CELEBRATING 175 YEARS OF ST JOHN'S!

# BANYULE BABBLE

The Newsletter of the Anglican Parish of Banyule

St John's Heidelberg ✻ Holy Spirit Watsonia

NOVEMBER 2026

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## DAVID'S DISCOURSE

On Sunday morning during the 9:30 am service at Heidelberg the churchwarden Dr Katrina Philip announced that it was my birthday. I think she had been talking to my friend, the Rev Jonathan Lopez, and he had told her. I turned 82. After the Heidelberg service at morning tea I was talking to a former churchwarden, Allan Way and his wife Joan. Allan told me he is 87 and I asked him what it is that allows him to have good health. Allan and Joan have been married more than 60 years and I asked her for some reasons for a long marriage. They have things in common, as any marriage does, and especially one as long as theirs. And they also have different interests and they respect that in each other. My wife Gretta and I have been blessed with almost 60 years of marriage.

It is possible to look back on the length of days that God has given us, and to thank him for all his blessings. I have enjoyed my time here in the parish of Banyule and especially the opportunity to look at two letters of the apostle Paul. He wrote to two of the churches he founded in Macedonia in northern Greece: Philippians and 1 Thessalonians, and we looked at these books in the Bible together. In both letters there is hope. Paul looks forward to when Jesus comes to earth again. There is a great need for hope in the world today. I like looking back, but I also need to have hope, the promised future that Jesus has given to all who come to him in trust with thankfulness for his love and care for us. There is sometimes a lack of hope in some people isn't there? Indeed, this week my wife and I looked at an old movie, 'The Shawshank Redemption', with the great actors Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins. It has a sad setting, in a prison, but a theme in this movie is the great importance of hope, no matter what our circumstances.

There was a song we used to sing in youth fellowship in the church I attended as a 17 year old: 'Standing on the Promises of Christ my King'. It's wonderful to list some of the promises that we find in the word of the Lord. The Bible is sometimes described as God's love letter to us. We can have real hope.

*David Jones*

### Annual Parish Meeting

Sunday 15th November after the service

*Come and cause havoc!*

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## Parish Lunch

**12.30 pm, St John's hall**
**Saturday 21 November**

Please join us to celebrate
**175 years of God at work in Heidelberg**

Please sign up on the list available at each centre from Sunday 1st November
**BEFORE Saturday 14 November**

The cost will be $25 per person payable on the day
(We do not have credit card facilities)

## 29 November at 9.30 am

***Combined Service at St John's***

to give thanks for
**175 years of God at work in Heidelberg**

The service will include a
**Blessing of the pets**,
followed by morning tea in our upper hall

11 am A visit with the ponies and their students from *The Backyard Ranch*

12 pm Maureen Shand will give a tour of the historic church

1 pm A visit with the ponies and their students from *The Backyard Ranch*

*A display of historic memorabilia will be open all day in our lower hall*

Activities will conclude at 2 pm

This is also an opportunity to enjoy our beautiful surrounds and the St. John's Riverside Community Garden

**As we are hosts to the local community please bring a plate for morning tea**

*Rosemary Bellair*

# Last Month – October

**Wednesday 28th**: 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers' Union; 3 pm Roshana Macleod

# This Month – November

**Sunday 1st** *Pentecost 23, All Saints:* 9.30 am St John's (all-age); 5 pm Holy Spirit
*1 Thessalonians 3:1–13; Matthew 5:1–12*

**Monday 2nd**: Denise returns

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

**Sunday 8th** *Pentecost 24:* 9.30 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit
*1 Thessalonians 4:1–18; Matthew 25:1–13*

**Sunday 15th** *Pentecost 25:* 9.30 am Combined, St John's, then **Annual Parish Meeting**
*1 Thessalonians 5:1–28; Matthew 25:14–30*

**Saturday 21st**: 12.30 pm **175 Years Celebration Parish Lunch**, St John's Hall, $25

**Sunday 22nd** *Pentecost Last, Christ the King:* 9.30 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit
*Ezekiel 34:11–16,20–24; Matthew 25:31–46*

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

**Saturday 28th**: Victorian elections

**Sunday 29th** *Advent 1:* 9.30 am Combined service **outside St John's**, **Blessing of Pets**, activities
*Job 39:1–18; Mark 11:1–11*

# Wanted

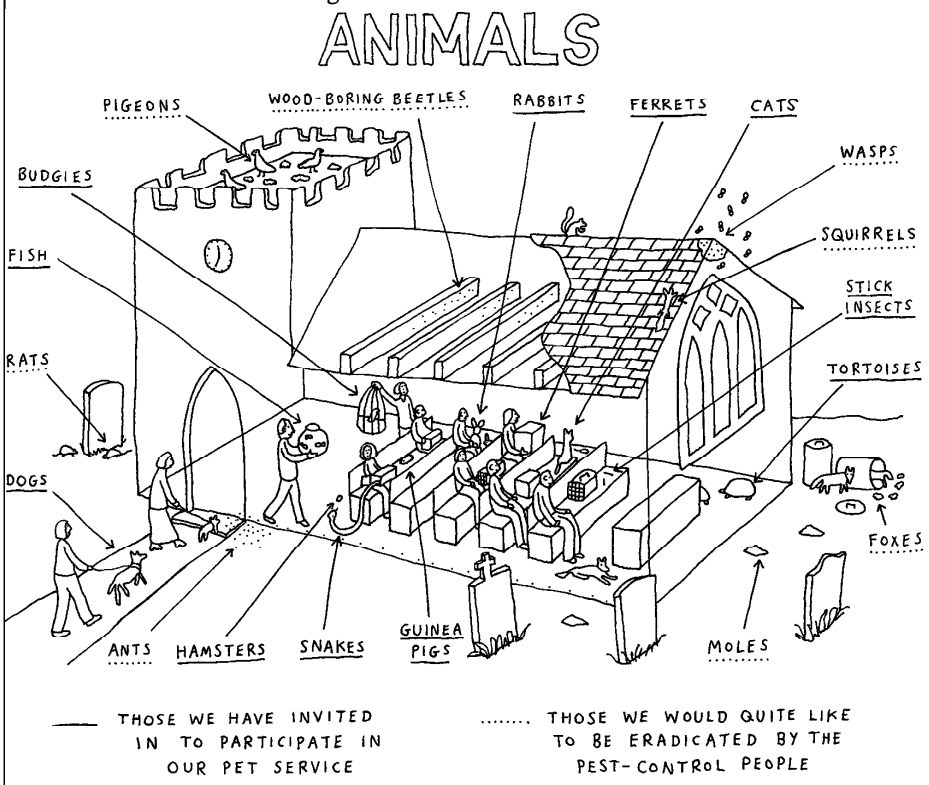
- More op shop volunteers

# *Holy Spirit Mothers' Union*

Our AGM meeting will be on Wednesday October 28th at 10 am.

One of our projects is that we give Christmas cards to two Women's Remand Centres—three to each person to give to their families. Also we give funds for the Nursery School for the Karen Children, and to the MU Melbourne Disaster Fund and to the MU Intercessory Prayer Circle. Our meeting ends with Midday Prayers.

Our November meeting Wed 25th will be the last for 2026.—*Elsie Storr*




# *Mission News*

### *Rowan*

*'Change is the only constant in life.'*
– Heraclitus (a Greek philosopher, c. 500 BC)

As I've travelled around Melbourne on the trains and trams, there have been regular reminder announcements over the PA announcing the tram stop or station that we are arriving at. Occasionally, there will be an extra announcement as well: 'Change here for ....'.

For me, September and October are not just announcements about another month on the calendar, but reminders that there are changes in direction and location quickly coming up as my time here in Australia comes to an end and I prepare to return to location.

I've particularly appreciated the opportunity over the past few months to connect with link churches across Victoria, and to share with you about our partnership in ministry. Thanks so much for your prayer and care and support and interest.

I've been grateful for the care and support of medical advisors as well during my time here, especially when there have been a few surprising and unexpected turns (in a good way) on the journey.

I'm thankful also for your understanding while I have been back this time about needing to have some medical leave, and so not able to reconnect with many of you — thanks for your prayers and support.

It's been good to be able to take a few weeks of annual leave and spend some time with my brothers, both of whom ventured south of their respective borders (Queensland and New South Wales). It was a special time as it's the first time that the three of us have been together in the same place since 2017.

This month is busy with pre-departure briefings and meetings, some final medical appointments and packing before I fly back to location at the start of November.

I would appreciate your prayers thanking God for quality time with both of my brothers, and your care and support during my time back in Australia. I would also appreciate your prayers for the pre-departure meetings and appointments to go well, and a safe return to location and a smooth re-entry.

### *The Killingbecks on King Island*

Pray for good weather as our tourism folk re-energise, and that visitors to the Island would be blessed in interacting with our church folk. Pray for opportunities for church members to share their faith in the community.

### *Lyn Pearson at Interserve*

Hi there, I just arrived in Malaysia. It is smoggy and hot, but the fellowship and conversation is encouraging: people from so many nations and languages.

I am here for a week at a church-based training conference focusing on Asia. This is celebrating 20 years of the Increase association. I have been with them since about 2010. I have been speaking lots of Russian as we have many folk from Central Asia and Russia here.

Please pray for our time together. That we can listen to God and be an encouragement to each other. We are here until the 24th. Lots of things to be thankful for, and to ask for new incoming leadership. I am helping facilitate small groups every morning and a workshop on Thursday. I am also the conference medic...so pray that people stay well!

Give thanks for three faithful long-term friends. We have holidayed together for some 34 years now. They go annually; and I try and join when I can.

I just left them in Greece. They were holidaying in Scotland and then Greece. We were told the Greek weather was unusually wet and windy. So for the week I was with them it was wild and raining...but then it cleared up yesterday when I left (below).

Oct 22nd will be my brother Andrew's birthday and would have been dad's too. Please pray for us as we grieve and finish things to do with the estate.

After ten days at home, I return to Malaysia to this same venue for our Leaders' meeting with Interserve. Much to pray about, much to prepare. I will write more soon, but wanted to get this off as I so value your prayers.

Blessings, Lyn

# Michelle's Testimony

*Given at St John's, 18th October 2026*

Last year I was received into the Anglican Church. At the time, a verse came to mind: Jesus told his disciples, *'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.'* These words have had a strong impact on me. But when I think of where I was at as a teenager, it seems amazing that they've become so important.

I didn't grow up in the Anglican church. My family didn't attend anywhere. I lived with my mother, grandparents, and uncle. When I was seven, Mum and I moved out.

My grandparents wanted me to have a good education. They sent me to an Anglican boarding school. I attended assemblies, divinity lessons, chapel, and church services. I sang in the church choir.

I had to be confirmed first. But I had no concept of who Jesus really was, why he came, or why he died on a cross. I actually thought church and the Bible were boring and irrelevant. I switched off in services. I day-dreamed.

The following year, I chose to attend my local high school. I seriously avoided church. I was attracted to Hindu meditation, and stuff like that.

I met Paul in a school musical. Our lives focused on friends, parties, and music. We married at eighteen.

We had a neighbour named Joan. She was sixty-ish and religious. One evening she came over to talk about her Christian faith. I really wasn't interested.

Joan talked for hours about her life. She and her family had been missionaries. They'd seen miracles happen. God had provided everything they needed. He'd given her spiritual gifts.

Joan told me Jesus gave his life so my sin could be forgiven. Everything she said was amazing. I'd never heard anything like that before. I felt strangely emotional.

After Joan left, I went to bed. I wanted to pray. So I said a simple prayer. *'Jesus, I believe in you. I want to follow you. Thank you for dying for me. Please forgive my sins.'* I fell asleep.

When I woke, I felt different inside. Lighter, somehow. I found a Bible, and started to read Matthew's Gospel. As I read stories of Jesus' life, God's Spirit opened my eyes. I began to understand who Jesus is.

The following Sunday, Paul and I walked into Joan's church. We were amazed by the warm welcome, the incredible joy that was there.

Three months later I was baptized. I was heading in a completely new direction. I read the Gospels in a few weeks. Paul and I joined a home group. We attended church twice on Sundays. Paul and I felt God was asking us to share the gospel with people who didn't know Jesus.

Then God blessed us with three children. He spoke to us again: *Time to prepare for missionary service.* We spent three years at Bible College.

God led us to Pakistan: we lived there 11 years. We served in a Bible Correspondence School. Thousands of students studied free Bible lessons. People from any religious background. I marked their courses, and answered their questions about faith.

What motivated me to go to Pakistan to do this work? It was Jesus' words: *'**Go** therefore and make disciples of **all** nations.'* And the chorus of an old song — *Jesus said,*

*'Freely, freely you have received;*
*Freely, freely give.*
*Go in my name and because you believe,*
*Others will know that I live.'*

# Synod 2026

Synod met in 2025 only to elect the new Archbishop, and not for general business, so this year's meeting should have had two years' worth of work to do, but it didn't quite work out that way. However, it was nevertheless a fairly gruelling programme. The main meetings started at St Paul's Cathedral on Wednesday 7th October, 7 pm – 10 pm; then Thursday 7 pm to 10.30 pm; then Friday 7 pm – 10.30 pm, then, after a break of only 11 hours, Saturday 9.30 am – 5 pm.

But this was by no means all. Before the meetings we were given a lot of material to read: the main documents totalled 703 pages. There were also seven separate one-hour online information sessions in late September, each covering different topics—these were apparently well-attended. Then in the afternoon before each evening meeting we were given the notice papers covering that evening's meetings: 58 pages on Wednesday, 73 pages on Thursday, 54 pages on Friday; and late on Friday night we got 51 pages of notice paper for the Saturday meeting starting 9.30 am.

On top of that, this synod had to elect people to a lot of different committees, which apparently come up every three years. The elections were not held during the meetings, but online during the day on Thursday: they took the Editor, working hurriedly, a good three hours or more.

All this left the Editor rather exhausted at the end, and he thought of Denise who was missing it all, sunbaking in Scotland.

On the first night we were provided with showbags which contained a stress ball, which attendees thought would be much needed. There were quiet rooms available if it all got too much, and also there were Archdeacons available if we needed a shoulder to cry on. The outlook looked grim.

But there was a change to the rules at this synod—standing orders had been changed at a previous synod to require a lot of notice be given for motions and amendments, and these are now much more difficult to bring in during debate. There was some bemoaning that there was less cut-and-thrust, but the Editor felt there was also this time a general feeling that since Synod had appointed an Archbishop to bring in change, it shouldn't stand in his way too much. It seemed to the Editor that there was more of a feeling of cooperation.

Indeed, the focus of this year's synod was definitely on the Archbishop's strategy document *For the harvest.* All synod members were given a printed copy as well as the electronic version, which is available for general download on the front page of the diocese's website https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/ , and it is discussed here in a separate report. There were no fewer than three (really, four) presentations by the Archbishop of various parts of this document, and it was endorsed by Synod.

But we started with the Synod Eucharist. The first reading was on Paul's shipwreck onto Malta in Acts 27. It seemed unusual to start a meeting with a reading about a shipwreck, but the readings continued with Peter walking on the water with Jesus, and the common thread, the preacher (Archdeacon Bree Mills) explained, was trust in God. The chief characteristic of leaders was not greater knowledge, but greater confidence. Peter and Paul both trusted God, the first to get out of the boat, and the second to stay in it. They depended on trust in God to provide, rather than worrying about the fruit.

During the service the Archbishop took the opportunity to collate Andrew Price as archdeacon. ('I collate you!' he said.)

There were lots of well-chosen hymns during the service, including *Be still for the presence of the Lord* and *Just as I am,* and the singing of hymns was a particular characteristic of this synod, and was stirringly done by the full cathedral with 1137 on the list.

Lots of different people presented petitions in the prayers, including that we would seek God's will, putting aside our personal preferences.

Next came the Archbishop's 'Charge to Synod'. This wasn't a fee for attending Synod, and indeed the Editor was pleased that at the Eucharist they hadn't passed the plate around (they did in 2024, and Denise told the Editor what did he expect?). Instead, Ric told us what we could expect from him from now on, and we were introduced to *For the Harvest.* (You can see or read the whole Charge at https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/watch-the-archbishops-charge-to-synod-2026/ .)

We come together (said Ric) as one body in Christ, and he mentioned the importance of history. Next year will be the shared 180th anniversary of both the City of Melbourne and the Diocese, which implies that the first vicar of Heidelberg was appointed only one year after the Diocese came into existence. This anniversary is another opportunity for engagement.

But, said Ric, we mustn't forget that it is all about Jesus, and it is Jesus' church, mission and harvest.

Ric said he has been listening a lot. He had been elected to lead change, but that does not mean starting again, but keeping the best we already have, dropping what should be dropped, and daring to imagine what we could do. There are great stories of faith and faithfulness and love, but also there is weariness and anxiety. Many churches are struggling, with not enough young people. Many people carry heavy burdens. In growing areas our presence is limited, and we are not supporting local mission well.

People in and out of the church long to belong. They want better relationships, to be known and have their gifts and contributions recognised. People are under pressure, and the social and political environment is changing.

There are great possibilities for renewal. As Jesus said, the harvest is plentiful. Only then does he say that the workers are few, which is also true. We see a gap between what we need and the resources we have. But Jesus goes on to tell us to *'Ask* the Lord of the harvest to send out workers'. We are to pray into the gap. 'Prayer cannot simply be one activity within our strategy', said Ric. 'It is its beginning, foundation and continuing life.' So 2027 will be a diocesan Year of Prayer. Disciples who pray then become part of God's answer to their prayer. Our plans must arise from dependence upon God rather than confidence in ourselves. Then we go where God sends us.

Ric's vision is a renewed Church, proclaiming Christ across Melbourne and Geelong, so that every person may encounter the love of God, and he enlarged on all these points. 2028 will be a diocesan Year of Evangelism. He also said, 'We need a faithful and con-

fident Christian voice in the public life of Victoria'. He is encouraging Anglican schools to 'own their Anglican [and Christian] identity with confidence', and intends to found new schools in new areas. He is trying to bring Anglican agencies closer to him, closer to the diocese, and closer to parishes.

Ric said, *'In just eight months it has been my privilege to consecrate three bishops and to experience the very special pleasure of adding them to our diocesan team as partners in care and oversight. Some have teased me a little about the speed with which this has happened.'* He then revealed that he was actually quoting Archbishop David Penman in his first Synod Charge. He (Ric) has done exactly the same, though David Penman didn't do them all at once.

Ric talked about belonging, and the importance of working across cultures and divides. We need to work with other denominations; and Philip Huggins has been commissioned to help develop Jewish–Anglican relations.

Work with First Nations is ongoing. Glenn Loughrey has painted five artworks as a retiring work, and Ken Hutton has been appointed to support First Nations clergy and leaders.

I quote the next section extensively:

***How I intend to lead***

*The way we lead and work together will shape the kind of Church we become. So, I want to be explicit about five commitments that I bring to my leadership and offer to the whole Diocese.*

**Audacity:** *or "Aim High". I will encourage us to pray in faith for what only God can do, set God-shaped ambitions, and act boldly with our confidence in Christ.*

**Humility:** *or "Bow the Knee". I will encourage our posture to lead us to prayer, to listen and learn, recognising that none of us has all the answers, to be willing to be corrected, to repent and to receive the gifts God has placed in others.*

**Unity:** *or "Enjoy it Together". I will encourage us to work in teams, together, across boundaries, resisting silos and defensiveness. We will choose to celebrate when we see breakthroughs and answers to prayer. We will choose to speak positively about one another. And when relationships are strained, we will speak honestly, directly and with love . . .*

**Generosity:** *or "Give it Away". I will encourage us to share people, resources, finances, learning and opportunities so that others may flourish, celebrating fruit wherever God gives it and asking what will strengthen the mission of the whole Diocese. We will give away the Gospel, so that all might hear.*

**Tenacity:** *or "Never give up". I will encourage us to remain faithful, even when renewal is slow, difficult or costly. We will not give up on one another. We will have a long-term, generational vision. We will not stop praying for the lasting fruit that only God can give.*

*Audacity. Humility. Unity. Generosity. Tenacity.*

*Aim high, bow the knee, enjoy it together, give it away, never give up.*

*This is how I intend to lead and how I hope we will treat one another.*

Ric then expanded on his vision under the heading *Lift your eyes,* and directed us to the document *For the Harvest.* He asked us to ask: Lord, what are you showing us? Lord, what are you asking of us? Lord, where are you sending us? And he finished with the *Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings* prayer.

There was applause.

Some procedural formalities were dealt with quickly, and then Archbishop Ric spoke again, this time with the first of three presentations of *For the Harvest,* which he had already foreshadowed in his Charge. He referred to the *Listening in Lent* exercise, which does indeed seem to have been listened to.

We finished right on 10 pm, and then we went home.

* * * * *

The next day, Thursday, the Editor spent several hours doing the elections. He could have (should have) prepared for them beforehand, as we had had the information available for some weeks, but the actual voting in any case was only open on the Thursday. It was made more difficult because nearly all the candidates were unknown to him, so he had to base his preferences on their statements, which he suspected (especially of course for the clergy) might not always be the whole truth. He did his best to read between the lines.

We met again in good time to start at 7 pm. There were a couple of disturbances: a spillage of some kind had occurred just a few pews away from the Editor, and cathedral staff were doing their best to mop it up, while the spillage was doing its best to run away from them. As far as the Editor could see, it did not appear to be blood.

A second disturbance was caused by the Archbishop's reporting that someone had substituted his coffee mug. This wasn't, apparently, to replace his mug with a poisoned one, but because the first mug, somehow, was a Collingwood mug, and it was replaced by a Richmond mug.

We had a short Evening Prayer (but with a hymn), then after some announcement etc we had the second of the three presentations on *For the Harvest.* Then Kate Beer, who is now a Venerable Archdeacon, talked to us about selection and formation of ordinands, which is now her especial field, and of course an important one.

We then moved on to some actual legislation. Most of it was uncontroversial, indeed dull, ratifying uncontroversial provisions of General Synod and fixing inconsistencies, and we were going great guns and even getting a little ahead of time, until we got to the *Office Holders (Removal of Age Requirement) Bill 2026.*

At present, to be on a Parish Electoral Roll and serve on Parish Council or on Synod, you have to be at least 18 years old. This bill sought to remove the requirement of being 18, provided you are confirmed (but you would still need to be 18 to be a churchwarden).

Synod was split on this issue. Someone had proposed a compromise amendment, in which the age for the Electoral Roll was reduced to 16 but everything else, including Parish Council and Synod, was still 18. It wasn't much of a compromise.

There was a lot of debate, but some people objected to some parts and not others, so it was thought best to go into committee, in which the bill is voted on bit by bit. But because there was also an amendment, the voting started between the amendment and the original bill.

The vote on the first sub-clause was close. It couldn't be decided on the voices, so it went to a show of hands, but even then it couldn't be decided. So it needed a careful count of lanyard cards, which took some time. The vote was very close, but slightly in favour of the amendment.

Based on some questions synod members asked, the Editor thinks many people did not understand the process, and that this vote would eliminate one of the options. There was insistence that there were three options, so why was it a vote between two? (The answer is that standard procedure is to vote on the amendment first against the unamended bill, and whatever wins that vote is then voted on against the status quo.) The Editor knows at least two people who voted incorrectly (i.e. against what they wanted) and there may well have been others.

At any rate we were now running rather late and there were lots more things to consider, so the Archbishop decided to defer this one until Friday, and have us pass some easy motions to get our confidence back. So we decided to tell the Diocese to make an annual report how *For the Harvest* was progressing; that we were in favour of evangelism (original sense); that we should support people with neurodivergence or hidden disabilities; that we should look after the environment; that we wanted a proper ban on gambling advertisements and better regulation; that the Diocesan Archive Centre online search function was a good idea; and that we should support global mission.

After we had done all that we did feel a bit better, and it was time to go home.

* * * * *

On Friday night we had Evening Prayer again, and then the Archbishop announced that he had now been gifted a Cats scarf. He said it was much appreciated, because his chair was uncomfortable, and he could make it more comfortable for the archiepiscopal derrière by sitting on the scarf.

There were then a number of First Nations-related topics. First, General Synod had said that First Nations bishops should be automatic members of synod without taking the place of other First Nations 'non-diocesan representatives', and we agreed.

Then we were shown Glenn Loughrey's artworks, representing Lent to Easter from an Aboriginal perspective. There are five works, which will go on tour around the five dioceses in Victoria, and then each diocese will get one. Glenn expressed his pleasure that the dioceses of Melbourne and Bendigo, which commissioned the work, had paid him. (See https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/five-paintings-and-one-shared-story/ )

We voted to set up a First Nations Reconciliation Reference Group, and for a motion that directed us to the findings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

It was time to get back onto the *Office Holders (Removal of Age Requirement) Bill 2026,* but its mover reluctantly decided to withdraw the bill, because Synod was so divided by it, and do more work on it to see what might be acceptable next year. So instead we did some other motions. We allowed Defence Chaplains to be members of Synod, and we voted to receive all the reports we hadn't already voted to receive because we hadn't read them.

We also supported a motion to set up 'a committee to review the Archbishop Election Act 2022 and the Archbishopric Act 2022 and to report to the next meeting of Synod with recommendations'. Archbishop Ric was rather

taken with the idea that even in 2022 Synod had foreshadowed an Archbishopric and had legislated about him.

There was also a motion from Rachel Lopez asking that people be allowed to set up stalls at synod to sell ministry and service stuff to synod members for a fee. She declared a conflict of interest, because she wanted to flog ministry materials herself. She was therefore unable to vote on the motion, but it nevertheless passed.

We now had 11 hours to get home, try to sleep, get up, shower, have breakfast, download the next notice paper, and get back to St Paul's.

* * * * *

And now we were on the last day! We started with Morning Prayer this time. Archbishop Ric informed us he had been given a comfortable Bulldogs cushion thing to sit on. He had also been given a mug and a bike helmet involving (the Editor believes) other sporting codes.

Next we moved into the state of the Diocesan finances, which are dire. Compared with 2024, the 2025 cash flow figures showed 'Receipts from operations' down by 45%, while 'Payments in course of operations' increased by 120%. It seems that 2024 receipts were particularly high, for reasons unknown to the Editor. Why payments were so high in 2025 wasn't clear to him either—it was not redress payments. The diocese has only stayed afloat by selling a lot more assets, which obviously cannot continue indefinitely. The profit and loss statement was fudged upwards by increased property valuations, which look odd and certainly unsustainable in a time of falling property values.

There is a budget and financial plan, which aims to get things back into the black in 2029. This involves a great deal of the theological virtue of Hope. In particular, the diocese is going to increase the risk level of its investments. They did not say to watch for particular horses in Melbourne Cup week; that may be the next step. Also, the diocese is going to borrow money to then make more money by investing it. If that works, why isn't everyone doing it? Kirsty Brown, the Scottish chair of the Finance Committee, said that if it didn't work they would get out of it, but the Editor is not sure it would be so easy.

Synod wasn't happy, but felt they had no choice but to accept things.

We did more motions, here and later in the day. There was the response to the 'Women in ordained ministry' report. This report had noted that the Diocese was officially in favour of egalitarianism (anything men can do in the church, women can do), but it had given its blessing to church plants that held complementarian views (men and women have different roles). (One of the speakers said that complementarianism was a new-fangled word, and it should be called 'subordinationism'.) One of the report's recommendations was that the diocese stop trying to have a bob each way and have the courage of its egalitarian principles, and the motion before synod endorsed the recommendations and passed them on for implementation. An amendment had been moved, that watered down 'endorsed' to 'noted' and 'implementation' to 'consideration', with extra wording to make it more palatable. The movers of the original motion, perhaps considering what happened to the Age Requirement bill, accepted the amendment, so we didn't have a chance to vote on it, and the amended motion was passed.

We debated whether clergy should always, under all circumstances, have training at an Anglican Theological College, and in the end decided that was too limiting. We relaxed the rules a bit for later synods for giving notice of things. We debated whether there should be a Register of Gifts, but I can't remember what we decided.

We also debated a motion in favour of the Mothers' Union. Why was this controversial? Well, Kären Hayden had asserted that Mothers' Union was *integral* to the mission of the church, and many people (the Editor included) took that as meaning it was essential and there could be no mission without MU, which seemed to be going too far. However, it was argued that 'integral' meant it was built-in, and that was accepted. It was interesting to hear someone's testimony (supported by others) that in some churches overseas that were not going well, Mothers' Union was often the only thing that was working properly.

We stopped at some point for lunch. It was possible to have ordered lunch through the cathedral from some local restaurant, but at an eye-watering price, which the Editor thought should get you six highly *recherché* courses on gold plate and a personal butler, but suspected wouldn't. So he took his two boiled eggs and a mandarin out into the sunshine.

After lunch we had the third presentation on *For the Harvest,* and then we passed a motion supporting it and telling everyone to get with the programme.

Then we got back into motions. One that came up was Muriel Porter's proposal for a successor to *The Melbourne Anglican.* The reader will recall that *TMA* stopped publication suddenly at the end of 2025, without any announcement. Apparently it was costing half a million a year to produce, and Archbishop-in-Council needed to find savings. Muriel said that since it had stopped, no-one had any way to know what was going on. (She didn't mention that also no-one had any way to read her regular column.) She proposed an online-only publication that could be much cheaper (she suggested $70,000 a year, perhaps $69,000 more than the *Banyule Babble* costs, but probably only gets you half a person nowadays).

The Archbishop is starting an opt-in email newsletter *In This Season,* which anyone can sign up for, and we were told it would be happy to receive contributions, but Muriel Porter thought we needed something broader. The motion was passed, I think, but it only urges Archbishop-in-Council to do something and doesn't require it.

We had the Synod photo taken at afternoon tea (shown on page 1; the Editor is there but obscured), and we finished with three conventional motions: the Honours list of long-time Synod members who are retiring, the Condolence list of those who have died before they could retire, and the Thank-you list of those who have helped run the show. This included thanks to the Registrar, who made sure she was thanked by seconding the motion.

We finished with more prayers and hymns, and got out right at 5 pm (hooray)!

# For the Harvest

**Matthew 9:35–38**

*[35] Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness. [36] When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. [38] Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'*

Why now? A chapter has ended. The community we serve is changing. *Listening in Lent* has shown there are many challenges, but also signs of hope.

Our foundations:

- We are confident in Christ
- Prayer through everything
- Renewal is God's work
- We are gathered and sent

It is not something done by someone else: it starts with me.

We have a ten-year plan, looking towards 2036. We must build the engine of renewal:

- Forming missional disciples
- Raising and releasing leaders
- Renewing and planting healthy churches

The signs of renewal will be:

- Healthy and fruitful churches
- Younger people everywhere
- We are trusted and safe
- We are diverse and together

Numbers matter because people matter. There will be different pathways:

- Existing parishes growing
- Some may need substantial revitalisation: renewed leadership, partnership/merging, missional focus, a fresh start, a replant, a reshape or closure
- New congregations and plants
- New forms: chaplaincies, schools, agencies

There is one Diocese but many parts. Parishes, ministries, agencies with visions and plans do not need to do another planning exercise, or do the same as others. It is 'add-up', not 'add-on'; alignment, not uniformity. We are to ask:

- What is God already doing here?
- What is our part?
- What is our next faithful step?

**From vision to action**

In the first phase, 2027–2029, the Diocese will establish the **Perry Centre for Renewal.** Named after the first Bishop of Melbourne, the Perry Centre is to equip churches, ministries and leaders with the skills they need to understand the present reality, discern the next faithful step, and access support and training for renewal, planting and revitalisation.

The Anglican Centre will be reshaped to better serve local mission, and financial resources need to be put on a secure footing to sustain renewal.

In 2029 everything will be reviewed.

In his final presentation Ric directed us to Ezekiel 47, where Ezekiel sees a stream coming from the new temple, at first just a trickle, then ankle-deep, then waist-deep, then over our heads. He invited us to *look up:* the harvest is plentiful; to *remain in the vine:* our life is in Christ; and to *step in the river.* We are to grow as disciples, invite someone else to follow Jesus, and help someone grow as leader. He asked us, 'Are you in?'

# *Blokes Helping Blokes*

It was the morning of 3rd October, and the Editor approached the Blokes' secret lair with a sense of hesitancy. He had aimed to have a particularly high standard of dress this time, and had even gone to the trouble of bleaching a dress shirt (because one can't wear tails with an ordinary shirt), but in the event he thought that with the rain, it wasn't worth disturbing the sleeping wife by trying to haul a white piqué waistcoat and white tie from the deepest recesses of the wardrobe, so he turned up in his usual shorts and thongs.

But as it happened, Glen was effusive in his praise for the Editor's appearance, and expatiated on his handsomeness at length. Admittedly, after Glen had made that heart sign with his hands that young people use on TikTok to express their love for their fans, and had repeated for the umpteenth time how good-looking the Editor was, the thought did enter the Editor's mind that perhaps Glen was being just a tad insincere; but he quickly banished it.

Glen sent an SMS to one of the Blokes who had not made it in, and this led to some disagreement between the Blokes about how fit and active and generally spry one should expect to be at 90 years old. One of the younger Blokes claimed he would be bouncing around at that age, while one of the older Blokes disagreed and said that when the younger Bloke reached that age he would be telling him, 'I told you so', not considering that he mightn't.

This topic was destined to reappear a little later.

There was also an interesting description of a certain care home (which shall not be named here) as the 'Titanic'. This was not because it had hit an iceberg and was on a severe lean and the residents would soon be floundering in dark icy waters, but because it carried residents in very different classes, with some in palatial first-class surroundings while others were below the waterline in steerage, presumably packed in bunks, four to a tiny cabin.

Glen asked the Blokes how many of them had felt the earthquake at 2 am that morning, and one had. Glen said his wife had felt it, but he had ascribed her feeling of movement to his having broken wind.* Blokes pointed out that Glen should take earthquakes seriously, as at the last one a goodly portion of his house had fallen down.†

From these cultured discussions we passed to the main topic of the day, which was 'harmless errors that went either very right or very wrong'. Glen gave as an example a recent experiment in dry aging of a full rump.

In dry aging of meat, the cut of meat is placed in a special cabinet where it is hung at a low temperature and a fixed humidity for perhaps 40 days. The muscles relax and become very tender, and the flavour also greatly increases. An ordinary cut of meat becomes something special, worth much more.

Blokes thought that under these conditions the meat would go rotten, but Glen said the surface dried to a black 'bark' that protected the interior. Afterwards, this 'bark' would be cut off. (His cabinet also contained an ultraviolet light against microbes.)

Where there was bone, this provided an alternate protective layer. The problem with a whole rump was the absence of surface bone or fat. There would be a lot of bark and therefore one would lose a lot of meat—indeed, most of it. For this reason dry-aging a rump was considered impossible.

You can't tell Glen that something is impossible without his trying to do it. In an effort to avoid the problem of losing meat to bark, Glen covered the surface with a mixture of rendered beef tallow and rice flour. Readers will probably remember a similar (though not identical) mixture discussed in the August 2025 number of the *Babble*, where it was used in the drying of a leg of ham to make prosciutto—and the question of its correct name, skirted by Glen this time.

He gave it 30 days, and the result was very good indeed. Less than 100 g of meat was lost to bark in 5.5 kg. Glen considers he has opened up a whole new area.

As an example where a 'harmless error' went wrong, Glen took us back to his time in Form 1 at school. His Science teacher asked the students to bring a piece of offal—a heart, kidney or liver—to school to dissect. At the end of the class, the teacher asked if anyone had a dog to take the meat home to, but only Glen put his hand up. He put the substantial amount of meat in his coat locker, and then forgot all about it. It stayed there for a long weekend in November (presumably the Melbourne Cup, so an extra-long long weekend).

When he went back to school the next week, he discovered a whole area of the school was closed down due to the stench of what was assumed to be a dead animal, and everyone was to go home. This was not surprising, he said, at his school, where he said there were rats as big as cats that came up through the drains. But he thought the teacher would have known what had happened, but perhaps was too embarrassed to admit it. At any rate he did not consider the outcome as too bad.

This inspired the Editor to recount when he had closed down a building in Swanston St in the city. He was working at RMIT in the city with ethanethiol, which happens to be the smelliest substance known to man. It is put into natural gas at 1.5 parts per million, and can be still be detected when that gas is diluted by many thousands times as much air. The Editor, aware of the problem, was working in a fume cupboard of a disused laboratory on the roof of a tall building on Swanston St. He only heard later that another building in Swanston St, not part of RMIT, had been closed down because they could smell a gas leak. Evidently the exhaust system had not worked as well as hoped.

There was discussion of the failure of 'wharfie time' in the Grand Final, and how the Lions had hijacked the psychological boost to themselves—one of the Blokes had particular information.

Keith then spoke, and took us back to January 1939, when he was only five years old, and not yet even writing his diary. He was about to start school, but his parents sent him to a small private school only a quarter of a mile away, run and taught by two women (whose names Keith still remembered, but the Editor failed to record), rather than go to Essendon Primary, which was considerably further away for a small boy to go. In 1941, after Bubs and Grade 1, however, they decided he was now big enough to go to Essendon Primary, but that school, presumably lacking confidence in the two ladies, put him into Grade 1 instead of Grade 2, expecting him to be behind in maths.

However in his new class he was asked to write the numbers one to ten, so he carefully wrote 'one, two, three . . .' etc, which wasn't what they expected at that level.‡ He was properly tested, with the result that he was moved to Grade 2, where he was pleased to join his mates.

Keith's story drew attention to his age, which is now 93. Glen looked at Keith, fit and perky, and then at Allan, who at 87 is six years younger. 'You have lived a good life', he declared to Keith. To Allan he said, 'You have really punished yourself, haven't you?'

On further questioning, it appeared that Allan's louche and dissipated appearance might be ascribed to a lifetime of drinking bourbon—and not just any bourbon. Allan explained

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* He used a slightly different form of words, but the *Babble* is read by people of refined and delicate sensibilities.

† And if his passing of gas produces turbulence indistinguishable from an earthquake, he should be careful about that, too.

‡ Keith spelt out what he had written, and the Editor noticed that he had misspelt some of the numbers. Either he remembered exactly how he spelt them at the age of seven, or his spelling continued to be bad. Since Keith is an extraordinary editor himself, the Editor is sure it must be the former.

that the volume lost to evaporation while in the cask was referred to as 'the angels' share', but the amount that soaked into the wood of the cask was called 'the Devil's cup'. Jim Beam do not reuse their casks, but instead grind them to powder which they then press, and the foul liquid thereby extracted is sold under the 'Devil's cup' name, and especially drunk by Allan. Allan says he is only allowed one bottle a month, though the Editor notes that Jim Beam can be bought in 4.5 litre bottles.*

David W recounted that 'some time well down the track' he had had to choose between unemployment in Melbourne or a very attractive six-month position in Sydney looking after a firm's accounting. He got to the point of enrolling his daughter in the University of New South Wales; but in the end he chose the unemployment option. It was just as well, as it turned out that the people were rogues, who turned a $27 million account into a $40 million debit. Interpol was involved, and the South Australian Supreme Court. The person who had taken the job instead of him had an 'accident' in his company Porsche, running off a bridge—the brakes had been tampered with.

David F described how he had been a busy shopfitter working for a company, but with various company takeovers, the firm was falling apart, and he decided to start his own business, called 'Chips Fly', making cupboards and the like for people. Then his old work wanted him to make shelves for them, which eventually grew to outfitting 600 7-11 shops and many hardware shops.

The government brought in a scheme where they wanted tradies to take up teaching. He had the choice whether to take this, or keep doing what he was doing, getting pots of money, hiring staff, building an empire; but he felt he was losing himself. Most people thought he was mad and stupid to be giving away what he had, with prospects of being a millionaire, but he said it had been for the best. His faith grew, and he had had experiences he would not forget, such as teaching woodwork in Uganda.

Neil B spoke to us about his early days in cricket. He was promoted to the first grade side as opening batsman, facing a demon fast bowler. He was taught to go onto the back foot and play back and across. Instead he hit fours over the wicket-keeper's head. Later the fast bowler asked him, 'Do you have life insurance?' 'No', replied Neil. 'Well, if you keep batting like this, you are going to need it', replied the bowler.

It turned out that the bowler was a life insurance salesman, and Neil decided that he would indeed take it out.

Very much later, he received a letter in the mail, that his policy had been turned into an endowment fund which contained $35,000. This enabled him to pay off his mortgage. He bought a bottle of Scotch for the fast bowler.

This anecdote inspired a flood of cricketing anecdotes, especially involving fast bowlers. They are regrettably poorly recorded in the Editor's notes, but it seems that not all the Blokes had experiences with fast bowlers that were to their financial advantage. Indeed, one Bloke recounted how someone had lost his 'family jewels', presumably some valuable heirlooms he would no longer be able to have appraised on *Antiques Roadshow*.

Another Bloke mentioned going to the family farm of Glenn McGrath's father Kevin. He was surprised to see no pictures of Glenn on the walls, until he went to the toilet and found a page from the *Sun* on the back of the door, reporting on Glenn's taking five wickets in a Test innings. He commented to Kevin on how little there was about Glenn in the house. 'I'm a farmer, he's a cricketer', was the laconic reply.

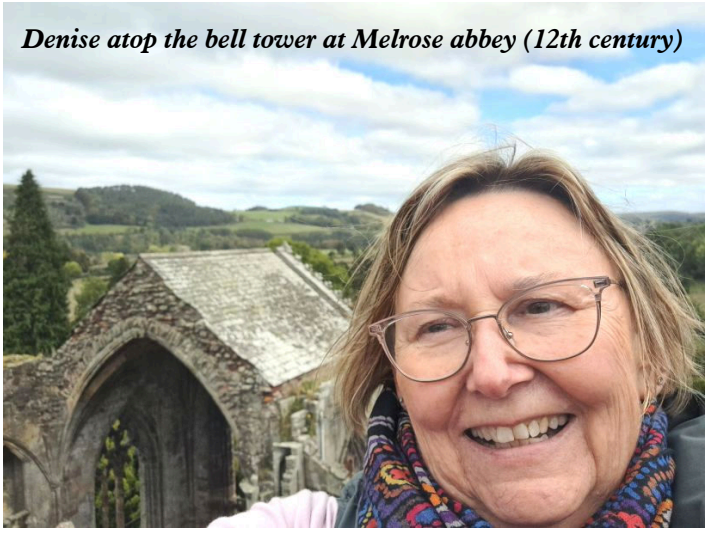
Jon thanked Dale for making another delicious slice for the Blokes (as well as gluten-free cookies), and Glen and Allan for their cooking, and Glen thanked Jon for his thanks.

The next *Blokes Helping Blokes* will be on 7th November. If you would like an invitation, talk to Glen on 0487 852 808.

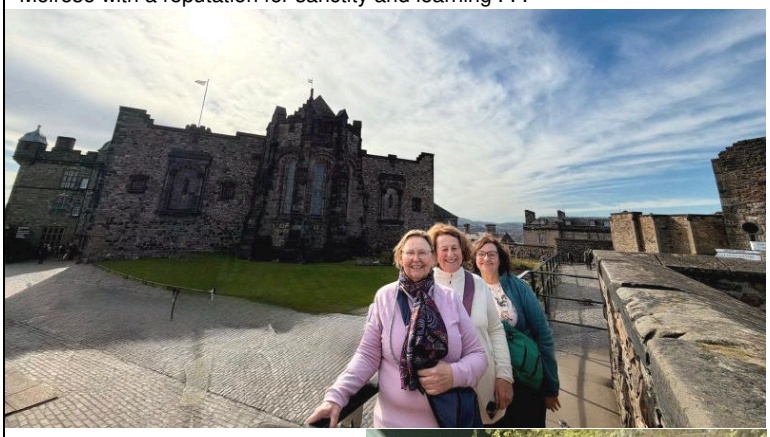
* A 311-litre bottle of Scotch was sold in 2022, buyer undisclosed.

# *Vicar's Voyagings*

***Denise atop the bell tower at Melrose abbey (12th century)***



*Wikipedia:* St Mary's Abbey, Melrose is a partly ruined monastery of the Cistercian order in Melrose, Roxburghshire, in the Scottish Borders. It was founded in 1136 by Cistercian monks at the request of King David I of Scotland and was the chief house of that order in the country until the Reformation . . . The east end of the abbey was completed in 1146. Other buildings in the complex were added over the next 50 years . . . Alexander II and other Scottish kings and nobles are buried at the abbey. A lead container believed to hold the embalmed heart of Robert the Bruce was found in 1921 below the Chapter House site; it was found again in a 1998 excavation . . . Waltheof of Melrose, stepson of King David and at one time prior of Kirkham, was abbot of Melrose from 1148 to 1159. He endowed Melrose with a reputation for sanctity and learning . . .



*Above:* I don't know if this is still St Mary's Abbey, or somewhere else in Scotland

*Right:* 'First day of Greece leg...Lyn has joined us for 6 nights.' Obviously Athens (Acropolis in background), perhaps the Plaka

*Below:* 'On windy Paros' (island just west of Naxos)

# *Mike Connor visited the same park for 40 years. His notebooks filled with birds are invaluable*

This is the headline of a 17th July article in the online ABC news: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-07-17/bird-watching-michael-oconnor-40-year-citizen-science/106835712

Who might this Mike Connor be, who merits an ABC news article, and has invaluable notebooks?

Good heavens! It is *our* Mike Connor!

The article says that Mike visited the new Birrarung Park in 1985, having just moved into the area. It wasn't much of a park, just some old farmland repurposed, but Mike, being a keen birder from childhood, carefully listed all the birds he happened to see. 'I've always just kept a list of what I've seen and what I've done', he is quoted as saying, explaining how he 'liked to make lists'.

Now this would usually be just considered material for a diagnosis of being artistic, or something like that. But Mike continued to make a list every time he visited Birrarung Park, which he did regularly for forty years. His notebooks ended up recording 153 species over more than 800 visits. During those forty years there were droughts and floods and the farmland became forest, and the effect of all these changes was reflected in the lists.

The article quotes Emeritus Professor of Ecology Andrew Bennett of La Trobe saying how 'immensely valuable' Mike's lists are. 'What is extraordinary in this situation is having observations by the same person, not a series of different observers, in the same park, for such an extended period.' When he found out Mike had these lists he was astounded, and made haste to analyse the data, which resulted in a joint paper: Connor MA and Bennett AF (2026) Long-term changes over 40 years in the avifauna of an urban reserve: Birrarung Park, Melbourne, Australia. *Pacific Conservation Biology* **32**, PC25078. doi:10.1071/PC25078. The paper was published on 27th April this year, and is available for access at https://connectsci.au/pc/article/32/3/PC25078/272299/Long-term-changes-over-40-years-in-the-avifauna-of

They also presented their results at *The Conversation:* https://theconversation.com/800-visits-to-a-suburban-park-inside-an-epic-40-year-birdwatching-quest-283593

They note that the reafforestation of the park 1985–2000 brought an increased richness of species, with especially forest birds such as the brown thornbill, grey fantail and grey shrike-thrush arriving. However after that there was a gradual decline.

Some birds have always been common, such as the red wattlebird, superb fairy-wren, fan-tailed cuckoo, magpie-lark, and little raven; water-birds such as the Pacific black duck, dusky moorhen, and white-faced heron; and the introduced spotted dove and common blackbird.

Less common birds include the flame robin, dusky woodswallow, brown goshawk, and yellow thornbill; rare sightings include the rufous songlark, little grassbird, scaly-breasted lorikeet, rufous fantail, and Latham's snipe. The common bronzewing, eastern spinebill, and olive-backed oriole were not seen at first, but became commoner as the forest grew.

As expected, water-birds have come and gone depending on the state of the wetlands; e.g. the Australasian darter, chestnut teal, little black cormorant, and Australian white ibis.

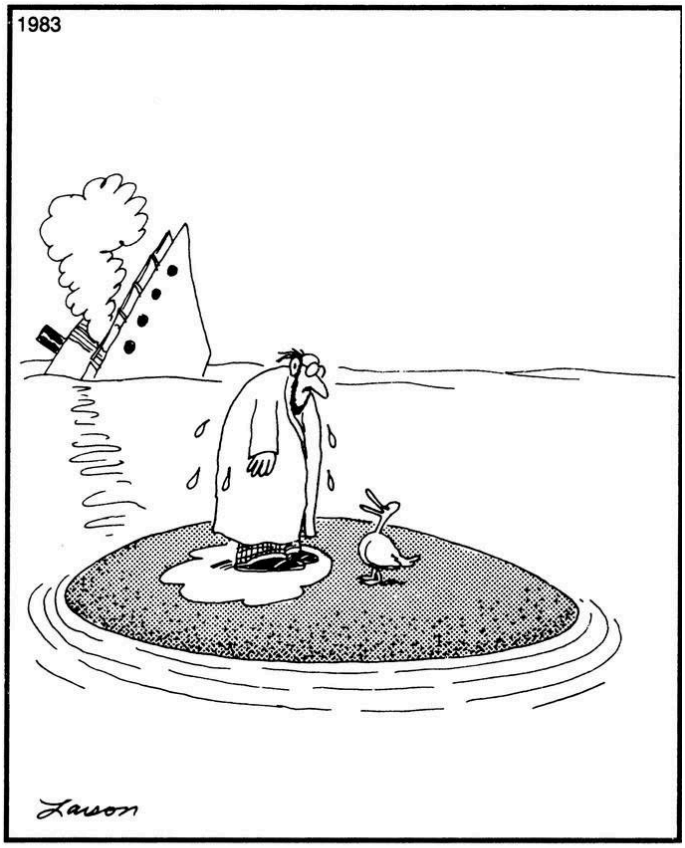
Some birds have moved in quite generally into the area. These include dry-country birds such as the long-billed corella, the crested pigeon and the little corella, and also mountain forest species such as the crimson rosella, king parrot, pied currawong, and yellow-faced honeyeater. The rainbow lorikeet, which used to be rare in Melbourne, is now common, perhaps due to increased planting of flowering native trees. There are also more sulphur-crested cockatoos.

On the other hand some birds that used to be common are now not seen: the yellow-rumped thornbill (last seen 2014), the crested shrike-tit (2015), the white-plumed honeyeater (2019), and the bell miner (2019). Others, though not fully gone yet, seem to be going the same way: the red-rumped parrot, the willie wagtail, the eastern yellow robin, the rufous whistler, the Australasian swamphen, and the black-fronted dotterel. Even introduced species that had previously done well in the urban landscape, such as the house sparrow, goldfinch and song thrush, are declining or disappearing.

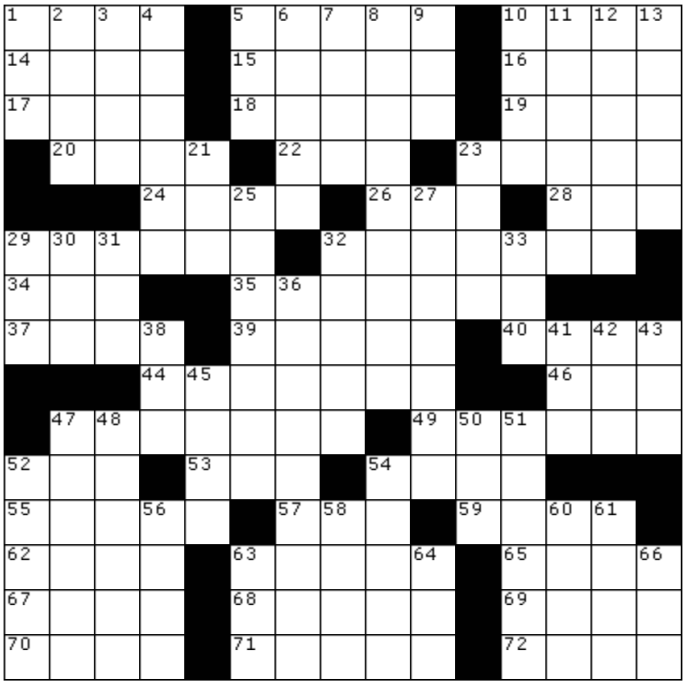
But especially the coming of the aggressive noisy miner (first seen 1998, well established 2004) has led to a sharp decline in small species such as thornbills, pardalotes and whistlers. 'Not my favourite bird', says Mike.

Mike tells me he 'hopes that the paper will encourage others who have kept records over a long time, not just of birds but of other creatures such as insects and other invertebrates, to publish their observations. Biodiversity is declining rapidly everywhere and knowing what changes are occurring, and why, is a great help when deciding on conservation measures.'

*Thanks to Rosemary Bellair for finding the article!*




"So, Professor Jenkins!...My old nemesis!...We meet again, but this time the advantage is mine! Ha! Ha! Ha!"



*https://www.christianbiblereference.org/crossword.htm*

**ACROSS**
1 Animal group
5 Take off the lid
10 Book after Gospels
14 6th month (Jewish calendar)
15 Cleaning agents
16 Loving
17 Transparent mineral
18 Mete
19 Margarine
20 Tap in lightly
22 American Football Conference (abbr.)
23 Used to kill Goliath
24 Association (abbr)
26 Type of music
28 Disks
29 Wag one's tongue
32 Electrical generators
34 Brew
35 Fatty animal tissue
37 Hearing-impaired
39 True
40 7 days
44 Christ
46 Boxer Muhammad
47 Omit
49 Cleverness of wit
52 O.T. city
53 __ Lanka
54 President (abbr.)
55 Not glossy
57 'Raven' author
59 Biblical weed
62 Native ruler
63 False name
65 Not found
67 A Roman emperor
68 Therefore
69 Pout
70 Colored
71 Lopsided
72 Eye infection

**DOWN**
1 Youngest son of Noah
2 Change
3 Biblical word for You idiot!
4 Plays
5 North American country
6 Mr. Ryan
7 Golden __ (Israelite idol)
8 Books in some Bibles
9 Pacific Time
10 Truant
11 Printed cotton cloth
12 Fads
13 Hazes
21 Pressure unit
23 Baths
25 Scantier
27 One more
29 Tribe of Israel
30 Bullfight cheer
31 Ocean
32 Toe
33 Kitten's cry
36 The twelve __
38 Madagascar franc (abbr.)
41 Serving of corn
42 Samuel's mentor
43 Set of supplies
45 Otherwise
47 Capital of Niger
48 Complete
50 Position
51 Book near Proverbs
52 Make revisions
54 __ be with you
56 Walked
58 Squeal
60 Basic
61 Catch sight of (KJV)
63 Expression of surprise
64 Quilt
66 Ball holder

P A S C H C O I T N A R Y T E
H G A I T A L A G E D U A C N
S R L L N E A P O L I S P L O
U E A I I S P H I L I P P I M
R P M C R A N O S U S R A T L
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A A X I N E O H P U T E O L I

## Bible Word Search: Paul's Missionary Journey

*https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_PaulsMissionaryJourneyFromActs_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***.

**Achaia, Antioch, Asia Minor, Athens, Berea, Caesarea, Caude, Cilicia, Corinth, Cyprus, Egypt, Ephesus, Fair Havens, Galatia, Iconium, Jerusalem, Laodicea, Lystra, Macedonia, Neapolis, Pamphylia, Paphos, Perga, Philippi, Phoenicia, Phoenix, Puteoli, Rhegium, Rome, Salamis, Salmone, Sardis, Seleucia, Sicily, Sidon, Tarsus, Thyatira, Tyra**

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

*Bible Word Search mystery answer:*
**REVERENCE**

***Last month's cryptogram:***

IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD.

*Philippians 4:6*

## *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 |
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*1 Thessalonians 5:14*

# *Philippians 2*

27th September 2026

**Philippians 2**

*Sermon by David Jones*

*2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, [4] not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

*[5] In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*[6] who, being in very nature God,*
*did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*
*[7] rather, he made himself nothing*
*by taking the very nature of a servant,*
*being made in human likeness.*
*[8] And being found in appearance as a man,*
*he humbled himself*
*by becoming obedient to death –*
*even death on a cross!*

*[9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place*
*and gave him the name that is above every name,*
*[10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,*
*in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
*[11] and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,*
*to the glory of God the Father.*

*[12] Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.*

*[14] Do everything without grumbling or arguing, [15] so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky [16] as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain. [17] But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. [18] So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.*

*[19] I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. [20] I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. [21] For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. [22] But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. [23] I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. [24] And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.*

*[25] But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. [26] For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. [27] Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. [28] Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. [29] So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, [30] because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.*

As you get older I find it is not easier. To persevere in following Jesus, to endure through the ups and downs is sometimes hard, and it is a great help to be able to share with other believers, I find. I'm glad I can share with you these seven weeks whilst your vicar, Denise in on Long Service Leave.

Faith is not words only but also action. And today we look at the way of humility and obedience.

We are looking at this great letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church he has founded in the Roman colony of Philippi. It's a happy letter, full of joy. Even though Paul is in prison he writes with this note of joy. He is full of Jesus. Paul's life had been turned around when Jesus came to him and told him who he was and Jesus told him to take the gospel to the nations. Jesus warned him that things would be hard for him. In Acts 9 we read that Jesus told a disciple in Damacus, Paul **'is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before the nations and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name'** (Acts 9:15–16).

These tasks were not easy. Indeed, what is easy in this life, in this age when the devil prowls around as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, as Peter reminds them in his letter. We must resist the devil, strong in our faith in Christ. The longer you live the more you see that it is not always happy. Life has its struggles, doesn't it? And yet the way of Jesus Christ is full of joy, no matter what our circumstances. Once we come to him for our life, things change. When things are tough it doesn't do to pretend they are not. Yet somehow we can see from the Bible, from what God says to any person who wants to please him, to trust him and his Son Jesus Christ, that in his presence there is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11).

Last week we saw Paul begin his letter with joy because the Philippian church had shared in his efforts to bring Jesus' name before others, and he was so glad at their progress in the faith and joy in the faith. The gospel is always good news. God loves those who love what is right and who hate what is wrong. And yet all have sinned. There is no one who is naturally good. Only Jesus was completely turned to God.

Since the time of Paul and the early church in that first century, since then people have been taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations. In my lifetime there have been some well known names, like the evangelist Billy Graham and more recently the Anglican vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton in London, Nicky Gumbell, who has developed the *Alpha Course* as a good way for people to be introduced to Christ. The Diocese of London, from where Melbourne's new archbishop comes, has been one of the few dioceses in England to grow, as many have come to faith in Christ doing Alpha. Evangelism may seem difficult, but we can all help by prayer and working together to help. Evangelism comes in many forms. Michael Green said you can use one of the many courses available, but it's always good to do it around a meal. I like the definition of the Sri Lankan pastor, D.T. Niles, who said evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. People want to go their own way, and even when it doesn't work we can be obstinate and not trust God. Everyone is spiritually a beggar. Christians are those who have found the source of spiritual food for our souls.

Here in his letter to Philippi we see what the apostle Paul immediately wants them to attend to. We see what he wants the church to do. What is that? He wants them to be united; to be of one mind. Disunity is destructive for God's people. Disunity is destructive of the gospel itself. The world is full of conflict. The way of peace between people is attractive. And of course, we actually need one another. I love the way C.S. Lewis acted after he was converted as a lecturer in Oxford University. After he became convinced that Jesus was indeed the way, the truth and the life, he repented of his former life and came to personal faith. There is only one way in, and that is through your own personal faith in Christ and repentance. We need to repent of our attempts at trying to live life our own way.

However, C.S. Lewis initially didn't realise he needed to go to church. He reckoned the local church was made up of some not such attractive people. If you read his book *The Screwtape Letters,* it is a brilliant portrayal of how a senior devil tries to get a junior devil to focus on how irritating other people in church are. Lewis himself came to see that it was by rubbing shoulders with others that he would learn Jesus' way of obedience and humility.

Paul has already rejoiced because of their faith, and their partnership in the gospel. Now he asks, please **make my joy complete … be of the same mind…being in full accord.** In the middle of his urging a spirit of unity amongst the believers in the church there the apostle adds these amazing words: **'In humility regard others as better than yourselves**'. That's quite an attitude, not one I can always have. Do you mean this person, Lord? Or that? Better than me? Such an attitude helps grow the Body of Christ, as we lift up others without resentment or jealousy.

And then Paul goes on to quote an early hymn about Jesus, as the best example of serving God humbly, obediently, willingly. This hymn is an amazing statement of just who this person Jesus of Nazareth actually is. In the first instance we read Jesus humbled himself and became obedient: **'Though Jesus was in the form of God, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (**Philippians 2:6–7).

The way of humility leads to being a humble servant. That is not a common way of thinking these days. Wow. We don't get that language outside of the Bible do we? Slave, Lord, Master, Servant, Obedience. A person might be forced by circumstances and events to serve another, yet still be proud and give his service without a willing heart. We don't have servants in Australian society. I remember as a boy on our dairy farm we had a swagman come and knock on our door and asking my mother for some job and a small wage. We had a wood pile and she asked him to chop up the wood. It was my job to peep around the corner of the house and see how he was going, and report back to my mum. I don't know how willing he was to do this job, or how humble. Perhaps circumstances had humbled him somewhat. But Jesus for our sakes was a humble and willing servant of his heavenly Father. We read '**he humbled himself and became obedient'** (Philippians 2:8).

Notice how being humble occurs before being obedient. We cause God pain because of our disobedience, and we are disobedient because of our pride and self-will. I can see

that in myself when I am indignant when someone is critical of me. Why should I be accused, even if the accusation might be false. I rise up in indignation. But Jesus didn't. We read, **'he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross'** (2:8).

Elsewhere Paul writes of his own experience. In Galatians 2:20 **'I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.'** I say those words and believe them, yet how much do I? Who is the Roman soldier in your life? Who is driving nails into you? Who is the person who might make you indignant? Perhaps in your place of work there is someone who makes it really tough for you; or even in your own household or wider family. Yet God knows about this person who is making life difficult for you.

The church in Australia sent me to Cambridge University to train for the ordained ministry, and whilst there I was blessed to have a Bible professor who was a humble Christian and set me a great example. He was known as Charlie, the Rev Prof C.F.D. Moule, one of the top Bible scholars in the world. Yet he took a personal interest in me, and when I returned to Australia and was ordained he kept writing to me and encouraging me, even though I was not a great scholar or anything. In Cambridge the church he attended put on a play they had written, called 'Charlie the Mole', a real play on words with his name: Rev Prof C.F.D. Moule.

Jesus obeyed. He bore it all for us. He was in the form of God, but emptied himself, taking the form not of a divine being, but of a slave; and he humbled himself and became obedient, so obedient that he went all the way to a cruel death on a cross. I think obedience is a challenging concept in modern Australia and the modern world generally. Paul writes to the Philippians, **'you have always obeyed me'** (2:12). Now he had founded the church there. Yet it's quite a call, isn't it? Paul had been called by Jesus personally to be an apostle, a planter of new churches and a preacher of the gospel. At the start of this letter he describes himself, and also his companion Timothy, as **'servants of Jesus'** (Philippians 1:1). And here he is writing from prison to them: **'Do everything without complaining so that you might become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe, as you hold onto the word of life'** (2:14–16).

This verse reminds me of a children's program we had at St Mark's church in Reservoir called the Holiday Kids' Club, held early each January for a week. There was always a theme taken from the Bible, and one year the theme was this: '**you shine like stars in the universe'.** We got one of the older boys who was a leader in our Boys' Brigade, who loved the stars and planets, and he made up a whole play where each child would be a particular planet and he would get them to move around the sun in a certain pattern. After this we got home one day with two of our grandchildren and heard one of them remind the other who was getting a bit tetchy, 'Remember, **shine like stars in the universe**'!

Jesus was humble and obedient. The hymn then goes on:

'**God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,**

**so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and earth,**

**and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'**

(Philippians 2:9–11)

**'Jesus is Lord': Κύριος Ἰησοῦς**

Only two words in Greek: Κύριος Ἰησοῦς. It's hard to realise what an enormous two words these are. JESUS IS LORD. In those days under the Roman rule, people were required to go to a public ceremony and declare Caesar is Lord. But Christians could not do this. Paul the author of this letter to the Philippians, could not do this, even if it meant the authorities might arrest them. He could only say 'Jesus is Lord'. And for his teaching he was imprisoned.

Why is this so significant? I was listening to John Lennox this week. John Lennox is professor of Mathematics at Oxford University and also a Christian. He was talking about some non-Christian people who want to attempt to use AI and genetic engineering and biotechnology, all to upgrade the human species into some kind of new superhuman species. This is not going to happen. Christians know the last chapter of life's story. Jesus is in charge. It will turn out the best for human beings and the universe, despite this crooked generation. Jesus is the Lord of all. We can trust him that he will get things right.

# *Philippians 3*

4th October 2026, St John's

**Philippians 3**

*Sermon by David Jones*

*3 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

*7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

*12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, 14 I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.*

*15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

*17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

*Father, we would see Jesus today*
*Father, we would hear Jesus today*
*Father, we would be moved to love*
*And serve Jesus today. AMEN*

How important is it to know yourself? Marilynne Robinson has written about it and said, 'Nothing is more unfathomable than ourselves'. Do our circumstances affect our sense of self? What role do your relationships with other people play in knowing who you are? Brian Rosner works at Ridley College in Melbourne and has written books on the subject. One is called 'How To Find Yourself' with the subtitle, 'Why Looking Inward is not the Answer'[*].

Is it right to try and weave your own story? Perhaps it depends upon where you think you came from and where you imagine you might be going. I find that the more I read the Bible the more I can begin to see a bigger picture. Psalm 139 declares, **'O Lord, you have searched me and you know me … for you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'**

We had no say in our conception and growth in our mother's womb. We find ourselves arrived here on earth, and then we try and work out how and why. And if we come to believe in our Maker, so we then can see we do have a story and we are not an accident. If you do not believe in God, perhaps it becomes more difficult to have a clearer sense of identity.

I'm not talking about making up a story, but I believe as we do seek God, so we can somehow begin to understand what God wants for us and in us and through our lives. As we listen to his word, which Christians have always believed is contained for us in the Bible, as we read it and hear it read and use it here, as we gather together, the body of Christ, on Sunday mornings, as we say a Psalm together and hear the readings and the sermon. This helps, and I believe it becomes possible to understand who we are.

You are unique. There is no one else in all creation like you. And God wants it that way. You have a unique story and as you trust him you can see how good God has been in directing your life. I'm not talking about your negative reactions to life's circumstances, but to the fact that you have arrived here this morning. We can say with the Psalmist, '**I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'**

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[*] Brian Rosner, *How To Find Yourself,* Crossway, Illinois, 2022

Today we are looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 3, where we read something about Paul's own story; where he has been also, where he knows he is ultimately going. As he looks back on his life he can actually boast of how well he was brought up to keep the Ten Commandments and to live a good life. He is not wanting to boast of this. In fact, he says, he now does not want to rest on his past goodness. Indeed, all his past achievements he reckons are nothing compared to knowing the Lord Jesus. His attention had been arrested by Jesus coming to him on the Damascus road and revealing himself. Paul is struck down as he journeys to Damascus in order to arrest Christians there and take them back to Jerusalem for trial. A voice speaks to him. We read in Acts 9:4–5, ' **'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'** Notice how Jesus identifies himself totally with the church. Saul, who is later called Paul, has been persecuting the church. And Jesus said to him, **why do you persecute me?** From now on Paul has a new and indeed a totally different orientation. Not only does he stop persecuting believers, he joins them. Not surprisingly, this takes the other Christians by surprise, and they require some persuading that Paul has indeed changed from an enemy to being a true friend of the gospel.

Last week I mentioned how I was challenged as a young man by the question, 'Is Christ unique in your affections?' Is the Lord Jesus the central focus of my loves and life?

To know the Lord Jesus, to know him deep in our souls with our all, our everything: this is what the apostle is writing about. We're born, we learn things as we grow up. We observe and in our homes we are taught at our mother's knee and we are sent to school where we learn to read and write and do our sums. Who teaches us about God, about Jesus? Our view of who God is will be influenced greatly by whom and what we are taught, particularly in our early years. Everyone has a unique story. And the Bible teaches us that God himself is at work, not just behind the scenes, but directly, influencing, calling, guiding what happens around us and in us.

I remember that I learned about these things by doing. My mother took me to church. St Luke's Wakool had a small congregation, perhaps ten people on many Sundays.

As I get older, I find forces at work that continue to seek to pull me down. We Christians know that such workings of the enemy occur. Perhaps it's not odd that aging does this. There are not only the physical aches and pains of our older bodies, there is also the fact that the longer you live, the more you see of the evils of the world. Ecclesiastes 4:1,3: **'Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun … better are those who have not yet been born, who have not seen the evil that is done under the sun.'**

Paul has good reason to have a heavy spirit. But he does not. He is full of joy, because he is full of Jesus. This chapter 3 of his letter begins, **'Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!'** (Philippians 3:1). Isn't that a wonderful instruction, an attitude pointing in the opposite direction from any tendency to have a heavy spirit.

Paul tells us something of his own story. From verse 5 of this chapter 3, he writes, **'Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legal righteousness, faultless.'** So, he can remember that he was a good Jew, upright, proper in every way, keen to uphold all that is good, and yet? And yet? He is no longer happy with all that has gone before. He goes on with these words, **'All the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life compared to the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as my Lord. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him'** (Philippians 3:8).

I love this focus. Jesus is now everything for Paul, and he wants the world to know the Lord Jesus too. Here we are; as we meet together here in St John's at this All-Age service this morning we are conscious of the different generations. I love the vision for such an occasion. The new archbishop of Melbourne, Ric Thorpe, was elected last year by the synod of the Diocese of Melbourne with the hope that he might help the mission of the church, through renewal of older churches as well as church planting of new ones. How do we reach out to the world around us?

Can I say two things here? This is not a new matter is it? The church in the western world has been declining for generations, apart from pockets like Holy Trinity Brompton and the Alpha courses it generates. What do we need?

Firstly, we need to get to know our neighbours, our fellow citizens who live around us, the people of Heidelberg and Watsonia and Macleod and Rosanna and Viewbank and all. People will start coming to church when they start to believe in God again. And most people come to faith through family and friends, people like themselves. We need to make friends with our neighbours.

And secondly, we need to know our times. What times do we live in in 21st century Australia? History is important. If we don't know our past, where we have come from, then we won't know who we actually are. History is that important. When I first heard about postmodernism I thought I'd never understand the term. But now I do. What has happened is this. People started to lose focus on God during the time of the religious wars in Europe in the 17th century; and with the rise of science, there was a movement away from trusting in God, and a growth of trust in human reason. The period which is called the Enlightenment dawned. People began to think that with human reason and science we could progress, without belief in God. That period is basically over. What has replaced it? We use the term postmodernism to represent this. It became unclear to people in recent times how science, and the technology that accompanied it, actually worked to help us progress. What we have today is certainly an amazing development in technology, but we find disillusionment and despair. The younger generations have less and less confidence in almost anything.

Both the gods of the premodern supernatural worldview and the various modern myths of progress in the natural world are attacked by postmodern 'deconstruction'. There is a constant suspicion, a loss of meaning, and a rejection of any fixed point of reference. The failure of the hoped-for 'progress' has led to postmodernist spirals of despair and hopelessness. The poor outlook for finding meaningful jobs leaves young people without any reason to learn, even as their entertainments deprive them of the brain space and skills to do so. We amuse ourselves to death with Sportsbet, gambling casinos and lotteries*.

Actually, human nature itself, without Christ, hasn't actually changed a great deal. Our natural tendencies are constantly pulling us away from the pure and the good. We all need Christ. Paul writes here in chapter 3 from verse 18: **'As I have often told you, and now tell you with tears, there are many whose way of life makes them enemies of the cross of Christ … They make appetite their god … their minds are set on earthly things. By contrast, our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies, and give them a form like that of his own glorious body'** (Phil 3:18–21).

The need for faith in Christ is as great today as ever. As lives fall apart, marriages, families, with conflict not just on the world stage in Africa and the Middle East, but conflict within families and within our own souls, the need for a true Saviour is as great as it ever was. What do you need after things fall apart in your life? Forgiveness. It is wonderful to know you can start afresh in life; that your past is forgiven. To know that my failures are not the end, but that I am accepted by my Creator, is a truly lifegiving wonderful freedom, that breeds hope, isn't it?

Paul reminds the believers of the importance of our future hope. We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, and to God's work in radically changing ourselves. You and I need to be transformed. Our current condition is not what the Lord Jesus has in mind to accompany him into eternity. So, Paul reminds them, God '**will transform our lowly bodies, and give them a form like that of his own glorious body.'**

Until Jesus returns at the Second Coming, believers die, and are in his hands, the hands of Jesus, who also died. And he was raised. Jesus of Nazareth who died as a king, the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and who died in humble obedience to His heavenly Father, was raised from the dead, never to die again. In fact, Paul tells us elsewhere in his correspondence that this is the gospel: God was in Christ, bringing the world back into friendship with Himself, because of Jesus who had lived a perfect life, and fulfilled the obligations that all human beings have to their Creator. The risen Christ gives our dead bodies a new form, so that our bodies, frail and sinful and mortal as they are, become like his glorious body. We too are raised so we can live with him in the glory of our heavenly Father.

And he does not leave us on our own to negotiate this present age. Paul reminds them, **'Real believers are the ones the Spirit of God leads and who glory in Jesus'** (Phil 3:3).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he ascended to the Father, who sent the Holy Spirit to guide and sanctify and empower those who believe in Jesus. Our job now is to **'press on'** as Paul writes here in Philippians 3:14, enjoying him now and looking forward to enjoying him forever.

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* Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal 'Waste' of Time,* Eerdmans 1999, 43

# *'The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ Jesus'*

4th October 2026, Holy Spirit

**Philippians 3; Matthew 21:33-46**

*Sermon by Helen McAlley*

**Philippians 3:** See previous sermon

**Matthew 21:33-46**

*33 'Listen to another parable: there was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall round it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.*

*35 'The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them in the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son," he said.*

*38 'But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

*40 'Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'*

*41 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'*

*42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures:*

*"'The stone the builders rejected*
*has become the cornerstone;*
*the Lord has done this,*
*and it is marvellous in our eyes"?*

*43 'Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.'*

*45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.*

**THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS**

In today's gospel reading, Jesus told a story or parable. A landowner plants a vineyard and rents it out to tenants or farmers to look after it. At harvest time, the owner sends his servants to collect the fruit. However, the tenants beat one of the servants, kill another and stone a third person to death. The owner sends more servants who are treated in a similar way. Eventually, the owner sends his son to deal with the situation and the tenants say, 'This is the heir. Let's kill him and then we can have the vineyard for ourselves.' And they kill the heir. The listeners to this parable are asked how the owner is likely to respond and they say that the owner will punish those tenants and give the vineyard to others who will look after it properly.

I remember reading this story in a children's Bible story book when I was very young, probably just able to read. (The word 'heir' was unfamiliar to me and I did not know how to pronounce it, not realising that it had a silent H). The fact that I can remember still reading that story so many years ago shows what a graphic and arresting story it is!

Jesus was telling this story in the temple court and His listeners were the chief priests and elders of the people – the Jewish religious teachers. He was telling this story to give them a loving warning about who He was and the need for them to accept His authority.

**WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS IN THE PARABLE?**

The owner in the parable represents God the Father. The tenants are the Jewish people including their leaders. The vineyard is the world. The servants who are treated so badly represent the Old Testament prophets, many of whom were killed because they were faithful in giving God's messages. The son or the heir represents Jesus Christ, who was condemned to death by the religious leaders, working together with the Roman administration. The other tenants who will receive the vineyard are the Gentiles – the non-Jewish people. We might remember how the apostle Paul preached to the Gentiles when the Jews refused to accept the message of the cross. By the second century AD, the church was composed almost entirely of Gentiles. God still has plans for the Jewish people who are very dear and precious to Him, but that is another story.

Jesus continued His teaching by quoting Psalm 118:22 and 23, making it very clear that this Psalm was referring to Himself:

*'The stone the builders rejected*
*Has become the capstone;*
*The Lord has done this*
*And it is marvellous in our eyes.'*

The capstone is the stone on which the whole structure of a building depends. This quotation rounds off the parable by providing a missing element in it, the subsequent vindication of Jesus in the Resurrection.

The chief priests and the Pharisees listening to the words of Jesus knew He was speaking of them. The sad thing was that they did not want to listen to His loving warning and to open their hearts and minds to the possibility that He was truly the eternal Son of God. Instead, they hardened their hearts and looked for a way to arrest Jesus.

**THOSE WHO CLOSE THEIR MINDS TO JESUS**

Sadly, there are also many today who also close their minds to who Jesus is. They want to be in charge of their own lives and not submit to God. The Bible describes this attitude with the words, 'The fool says in his heart, "There is no God"'.

Just the other day, I was speaking to a man at a funeral. He said quite jovially, 'I won't be going to heaven.' He obviously had no idea of the difference between heaven and hell or maybe chose not to believe in either. But the Bible says they are realities even if people choose not to believe in them.

**PRAYING**

One message from this parable for those of us who do love Jesus is the importance of praying for people in our increasingly secular society. We need to pray for the softening of the hearts of those who live their lives as if there were no Saviour and no heaven. We need to pray for atheists and for young people. It has been encouraging to hear recent reports that many young people have been turning to the Lord throughout the world. When we pray for missionaries, it is a good idea to pray for their children too, who are often targets of the enemy. When I pray for the missionary children, I pray that they might be brought up in 'the fear and admonition of the Lord' with love and discipline. We also need to pray for those people in countries where there is not freedom to worship, where people are persecuted just for believing the gospel. North Korea, China and India are examples but there are many others. We also need to pray for missionaries, especially our link missionaries. It is often a spiritual battle for them as they seek to work in a different culture from their own, often away from family and friends. When I pray for missionaries, I pray that they would have an open door to share the gospel and that they will be anointed with the Holy Spirit as they share it. We also need to pray that the Lord would send more workers into the harvest or into the world to share the gospel, as Jesus asked His disciples to pray.

I often pray that the Lord would soften people's hearts and that I too would be a witness, that the Lord would set up divine appointments that I might share my faith, and that He would give me the words to say to people. Witnessing is something that we do in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than in our own strength.

At the end of the day, if we have a prayer time, or maybe last thing at night before we go to sleep, we can pray for those we have been in contact with during the day. If they are not Christian, we can pray for their salvation, that God would put revelations of His truth into their hearts. Maybe we can pray in the car for those the Lord brings to our mind. I often pray and praise on the journey to wherever I am going and perhaps listen to the radio on the way back.

We also need to pray for our enemies as Jesus taught us to do. We don't need to feel like it; we can just choose to do it and there is power in those prayers as we pray for their salvation.

**JESUS IS UNIQUE AND SPECIAL**

This parable is also a reminder of how very special, wonderful and unique Jesus is. He made the whole universe which is far more intricate and amazing than even the cleverest scientists can understand. He is also the head of His body the church, and cares for each of us as if we were the only one. We can come to Him with any problem and He also has a heavenly home prepared for each of us who love Him. Jesus loves everyone and that is why it is so important to pray that those who are lost will come to salvation.

**JESUS IS WORTH MORE THAN EVERYTHING**

The apostle Paul understood the greatness of Jesus as we heard in our epistle reading today. Paul had a lot that he could have boasted of, but he wrote, 'But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.'

Paul regarded his personal heritage and achievements, and in fact everything in this world, as being of no value, even rubbish, compared to the riches of knowing Jesus as his Saviour. Although we live in this world, can we keep in mind that nothing can compare to knowing Jesus and knowing we are loved by Him? We might value our belongings, our

homes, our education, our status in society, our health and our hobbies, but Jesus is more than everything, and if we have Jesus we have everything we need. The dying person with Jesus as their Saviour still has everything of worth and value. The person with a lot of wealth and status in this world really has nothing if they do not know Jesus. And the wonderful thing is that the Lord loves us so much and wants us to come to Him. He's not angry with us. His attitude is one of total unconditional love. We don't have to try to win His love by doing good works. He loves us anyway and Jesus has paid the price for all of our sin on the cross of Calvary.

**PRAYER**

Shall we pray: *Lord, we pray for those who have rejected you, and for those in our society who value the passing things of this world above a relationship with you. Help us to be always prayerful for those who do not know you and to be always ready to share our faith as you give us the opportunity. We ask that you would soften hearts everywhere and give revelations of your love and truth to each heart. And help us to know how very much you love us and how very important and precious we are to you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

# *Stand Firm in the Lord*

11th October 2026

**Philippians 4:1–23**

*Sermon by Michelle Loveday*

*4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

*2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*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.*

*10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

*14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

*20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

*21 Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. 22 All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.*

*23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

Exhortations. There are lots in Paul's letters.

It's a long word. I wonder who knows what they are? The Cambridge Dictionary says it means 'strongly encouraging someone to do something':

*Turn off lights, to save power.*

We hear and read exhortations often:

*Please respect staff and customers.*
*Turn your phone off.*
*Remove your rubbish.*

I wonder how many pay attention, and how many ignore these messages. Perhaps they prefer to do things their way.

I read that more than 25% of people injured on e-scooters are children under sixteen. That's illegal, but they're turning up at hospitals every day.

Exhortations:

*Respect others.*
*Drive carefully.*
*Mind your language.*

Exhortations and laws are there for a reason. They're to help people do what's right. Encourage them to think of others. To create safety and harmony.

It's the same in the Bible. The Apostle Paul often exhorted believers in the early churches. 'Exhort' comes from the Greek word *paraklesio*. It means 'to call alongside' or 'to comfort'. That's what Paul did.

The *Bible Dictionary Today* says it's about providing guidance and support, helping individuals grow spiritually and morally. It includes encouragement and accountability.

Christians are called to support one another in their spiritual journeys. Faith is not just about us and God: it's a community thing.

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians, we see Paul providing support to the believers in Philippi. On previous Sundays David has told us Paul was writing this letter while under house arrest. He didn't know what would happen to him. Paul was determined to encourage the Philippians as much as he could.

His main point is found in verse 1:

*'Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.'*

Stand firm in the Lord. Don't give up because people are against you. Don't listen to false teaching.

I wonder why Paul was so concerned about their welfare. It's clear that Paul loved the Philippian church. He wanted to be with them. Paul was so happy they had found faith, and were following Jesus.

Paul knew when Jesus returned, he would be rewarded, he would see the believers welcomed: they were now members of Christ's kingdom. Most of Paul's letter is about encouraging them to stand firm in the Lord.

They were facing trials, just as Paul was, from people who opposed their spiritual beliefs —they wanted to harm them—and from groups promoting false teaching, saying they needed to follow Jewish laws to be accepted by God. These people were adding to what Paul was preaching.

Jesus said faith in him is enough—believing he's the Son of God. That Jesus gave his life so our sins could be forgiven. That he rose from the dead. Jesus is alive in heaven. He will return. We'll be with him forever—the things we say in the Creed every Sunday.

This was what Paul wanted the Philippians to believe. He knew they were doing it tough. Paul knew how to help them stand firm in the Lord.

Philippians 3:20 says: *'But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.'*

The believers were to live differently from people around them: those who didn't know Jesus, people who were selfish and ungodly.

Paul passed on some good advice: how to live in ways which please God. Paul helped the Philippians stay strong in their faith. He wrote about important things they needed to put into action.

Let's take a look at these now. Paul encourages two co-workers to make peace with one another.

Verse 2: *'I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.'*

These women were teaching the gospel. They needed to be united so they could support one another. They were living in a hostile environment. Paul was concerned about this. He asked a colleague to assist them, so the problem could be sorted.

Paul wanted them to be on the same page in their spiritual beliefs, to get on with the job of spreading the good news.

Paul encouraged his co-workers: all their names were in the book of life. They were all God's children.

I wonder if we take unity as seriously today.

I wonder what you've noticed, when churchgoers can't agree about things like what songs we should sing, how long the sermons should be; or deeper matters, such as who will get to heaven?

Open discussion can be helpful. We have our own ideas and preferences. Paul was urging his co-workers to agree on the essential aspects of faith, the traditions that Paul had passed on. They were to find ways to work together in harmony.

It's helpful to remember we're being observed by others, inside and outside the church. When we do serve together in unity, this is a powerful message of God's love at work in us. Peace, love and humility are attractive to everyone.

Paul continues his loving advice, reminding the believers to (verse 4) *'Rejoice in the Lord always'.*

Here was Paul, writing from house-arrest, encouraging the Philippians to be joyful at all times.

Paul was experiencing this kind of joy himself. His faith gave him strength to cope with the difficulties he was facing, not knowing what lay ahead. Paul wanted the believers to experience supernatural joy. It came from God's Spirit living within them.

I wonder if you've ever experienced this. A sense of deep peace, maybe, or contentment and acceptance when your circumstances are challenging.

A colleague felt this, when near the end of her shortened life, God comforted her. He gave her supernatural strength to cope with her illness. I sensed Christie's amazing joy when I sat with her and listened to her testimony. Christie's faith was what gave her that peace and joy. It helped her to stand firm in the Lord.

Paul continues to encourage the believers. Verse 5: *'Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.'*

This was about being kind-hearted and humble. Not striving to get their own way. Being fair-minded with people outside the church.

Relationships are important. How we treat others counts. We're being observed. I wonder how we look and sound.

Paul reminds his readers, God is with us when we need help. We just need to ask him for assistance. Paul might also have been saying, 'Jesus will return soon'. This was something the apostles expected. It gave the believers hope then, just as it does now for us.

Then we come to the part about not worrying. Verse 6: *'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.'*

I wonder what Australians worry about most. According to the *Times,* it's money, housing, employment, health, and the future. Paul said the believers shouldn't worry about anything. They were to ask God to help with whatever they needed. To thank him for his goodness and kindness. They were to talk to God with confidence, to trust that he cared and would answer in line with their requests.

Paul assured the Philippians that when they did this, (verse 7) *'The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds In Christ Jesus.'*

I wonder how you feel when you're worrying about something. I wonder if your mind feels troubled, and your mood is affected. That's what happens to most of us.

Paul writes that if the Philippians pray about the things which concern them, God will give them his peace. This will be like a guard over their hearts and minds, as if a soldier were protecting them. Their faith would remain strong. They would know Christ's Spirit was with them, and would help them.

The peace of God, like the joy of God, is supernatural. It's unique. The peace of God would help the believers to stand firm in the Lord.

Paul's last exhortation is in verse 8:
*'Whatever is true,*
*Whatever is honourable,*
*Whatever is just,*
*Whatever is pure,*
*Whatever is pleasing,*
*Whatever is commendable,*
*If there is any excellence*
*And if there is anything worthy of praise,*
*Think about these things.'*

What we think about impacts our mood and behaviour. I was a counsellor for many years: I helped clients see how unhelpful thoughts could make them anxious, depressed, angry. Focusing on positives helps: changes begin to take place, life becomes easier.

When Paul says think about good things, he means take account of them. Notice them. Learn to appreciate beauty, wholesomeness, great stuff. Be grateful for these things. Talk about them. Enjoy the wonder of simple things, like spring flowers. Don't dwell on thoughts which drag you down.

To end these exhortations, Paul says (v 9): *'Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.'*

Paul devoted his life to teaching the good news about Jesus: truths about how to live, how to please God, and Christ's commandments. Paul was an outstanding mentor, practicing what he preached!

Paul was an excellent role-model for the Philippians. He showed them how to find contentment.

Verse 11b: *'I have learned to be content with whatever I have.'*

And verse 13: *'I can do all things through him who strengthens me.'*

This was about Paul's priorities. He didn't get strung up when rations were short. He trusted God to provide what he needed.

Paul focused on what God had called him to do:
Tell people about Jesus.
Look after the believers.
Stay close to God.
Do what he says.

Paul knew his life was in danger. He made the most of every opportunity. Paul shared the message of salvation through faith in Jesus.

The Philippians had given Paul financial help. He thanked them for this. Paul encouraged the believers. He called their gifts (verse 18) *'A fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.'*

Paul said God would bless the Philippians because they'd been generous towards him. Paul assured them of this (verse 19): *'And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'*

God is able to provide for everyone. Whatever we need, he knows about it. He's looking out for us. When we pray, God answers.

I wonder if you have a story of how God has cared for you, given you everything you needed, at the right time. I know God has answered my prayers so many times. I'm thankful for everything he's given me. I'm still learning how to be as content as the Apostle Paul.

The main thing Paul wanted to remind the Philippians was to stand firm in the Lord, no matter what.

God has given us his Spirit to help us do this. He sees every challenge we face. God assures us he is always with us. We can be encouraged, and have faith to believe: *'I can do all things through him who strengthens me.'*

With the Spirit's help, I can stand firm in the Lord.

# *1 Thessalonians 1*

18th October 2026

*Sermon by David Jones*

*1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,*

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*Grace and peace to you.*

*2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

**'We remember before God our Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus'** (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

So, we have here immediately the big three. There is a lot we don't know about the heavenly realms. There are people who say they can look into the higher things and see how it all fits. I don't tend to trust them. However, in the Bible we are taught the big three: faith, love and hope. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul writes, **'Now I know only in part'**. He admits his knowledge is limited. God has revealed only part of the picture. But it is the important part. Paul is looking forward to where Christians are headed, to where Jesus has gone before. So, he writes, **'for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now we know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love'** (1 Corinthians 13:12–13).

Again, here in his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul brings these three greatest realities together: faith, love and hope. **'We remember before God our Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus'** (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Love is such a big word. We have one word 'love' whereas the Biblical language of Greek has four words, four major kinds of love. There is affection, as for our pets. Secondly there is friendship, filial love, the feeling we have between friends. I come from a background where I rarely say to another person, 'I love you'. Perhaps I need to. Parents say it to their little children. Children can say it to their parents. When children grow up, perhaps it is good if we continue to say it, both ways, 'I love you'. Then there is *eros*, erotic love, the love between a man and his beloved. I do say it to my wife of nearly 60 years, 'I love you.'

And fourthly there is Godly love. It used to be called charity. In the Bible it is ἀγάπη love, divine love, God's love. The natural loves, affections, friendship, erotic love, can all be enhanced when mixed with divine love. God's love is a giving love, a sacrificial love. This love is defined by God Himself. It is not something that we can embrace unless we first seek God Himself, for Himself. **You will seek me and you will find me if you search for me with all your heart**, says God in His word (Jeremiah 22; Deuteronomy 4).

This is the love God has towards you. He made you and he loves you. This is the love that God had for the Thessalonian believers. Paul writes, '**We know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you'** (1 Thessalonians 1:4).

They were beloved by God. Imagine it. Remember in Philippians 3 how Paul admitted that he was a faithful Jew, and a Pharisee. Now Pharisees did not mix with Gentiles. And the Thessalonians were not Jews. They were Gentiles, yet here Paul, despite his background as a Pharisee, said to these Thessalonians they were beloved of God. What a change has happened in Paul since Jesus came into his life! When you become a Christian, everything changes. We heard Michelle's testimony earlier. It is a big thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Until you settle in your mind that God loves you unconditionally, and that you are a child of his, you are going to be prone to stress.

There is faith, what we believe determines how we live our lives; and there is love and thirdly in this trio there is hope. What do we put our hope in? Is death the end of our lives? Or can we look forward beyond death?

'**They report how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming'** (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

There is no talk here of living for this life only. Rather they are people with hope, looking forward, waiting for Jesus. What does that mean for us? That is a long time ago. Are we still waiting for the Lord's return? This question has been asked before. Indeed, Peter in his second letter to the believers writes, **'Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord … a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance …But in accordance with his promise, we wait for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home'** (2 Peter 3:8–9, 13).

Last Sunday morning here during the 9:30 am service our churchwarden Dr Katrina Philip announced that it was my birthday. I think she had been talking to my friend, the Rev Jonathan Lopez, and he had told her. I turned 82 last Sunday. After the Heidelberg service at morning tea I was talking to a former churchwarden, Allan Way and his wife Joan. Allan told me he is 87 and I asked him what it might be that helps him to have good health. Allan and Joan have been married more than 60 years and we talked of possible reasons for a long marriage. My wife Gretta and I have been blessed with almost 60 years of marriage. It is possible to look back on the length of days that God has given us, and to thank him for all his blessings. Yet what about the future?

I am enjoying my time here with you in this church. Your vicar asked me to preach most Sundays and it has been wonderful to open the Bible with you at Philippians and Thessalonians. In both letters there is the theme of hope. Paul looks forward to when Jesus comes back to earth again. There is a great need for hope in the world today. I like looking back, but I also need to have hope, the promised future that Jesus has given to all who come to him in trust with thankfulness for his love and care for us. There is sometimes a lack of hope in people, isn't there? Indeed, this week my wife and I looked at an old movie, 'The Shawshank Redemption', with the great actors, Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins. It is set in a prison, and there is great sadness. You can see how people can give up hope when circumstances are really difficult. The movie explores the possibility of hope, no matter what are our circumstances.

It's wonderful to list some of the promises that we find in the word of the Lord. There was a song we used to sing in youth fellowship in the church I attended as a teenager: 'Standing on the Promises of Christ my King'. The Bible is sometimes described as God's love letter to us. Reading those promises with faith, can give real hope.

Faith, hope and love, the big three. They are all connected in and through Christ. What is faith, but the assurance of things hoped for. Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith, begins with those startling words, **'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'** (Hebrews 11:1).

Paul reminds the church that God's kingdom has already broken into this world at the first coming of Jesus. God's rule as king was brought into this world in the one who is the heir of all God's promises. As we saw in his letter to the Philippians, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the King of the universe. The crucified one is king of all, to the glory of God the Father.

And so we live in between the first and the second coming. This is something like the difference between D-Day, when the Allied armies first set foot back in France, and VE Day when peace was finally achieved.

When will Jesus come back? In the 2000 years between that first coming and now, various teachers and cults have claimed to have worked out the answer to that question, as if they have known precisely when Jesus was going to return. You may have come across a series of books with the title 'Left Behind', and there have been movies and websites like the 'Rapture Index' trying to measure the nearness of Jesus' return. The Bible's advice to the church back then is just as good for us now. Of times and seasons we are not to trouble ourselves. Jesus himself he did not know. That is in the Father's hands, Jesus said. Our job is to be faithful.

Paul gives instructions so that the Thessalonian church will not be ignorant about the Lord's return. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14 we read, **'I do not want you to be uninformed about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.'**

We are not like others, unbelievers, who have no hope. We know Jesus died and was raised, and Paul points out, because we are united to Christ, through faith and our baptism into him, so we will be raised with him at the general resurrection.

What are we to make of this today, here and now? Can I suggest the key to all is this: the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, after his crucifixion and burial. Yes, it is the resurrection.

There are certain problems facing anyone who wants to become a believer, a Christian. A major problem is the problem of faith and history.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? That is the central question of faith, and the problem of faith and history. If a man was indeed raised from the dead, that does change everything. What is the evidence? Well, if you look into it, the evidence happens to be pretty good. Indeed I am completely convinced by it. You can begin with the empty tomb. If the Jewish enemies of those early followers of Jesus could have at any time produced a body, the movement would have been over. No body of Jesus was ever found or produced, except the raised and living one.

For me perhaps the greatest evidence is the change in the disciples, those followers of Jesus who deserted him at the end, and fled. Indeed with great shame, we read how the main leader of the disciples, the apostle Peter, denied with curses that he even knew Jesus!

What became of these fleeing followers? We read that when Jesus first appeared to all 11 of them, or actually 10, as Thomas was not there, they were behind locked doors for fear of being arrested like their master, for fear of the Jews. What happened to change this fearful group into one with vibrant faith?

Well let me put it this way. I was teaching a course in the New Testament several years ago in Thailand, to some refugees who had come across the border from Myanmar. And I began the course by asking these students, why do we have a New Testament? I held up a copy of the Greek New Testament and asked that question. Why on earth do we have this collection of writings called the New Testament? The gospels and letters were all written in a short period towards the end of the first century AD, and collected together soon afterwards. These writings reflect a lot of energy, positive energy. Where did that come from?

No one gave the answer I was looking for to start with, then towards the end of the course one of the students put up his hand and said, we have the New Testament because of the resurrection of Jesus! I said, yes, that is it. If he had not been raised, there would have not been any positive energy of that kind. The Holy Spirit came upon a totally changed group of people, joyous that their master had not been defeated. The sting of death was gone. Jesus had been killed, buried, and then raised from the dead, never to die again. The change in the disciples is the best historical evidence for the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised, so we now have the certain hope, no matter what trials and hardship we might experience in this life, of being raised alive with Christ in God's kingdom, eternally.