'I need to confess'.

'I'm sure everyone else on the tram doesn't want to hear your confession', I said desperately.

(Though actually by the way my fellow passengers all looked up from their phones it seemed like they really did.)

And so I heard his confession (which thankfully was not as graphic as I thought it might be), and then prayed with him on the Number 8 tram and assured him of God's forgiveness. He thanked me and asked for a blessing – and so I pronounced God's blessing over him, with all the curious onlookers joining us in silent prayer.

The blessings Jesus pronounces in the Sermon on the Mount are not so much over individuals, but over certain groups of people:

- the poor in spirit;
- the meek;
- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness;
- the merciful;
- and those who are persecuted and reviled and falsely accused;

What stands out here is not so much these particular conditions – whether the meek or the merciful or the pure in heart are somehow especially blessed – but the counter-cultural nature of this, and the manner in which it defies conventional wisdom and experience.

None of these groups of people would normally be associated with God's blessing, if we understand and associate being blessed with good fortune, or something favourable or beneficial, or with joy or happiness.

We often use the word 'blessing' in this way: for instance, if something good and positive or joyous happens to me, I might say I am blessed.

Those who are being persecuted and reviled and falsely accused are not experiencing a lot of good fortune. Nor are those who mourn, or the poor in spirit.

The blessings are counter-cultural. They are pronounced on:

- those who are meek – in world where the strong and assertive often get ahead and receive the rewards;
- on the peacemakers – in a world that often thrives on strength and conflict;
- on the pure in heart, who seek to do good and to serve others – in a world where the self and self-gain is often all-important;
- and so on.

The Beatitudes are a radical call and invitation to a different way of living, following the way of Jesus, and the counter-cultural teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, to a place with the promise that here true joy and true blessing is to be found:

- where we find that righteousness, doing the right thing by the self and to others, is its own reward;

- where we find that humility is more fulfilling than having power over others;
- and that seeking to be pure in heart makes us happier than being filled with jealousy and resentment;
- and even that being persecuted or reviled for our faith can lead to an inner peace and a source of inner conviction and joy that cannot be taken away.

The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and these verses which commence it, is that true blessing is found in surprising ways and surprising places, and has its source and on-going power in spiritual, rather than worldly, things.

I conclude with one of the oldest prayers invoking God's blessing that has come down to us from the Hebrew Bible:

*The Lord bless you and keep you*

*The Lord make his face to shine upon you*

*And be gracious to you*

*The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you*

*And give you peace. Amen.*

## Salt and light in the world

8th February 2026

Matthew 5:13–20

Sermon by Helen McAlley

<sup>13</sup> 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

<sup>14</sup> 'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

### EXAMPLES OF LOVE AND KINDNESS

I support a mission called *Mission Without Borders* which supports poor people in Eastern Europe. Alan, a man from the West, visited Eastern Europe and was able to see first hand what the Mission was doing. He described his visit in this way:

*'I witnessed on our tour an organisation filled with individuals that did not give up on anyone. They help the people that the rest of the world would have forgotten, even people who had given up on themselves. The community coordinators feel every human being has a potential, no matter what their individual circumstances might be.*

*'(The Mission) provides the necessary support for people to believe in themselves and that they are capable and worthy of making*

changes in their lives. Physical support can be essential – whether it is soup and bread for a man living on the street or a hot meal for a mother and her young children. But what truly matters is how we provide the soup, how we deliver these meals. One soup kitchen participant reported that of all the places that he has received services at, (the Mission) was the only place he felt respected, loved and cared for.

*'At Mission Without Borders, we believe in the power of unconditional love, shared every day by giving meals to a hungry family, or by looking at a person who is living with mental illness in the eye, and really listening to them. This work affirms and celebrates the human spirit....we believe in the power of unconditional love to transform a life.'*

How important it is to show love to people without being patronising. Being patronising can be very easy, especially if we believe that we are better off than those we are helping, or maybe believe that we have managed our own lives better and look down on them.

The Bible teaches that we are all made in God's image and therefore each one is special and worthy of redemption. The apostle James also taught that we should not look down on or mistreat those who are poor.

### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Our Lord Jesus Christ treated all who came to Him, who were genuine seekers, with the utmost respect, whatever their station in life. Whether it was Mary or Martha, Nicodemus, the woman taken in adultery, the woman at the well, Jairus, His disciples, or the rich young ruler and many others, He always gave them His full attention and patiently answered their questions. The way he conversed with women is particularly significant as the Roman world He lived in often treated women (and children too) with contempt. Jesus shows us how to treat people.

### MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

I've recently been reading a book called *How Christians Can Succeed Today* by the Christian journalist Greg Sheridan. Sheridan describes how he was on the ABC TV program Q&A and another member of the panel was the atheist philosopher Peter Singer. During the program, Sheridan quoted from Singer's book, *Animal Liberation*. Singer had written, 'There will surely be non-human animals whose lives, by any standard, are more valuable than the lives of some humans. A chimpanzee, a dog or a pig, for instance, will have a greater degree of self awareness and a greater capacity for meaningful relations with others than a severely retarded infant, or someone in an advanced state of senility.' He had argued from that proposition that there was no point in keeping severely disabled babies alive.

Singer replied, 'What are you arguing Greg, that they should stay alive just because they're members of our species?'

Sheridan said, 'Yes, indeed, that was exactly what I was suggesting. Just because they are *imago dei*, the image of God, just because they have innate human dignity deriving from their unique relationship with the eternal living God, yes indeed, just because they're human beings....'

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom who was in a Nazi concentration camp during World War 2 for trying to protect Jewish people, described how she had run a girls'

club for intellectually disabled girls before being taken into the camp. She was once questioned by a Nazi officer who had absolutely no comprehension of why anyone would want to help someone who was disabled. The Nazis sent many of the weak and disabled, including many babies, to the gas chambers.

My daughter Bronwyn attends St Peter's Bundoora, where students from the Concord Special School come once a week to clean the church. Someone from the church needed to be there when the students came with their teachers. Bronwyn volunteered, and she really loves those students and patiently helps them with their cleaning duties as well as organising a party at the end of the year, to which the parents are also invited.

Than our beloved Betty Cummings from Watsonia spent many years at Concord School helping the disabled students with music.

### YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

When I think of all these examples: the workers at *Mission without Borders*, Greg Sheridan, Corrie ten Boom, and, closer to home, Betty and my daughter Bronwyn, I think of Jesus' words in our gospel reading today, *'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'*

### GLORIFYING OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Elsewhere, Jesus had described Himself as 'the Light of the World'. With His perfect goodness and love, He shone like a bright light in an evil world. But in our reading today, He is telling His followers that they too are the light of the world. By their good deeds, they shine like lights in a dark world as Jesus Himself did. And we too are the light of the world as we seek to honour our Lord and to show love to others as he prompts us. Each morning we can pray, 'Lord, make me a blessing to others today.' The Lord both prompts us and gives us the ability to do those good deeds that He has planned for us. The idea is that we allow our good works to be seen, like a city on a hill, or like a candle set on a lamp stand that gives light to the whole house. Where appropriate we share our faith so that others, when they see our good deeds, will glorify our Father in heaven. We do not aim to get praise from others for our good works. Rather we seek to direct attention to God who inspired those good works.

And, of course, we can never be saved from sin be doing good works. We can only be saved by trusting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Our good deeds result from our love and gratitude for Jesus for what He has done for us (Ephesians 2:8-10).

### SALT

As well as light, Jesus said that His followers would be like salt in this world. Can you think of a food that you really need a bit of salt on to make it taste better? Maybe you enjoyed having fish and chips as a child when salt was automatically sprinkled quite liberally on food. We might try to have less salt nowadays, but might still enjoy salt sometimes on our food. Just as salt flavours our food, we Christians are to be out in the world being a blessing or flavouring to others, pointing by our lives and words to our wonderful Lord.

Salt can sometimes sting when applied to a wound but, at the same time, it is healing. There may be a time when we need to act like salt in speaking out about something that is wrong. Maybe Greg Sheridan, as a Christian on the program Q&A affirming that, as human beings, we are made in God's image was an example of someone being salt in the world. On these occasions, we need the love of God and the boldness of the Holy Spirit.

### LOSING SALTINESS

Jesus said that if salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything except to be trampled underfoot. Although pure salt would not lose its strength, it could become impure if another substance were added. Sometimes, those selling salt would add an inexpensive white powder to it to increase their profit. That would be a way of salt losing its saltiness. Such adulterated salt was sometimes used in making paths as it was useless for its normal purposes of flavour and preservation. It would literally be trampled underfoot.

We could say that Christians might 'lose their saltiness' by allowing deliberate sin to come into our lives. The salt in us can also become impure when we fail to keep in close contact with the Lord, when we don't think it is important to pray and read God's word to receive fresh messages from Him each day. Or we can lose our saltiness by failing to do something that the Lord shows us that we need to do. It may be to forgive someone or to reach out to someone in need. It may be to speak out about something wrong that is happening. As I am speaking, there may be something that the Lord is speaking to you about today.

### PRAYER

Shall we pray: *Our Heavenly Father, you are the source of all love and you have shown that love to us so wonderfully in our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to be ever mindful of those times when, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, you encourage us to show love to others. Help us to be obedient and also to be vigilant so that we do not allow sin, which could spoil our witness to others, to come into our lives. Help us to be salt and light in the world so that people will give glory to you, our Father in heaven. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

## Ash Wednesday

18th February 2026

Matthew 6:1-21

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

*6 'Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

*2 'So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

*5 'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father,*

who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.<sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.<sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup> This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.”

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.<sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

<sup>16</sup> When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,<sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

<sup>19</sup> Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.<sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Today’s reading comes from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew.

This section of Jesus’ teaching is all about the theme of **Righteousness**, meaning people being ‘Right with God’.

Here, Jesus poses the question of whether his followers seek to be valued and/or rewarded by PEOPLE, or by GOD. Or putting it another way, **How do we live out our faith? Who is our audience?**

Certain words and phrases recur in this section; namely ‘To be **seen** by People’, and ‘The **Unseen Father who sees** what is done in secret’. It is clear that the Lord Jesus regards a righteous person, a person who is in right relationship with God, is one who **will** give to the needy, pray, forgive others and fast. These spiritual practices were expected of all God’s people.

As Jesus does throughout the Sermon on the Mount, he injects fuller meaning into the teachings of Old Testament Scripture, into the expectations God has on his people. For it is not only outward observance, but the inner reality: this has always been God’s concern!

And so, we read in the Prophet Joel:

‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with **all your heart**, with **fasting and weeping and mourning**.<sup>13</sup> Rend **your heart** and **not your garments**. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Jesus highlights these four spiritual practices: giving to the needy, prayer, forgiveness and even fasting. And in so doing, he implies the questions: Who is our concern? Our audience? Whose approval do we seek?

Jesus says that if we give to be honoured by others, or pray – to be seen by others, or fast – to show others our holiness and righteousness, announce our generosity loudly, pray beautiful prayers in public – but not pray in private, withhold forgiveness in our heart and still wear or portray all the outward signs of faith and religiosity—we might well be seen as righteous or pious or nice or good by others.

Jesus says That will be your reward – and that is all.

But if we quietly generous in giving to those in need, if prayer is central to our lives, not an add-on, if we offer forgiveness, knowing we are forgiven, then we live our lives with an audience of only ONE: **the unseen Father who does see what is done in secret/hidden from view of others.**

So we will be rewarded by God with his love and righteousness and mercy: **for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.**

This Lenten season, however you observe it, our audience is only ever Our Father in Heaven who is unseen. It is to him alone we look for our recognition and reward as his precious children.

## Luke 5: 27–32

21st February 2026, St Paul’s Cathedral  
Farsi Service with live translation

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

<sup>27</sup> After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus said to him,<sup>28</sup> and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

<sup>29</sup> Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.<sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’

<sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill.<sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’

Who is God interested in? Is God only interested in good people, religious people like us? Sometimes people think that!

In today’s reading from Luke’s Gospel, we read how Jesus Christ called Levi, a tax collector, to follow him.

Tax collectors were not popular in Jesus’ day! They collected taxes for the Romans, the foreign occupiers of their land; and the tax collectors added some extra on top of the tax for themselves. They were NOT nice, NOT religious, some people called them *traitors*.

So, it is not surprising that the very religious people, the Pharisees, who kept all God’s laws complained about Jesus.

But Jesus says, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’

The Lord Jesus Christ is not just concerned about people who seek to be religious, or seem interested in God. No, God is concerned about ALL people! EVEN those who don’t seem to care about God at all.

So, Jesus spent time with all sorts of people, even those who broke the rules of polite society. So Jesus calls ALL people to

follow him: the religious, the outsiders, the sinners, those who even ignore God.

That includes US! We, who were once far away from God. So, if we think, God is not interested in a specific person, or a group of people, think again!

Jesus comes to call ALL people to follow him. Will YOU answer his call today?

## One Man

Lent 1, 22nd February 2026

Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7; Romans 5:12–21

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;<sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’

<sup>3</sup> Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden”?’

<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the snake, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’

<sup>4</sup> ‘You will not certainly die,’ the snake said to the woman.<sup>5</sup> ‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’

<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Romans 5:12–21

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –

<sup>13</sup> To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

<sup>15</sup> But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!<sup>16</sup> Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.<sup>17</sup> For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

<sup>18</sup> Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.<sup>19</sup> For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

<sup>20</sup> *The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,* <sup>21</sup> *so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Footy Season is starting soon, and whether we go to the game, or watch it on TV, we will usually barrack for one side or another. Even if your team is not playing, we usually choose one side to support. Or if we have electrical work done, we ask if the power is ON or OFF; there is no in-between. Or a woman can be pregnant or not; or if you consider my garden, a plant is either alive or dead – and usually dead in my garden, unless Kaye plants and waters it.

In the letter to the Romans, St Paul teaches us that all people are in one of ONLY TWO states before God: either 'in Adam' and dead, OR 'in Christ' and alive; there is no third option.

Today we will look at how sin and death entered the world, and how life and grace are the gift of God through the lord Jesus Christ.

**SIN & DEATH enters the world: Genesis**

The book of Genesis takes us back to the beginning, an explanation of how the world is experienced by humanity.

Genesis chapters 1–11 is known as 'Pre-history', that time before writing and recording was established among humans. It tells us that all life is part of God's creation. Genesis 1 gives us first the big picture of God's creative endeavour; Genesis 2 gives us a zoom shot into humanity, and our place in God's creation. Genesis 3 shows us the Fall, where sin enters the world, and then all the pain and suffering that stems from that: Cain and Abel, the Tower of Babel, Noah and the flood.

From Gen 12 onwards, we read the history of God's people, beginning with one man Abraham and one small family, and even in the first verses of Genesis 12 we see God's plan to bless all humanity through Abraham and his descendants.

In Genesis 3 we read of the Fall, which begins with the snake stating a LIE about God, that God is untrustworthy, that he is withholding something good from humanity.

The Woman and the Man, deceived by Satan, take and eat of the ONLY tree in the garden that God commanded them NOT to eat from; so SIN, and death and shame and disruption and distortion, enters the world.

The perennial nature of the human disease of sin comes to all people. In some people this is more obvious than others; but it is innate in us all.

Yet God's love for his world and for humanity endures beyond sin, so God gave his people a way to deal with their sin: the sacrificial system, the Ten Commandments and the other 613 commandments in Scripture.

This year I'm reading the whole Bible again, a little each day. I'm currently reading through Leviticus which can be tough going! The detailed descriptions of the Tabernacle, the portable temple: the instructions about the items, the clothing, which animals to sacrifice when and how, all point to the need of cleansing from sin for people to be RIGHT with God.

How great of God to provide a way for his people, who fall short time and again, just like us, to be forgiven!

In our human condition, we make bad choices in our relationships, in how we treat others, we can be selfish and ignore God and others. We know in our hearts that we have either been the cause or recipient of hurt, at different times in our lives. SIN is present in the world, and in our hearts.

<sup>12</sup> *... sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –*

**The gift of GRACE and LIFE through the Lord Jesus Christ**

When we speak of sin, we are often referring not so much to individual sins, but rather that **great sin of Adam** – the disease of sin which we all share.

In this passage in Romans, we move back and forward in contrast between two things: namely **ADAM**, the prototype human, through whom sin and death and separation from God entered the world, and the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, the perfect human, our Saviour, who brings forgiveness and life, and righteousness before God.

Note below the distinctions made between the consequences of the *Sin of Adam*, and the righteousness wrought through **the Lord Jesus Christ**. Look at

<sup>15</sup> But **the gift** is not like *the trespass*. For if the *many died by the trespass of the one man*, **HOW MUCH MORE** did **God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!**

<sup>16</sup> Nor can **the gift of God** be compared with the result of *one man's sin: the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation*, but **the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification**. <sup>17</sup> For if, by *the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man*, **HOW MUCH MORE** will **those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!**

<sup>18</sup> Consequently, *just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people*, so also **one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people**. <sup>19</sup> For just as *through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners*, so also **through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous**.

<sup>20</sup> The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. **But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,** <sup>21</sup> so that, *just as sin reigned in death*, so also **grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**.

We can also represent it in this way:

<b>IN ADAM</b> .....	<b>IN CHRIST</b>
<b>Trespass</b> .....	<b>Gift</b>
<b>Disobedience</b> .....	<b>One Righteous Act</b>
<b>Sin</b> .....	<b>Forgiveness</b>
<b>Condemnation</b> .....	<b>Righteousness</b>
<b>Death</b> .....	<b>Eternal Life</b>

This passage in Romans gives us a clear theological statement of Jesus' redemption of humanity. It is also a passage of great ENCOURAGEMENT!

'Sin increased, but Grace abounded' the writer tells us; Jesus has triumphed over sin and death. Jesus overturns, overcomes and sets right the sin of Adam, and this is the

good news of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once we were all in Adam, now we are in Christ! Once we were dead, now we are alive.

Yes, there is sin, both in the world and in us; but God's gift of grace through the Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed over all.

So, next time you are barracking for your team, remember that you were once on TEAM ADAM, but that now, through the grace and love of God, you are now on TEAM CHRIST. Jesus is ALL we need.

**The Flower**

*By George Herbert*

How fresh, oh Lord, how sweet and clean  
Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring;

To which, besides their own demean,  
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.

Grief melts away  
Like snow in May,  
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shrivelled heart  
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone

Quite underground; as flowers depart  
To see their mother-root, when they have blown,  
Where they together  
All the hard weather,  
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,  
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell

And up to heaven in an hour;  
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.  
We say amiss  
This or that is:  
Thy word is all, if we could spell.

Oh that I once past changing were,  
Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!

Many a spring I shoot up fair,  
Offering at heaven, growing and groaning thither;  
Nor doth my flower  
Want a spring shower,  
My sins and I joining together.

But while I grow in a straight line,  
Still upwards bent, as if heaven were mine own,

Thy anger comes, and I decline:  
What frost to that? what pole is not the zone  
Where all things burn,  
When thou dost turn,  
And the least frown of thine is shown?

And now in age I bud again,  
After so many deaths I live and write;  
I once more smell the dew and rain,  
And relish versing. Oh, my only light,  
It cannot be  
That I am he  
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,  
To make us see we are but flowers that glide;

Which when we once can find and prove,  
Thou hast a garden for us where to bide;  
Who would be more,  
Swelling through store,  
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

# Parish Council Notes

## Meeting of Monday 16th February

### Ministry matters

- Curacy partnership with All Saints' Greensborough continues 2026. They agreed we get a third of Birch money for accommodation, utilities & car costs. Our superannuation portion to be reviewed for both years: 2025 overpayment offset against this year. Discussions continue.
- Youth activities for 2026: meet with youth and families to discuss options. Camp?
- St John's 175th year celebration in 2026: a small planning committee to be formed. Newsletter notice requesting volunteers. Archbishop booked Sunday 16 August.
- Potential student minister for 2026 interviewed by Denise. Follow up with referee.
- BSL payments: another meeting held, letter received—outlines Dec issues, not outstanding months in 2025. Denise to continue trying. Council wants resolved by year's end.

### Financial matters

- General discussion.
- Denise paid same travel allowance for 8 years (\$42/month). Increase to \$100/month from Mar.
- Transfer some finances into other bank accounts to get more interest.
- Diocese encouraging parishes to have access to the ADF fund online. Do so.
- AA did not pay rent for a period of time, has asked how much they owe. Clarify with them.

### Property matters

- *St John's*
  - Request re installing plastic, rather than brass, plaque in memorial garden. Check existing ones, discuss with manufacturer, warden & vicar empowered to decide [*decision*: no plastic].
  - Restoration with Heritage Victoria. Current sign notifying proposed works to remain until 22 Feb.
  - Banyule Council hard rubbish collection 25 Feb.
  - Space made for Dance Artistry Australia to rent the lower office. Negotiate amount.
  - Issues with heating & cooling at Gloucester Dve.
- *Holy Spirit*
  - Where are the warranties for **all** the recently installed air conditioning units?
  - Carpets to be cleaned: obtain 3 quotes.

### Diocesan professional standards

- Angela Bergman being qualified as Disability Advisor and Advocate.

• Christopher-Jack about to do required training.

### Vicar's report

- I have now been here at Banyule for 8 years: plan to be here till the end of 2027 at least, God willing and Dad's health holding up.
- I have been in ordained ministry now for 32 years! Half my life!
- Long service leave approved by Diocese, 14 Sep – 1 Nov incl (7 weeks). Locum being organised.
- Lous on leave 26 Dec – 16 Jan; DJN delayed leave 21–27 Jan.
- Helen McAlley preached twice in January, 11 & 18 Jan – big thanks!
- Heather and I sorted out choir music in Jan – gifted to another church via St Paul's Cath.
- Attended ordination of Sarah Coe and Michelle Loveday Saturday 7 Feb.
- Met with a location scout re use of St John's for a movie – unfortunately funding fell through.
- Begun my meetings with Pastoral Supervisor and Spiritual Director.
- Deployed in my role with Parish Support team 3 meetings so far – a few to go I think.
- Continue as Area Dean – we have no Archdeacon at present as Rev Tim Johnson has moved on to teach at Ridley.
- *Watsonia Christmas Celebrations 13 Dec*:
  - A great team of Rhonda, Wilma, Marcia and Kaye as well as me.
  - Decorated the church and had a 'nativity dress up' in our car park with stable background.
  - Weiyi and Charlie were a great help in moving the 'stable' in and out.
  - Gave out about 50 HOPE-25 New Testaments and lots of candy canes and other free gifts.
  - I have already purchased over 100 Christmas decorations for giveaways for this year.
- *Christmas Services: good attendance figures*:
  - Christmas Eve 5 pm children's celebration on the lawn: 42 adults, 18 children
  - Christmas Eve 9 pm St John's: 42
  - Christmas Day 9:30 am St John's: 53
  - Christmas Day 9:30 am Watsonia: 20+?
- Brilliant response to the consecration of the new Memorial Garden: 138 people.
- Interment of Ashes Sunday 22/2.
- Interview with a potential student minister.

• *175 Years anniversary of St John's*: Archbishop booked Sunday 16 August. Convene a small planning group.

• Moved weekly staff meeting to Wed mornings at 9 am. Helen & Weiyi will join monthly.

### Visits booked

- Bishop Kate at Holy Spirit on Pentecost 23 May to preach and observe Xiaoxi preside.
- Rowan (CMS) will be home this year: I have asked for a Sunday with us.
- 13 December: Adrian (BCA) Combined service?
- Op shop: another meeting with Helen Moppert & Kelly from BSL. Explained about back-pay due.
- Will follow up again with All Saints' Greensborough re overcharges to us in 2025: happy to have that offset against this year's charges.
- *Current and ongoing position descriptions with Banyule for the Lous*:
  - Xiaoxi to continue with us on Sunday mornings (Sunday nights at ASG)
  - Xiaoxi to be with us Wed & Thurs mornings
  - Weiyi will be at Holy Spirit Watsonia twice per month (2nd & 4th Sundays)
  - Weiyi will be at Banyule on mornings when ASG has a combined service (4–5 times per year)
  - Weiyi will work on tech advice and other things on Wednesday mornings

### Wardens' report

- New cleaner to start both churches 1 March.
- *Holy Spirit*: evaporative cooler serviced and cleaned, leak in ladies' toilet cistern repaired.
- *Jika St*: electric split system installed, ducted gas heating decommissioned.
- *Gloucester Drive*: electric heating/cooling installed, ducted gas heating decommissioned. Leak from shower base investigated & repaired.
- *St John's*:
  - Memorial Garden landscaper topped up Tuscan toppings pathway, replaced some plants.
  - Heritage Victoria application continuing input as requested. 75% application fee waiver granted. Notice of intended works displayed at St John's and in *The Age* newspaper.
- *St Andrew's*: Ongoing discussions with Diocese re the sale payment to us.

### General business

- Rhonda requested assistance to clear gardens at Holy Spirit to a level that can be maintained more easily.

*Minutes Xiaoxi & Rhonda Taylor, précis Editor*

A guy walks into a bar on Ash Wednesday and orders a beer.

"I'm really having a hard time trying to decide what to give up for Lent," he tells the bartender.

"Well let me tell you a little cautionary tale about giving things up for Lent," the bartender says. "A particular family in LA has been abstaining from using one letter of the alphabet for Lent each year, since 2001. It started as a joke, giving up "A" in 2002 and "B" in 2003, but developed into a strong family tradition. This year, one of the members has a tough choice to make. Unlike the rest of the Astleys, Rick made a solemn vow..."

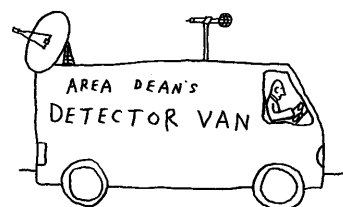
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# LENT

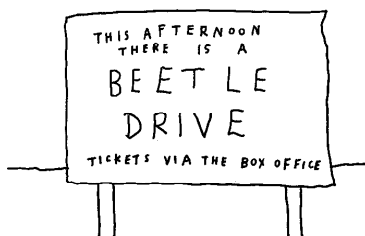
ACTIVITIES THAT ARE FROWNED UPON



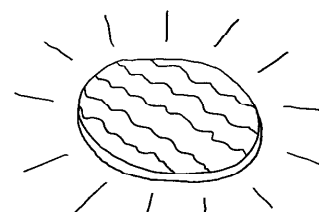
PARISH BREWERY TRIPS



FOUL LANGUAGE ANYWHERE IN THE DEANERY



HAVING TOO MUCH FUN



CHOCOLATE BISCUITS AFTER THE 10 A.M.