

# BANYULE BABBLE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF BANYULE

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

OCTOBER  
2020

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## PATRICK'S PROCLAMATION

### Introduction

LAST month, three archbishops wrote a letter to the Prime Minister. While this sounds like the start of a joke, the controversy the archbishops' letter (AL) has generated is no laughing matter. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Greek Orthodox archbishops of Sydney expressed their concerns surrounding the vaccine the Australian government would provide to all Australians. In particular, they made two requests: 1. That the vaccine would not be obligatory for any citizens that might have conscientious objections to it; 2. That the Australian government commit to funding and pursuing a different vaccine that would not pose such a moral objection.

If any subject warrants slow, careful, and humble deliberation it surely is in the realm of ethics. And yet, the online reaction to the AL was swift. 'How dare the church force its religion upon others!' 'The archbishops are anti-vaxxers!' Another comment simply stated 'Reverends: butt out!' Now, that the dust has settled and everyone is a bit calmer, I want to explore the issues that the AL has raised, and how Christians should think about the vaccine in question, let alone whether we can take it with a clear conscience. Before I go any further, I want to reiterate that I am not an ethicist, nor a scientist, but simply a pastor who wants to provide some clarification for his parishioners. In particular, I want to assure you that should the Oxford vaccine in question be rolled out, you can access it with a clear conscience, free from committing any wrongdoing.

### Christian Ethics

Why would the AL raise any objections to a vaccine in the first place? Speaking as generally as possible, Christian ethics begins with the dignity and value of the human. We are not simply animals, but human *persons*. Personal beings, rather than mere objects. This is because, according to the creation story in Genesis 1, we are created in God's image and likeness. We reflect not only the natural world from which we stem, we also mirror the divine. Moreover, every Christmas we celebrate that God the Son became a human being in order to redeem our world. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, it is abundantly clear the value God bestows upon us in becoming one of us. A human life, whether it is in the womb, in youth, or its final days, bears God's image, and possesses inherent worth. After all, God the Son did not descend from heaven in a formed body, but entered our world in the womb of the virgin Mary. Outside of the writings that comprise our New Testament, one of the earliest Christian documents—'The Didache' (meaning 'The Teaching')—states this unequivocally. Alongside its condemnations of sorcery, theft, and covetousness it also

commands: "you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide." (Didache 2:2), something that was a normal, everyday occurrence in the ancient Roman Empire. How then is all this related to a vaccine against COVID-19?

### The Oxford Vaccine

Researchers at Oxford University engineered a vaccine that, when injected into monkeys, saw it act as a vaccine and shield from the coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, our government secured a deal with the company behind the research to guarantee all Australians a dose of this vaccine. The AL now comes into focus because the Oxford vaccine used human foetal cells, supposedly derived from an abortion, for its development. As I outlined above, Christian ethics regards all human life as valuable. Humans are persons, never to be used as an instrument or a means to an end, but always an end in itself. Clearly, to destroy a life in order to develop a vaccine from it would be to treat it as an object, a mere means to an end. However, there is more to the story.

### The Facts and the Facts behind the Facts

In the sciences, foetal cells are used, and often have come from aborted fetuses, because it is much more difficult to develop them in a laboratory. In the case of the Oxford vaccine, the cells were supposedly 'taken' from a foetus aborted in the 1960s. I say 'taken', because the cells used are not the original foetal cells; they are new cells that have been 'copied' from the original foetus.<sup>2</sup> This is standard medical practice. More than 50,000 papers have been published in biomedical research that have used the same cell line, and in many cases have led to life-saving treatments. The cell lines have been well studied, and are well established. Their continued use prevents the destruction of present and future fetuses for scientific purposes. This is an important point; surely, it is better to use well-established copies of cells, than to perform abortions for new cells today. It is the lesser of two evils, and in our fallen world issues seldom are black and white.

<sup>1</sup> 'Moral Guidance on Using COVID-19 Vaccines Developed with Human Fetal Cell Lines', Rev. Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, O.P., <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/05/63752/>

<sup>2</sup> The word 'copied' is used loosely here. The cells were treated with viral DNA to make them capable of further dividing indefinitely.

Having said all this, it is may not be necessarily to presume upon this kind of reasoning. In my research, I have found Frank Graham unable to recall whether the cells came from an elective abortion, or a spontaneous miscarriage.<sup>3</sup> Frank Graham was responsible for incorporating ("copying") the viral DNA.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Alex van der Eb, who was responsible for the cell culturing (and Frank Graham's boss) is on the record saying that the cells were derived from an abortion.<sup>5</sup> So, it seems that there is the possibility that the origin of the cells used in the Oxford vaccine are not immoral. Still, even if the cells did come from an abortion, I do not think it is sufficient to demand Christians abstain from the vaccine, as my reasoning above shows.

Everything I have said so far concerns the origin of the cells that are used in the vaccine today. As I say, while the origin of the cells could be immoral, use of the vaccine today is at most a grey issue. But, this quickly disappears when we consider our situation today: As of me writing this now, there have been more than 900,000 deaths due to COVID-19 worldwide. It is an unrelenting plague. Abstaining from the vaccine would lead to many more. It is pretty clear that the issue now is black and white. Considering the threat the coronavirus poses to our world, getting vaccinated is an act of love for our neighbours.

### Conclusion

Returning again to the AL, its requests are not at all unreasonable. Despite my reasoning above, some people might still have moral objections to it. Given this reality, the two requests that the AL makes are entirely reasonable. It is the opposite of the church forcing its religion upon others. Nevertheless, as your pastor charged before God to train you in the way of Jesus, and in all godliness and goodness, I want to assure you that no moral concerns need to keep you from accessing such a vaccine. The issue is not as neat and tidy as we might prefer, but things seldom are in the fallen world that we live in.

Patrick



<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 2 on how 'copied' is meant.

<sup>5</sup> My thanks to the editor of the *Banyule Babble* for pointing this out to me.

## This Month – October

**Sunday 4th** *Trinity 17 / Pentecost 18*

*Deuteronomy 28:58–68; Galatians 3:10–14*

**Sunday 11th** *Trinity 18 / Pentecost 19*

*Psalm 79*

**Sunday 18th** *Trinity 19 / Pentecost 20 / St Luke*

*Psalm 92; Luke 7:36–50*

**Sunday 25th** *Trinity 20 / Pentecost 21*

*Isaiah 60:1–3; Revelation 21:1–8*

## Next Month – November

**Sunday 29th** *Advent 1: Annual Parish Meeting*

## Wanted

- People to keep in touch with other people
- Another churchwarden
- New volunteers for *mainly music* and the op shop, when the restrictions are lifted

## Money: August

Income:	Giving:	\$9,202.00
	Other:	\$13,834.37
	Total:	\$23,036.37
Expenses:		\$4,450.22
<b>Surplus:</b>		<b>\$18,586.15</b>

Giving was up considerably, thank you. Because two monthly salaries both fell in July, we didn't have to pay salaries in August. Our employment expenses will swing wildly from month to month.

## mainly music: October 2020

Our weekly emails have continued with Jo's fortnightly sessions repeated the second week. No one has complained so I assume everyone is relatively happy.

Distribution of birthday presents is made difficult with the 5 km limit on travel. Some of our families travel quite a distance to attend our sessions!

Two more donations have helped us on our way to the Christmas books – especially as, if the travel limit remains, we will have to have them posted which will be quite expensive. The hexagon quilt is still for sale but a further two will have to wait until the shops reopen before I can finish them.

*Rosemary Bellair* (9459 5394)

**Right: Hexagon quilt**

approx 90 cm × 180 cm

**\$100**

(hand pieced and quilted)

All proceeds for the Christmas books to give to the *mainly music* families

**Call Rosemary: 9459 5394**



## Annual Parish Meeting

This is the new name for what used to be called the Annual General Meeting. We have set it for **Sunday 29th November**. That is the First Sunday in Advent, and therefore very appropriate.

It is also the day that we hope that real-life services in our churches can start again, though that very much depends on the case numbers and nothing in this world can be relied on. If we cannot have services that day, we may have to have our Annual Meeting by Zoom, with arrangements for those who do not have the technology.

Letters on what is happening, and how to nominate someone, or yourself, to positions, will be mailed to everyone on the Parish Roll. If you think you are not on the Parish Roll but should be, or the other way round, please contact Denise.

Reports of groups should be written by 8th November.

You wouldn't consider putting your hand up to be a churchwarden, would you? It would lighten the load a lot if you could do some of it. Pray about it.

## The op shop needs volunteers!

Some people who have put in many devoted years of service have decided that they are now getting too frail to keep doing it. Their service is much appreciated, and now we need people to take up the baton.

The op shop is an outreach, a help for people with little money, and an important source of income for the parish. But when it reopens, we hope some time later this year, it won't be able to open as often as it used to, unless you help out. It's not difficult work, you won't be by yourself, it's rewarding, and you can do it.

## Holy Spirit Mothers' Union

The September meeting on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> has been cancelled due to the coronavirus.

On **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> October** will be our 2020 Annual Meeting.

I am taking orders for MU Diaries and MU Christmas Cards. Designs are on page 13 in the winter *Mia Mia* Magazine.

*Past projects of Holy Spirit MU members:*

We ran a crèche in the Church House on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the month (family service). We organized the cake stall at the church fêtes. We provided baptism kits, and one member would send a card on the anniversary of the baptism. Two members shopped for, made and served lunch once a week for a kindergarten at St Albans. Five members became volunteers at Dowell Court aged care centre.

We knitted bonnets and jackets for still-born babies, fairy penguin jumpers for the Tasmanian Conservation Trust (these jumpers were put on the penguins to protect them from poisoning as they preen their oil-clogged feathers), and beanies for the Lazarus Centre, Steps Ministry, and now Seafarers.

*Midday Prayers:*

North/West region: St Andrew's MU Rosanna. Link branches: St Mary's Broughty Ferry Scotland and St Peter's Kitwe. Families worldwide: Mthatha in South Africa, Dublin in Ireland, Solomon Islands. Defence Anglican Chaplaincy, Day 19: Army Reserve Chaplains—pray for wisdom, strength and, above all, compassion for those whom they lead.

*Elsie Storr*

# Prayers for these times

*From Emmi Godau:*

Dear Father in Heaven

You are a gracious God; you look after this beautiful earth. You provide for all there is on earth and in heaven. You know our thoughts and deeds we do and have before we express them. You know every one's secrets, wishes and what is in our hearts.

Thank you for providing us with the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink and to maintain all plants and animals on this earth. From the smallest to the big once, to all what we can see and the once we can't see as they are too small or living on the earth.

I only must look to nature to see the proof of abundance you provide. I am committed to be grateful for all I have in my life and that it is possible to connect with my family, friends, and co-workers whenever we desire with the phones we have.

Give us courage to support each other. Protect us from dangers and help us to protect others in need and support them.

I thank you Lord for all the support I received recently when sick with COVID-19. The many phone calls, messages and cards with prayers and good wishes to keep my spirit up. For all the prayers from church members, co-workers, and family. The willingness of people dropping food at my door without asking. The beautiful flowers I received to cheer me up when looking at them.

Thank you all for your generous support and encouragement which helped me to get better. I will never forget this time and dear Lord thank you for giving me my Health back and for everyone that prayed for me, supported me and gave me courage to get well again.

Lord, you are the power and glory for ever and ever and without you we can do nothing but with you all is possible. Thank you with infinite gratitude. Amen.

*This is a special prayer which was sent to me during my sickness and I prayed it most days.*

## **The Power of Prayer**

Nobody knows what a prayer can do  
When somebody, somewhere, prays for you.  
Burdens are lifted and doors unbarred  
Nothing seems quite so bad or hard

Nobody knows how God intervenes  
Working His wonder behind the scenes,  
Turning the evil away from us,  
In a way most marvellous.

Clearing the path through the tangled track.  
Easing the strain on the breaking back.  
When hope fades away and is lost to view  
Nobody knows what a prayer will do.

*Patience Strong*

*From Bishop Philip Huggins:*

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

Gracious God,

We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.

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

We pray for those in need of healing.

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

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

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

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

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

*From Olive Clements:*

The Corrymeela Community was founded in 1965 by Ray Davey, along with John Morrow and Alex Watson, as an organisation seeking to aid individuals and communities which suffered through the violence and polarisation of the Northern Irish conflict. They have done a great work and my friend Elsie is involved.

*Prayers from the Corrymeela Community:*

God who holds us in our brokenness, God whose healing makes us whole: the biggest event of our lives is still unfolding. It is not something to be outmanoeuvred or outwitted. This story is still incomplete, and our recovery has yet to begin. That unknowing is part of our pain. There is wisdom in accepting the things we cannot change. But there is strength in remembering that nothing, not even what we can't control, will separate us from your embrace.

**Amen.**

God of this shared earth and this shared experience: may this great leveller of a disease, this reminder of our common fragility, our mortality, and our recognisable fears, be also the great correction in our collective story. May this be the moment when we start again with clearer eyes and kinder hearts, and with a renewed resolve to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly together.

**Amen.**

God of community, God of our deepest self: in this time of isolation and protective separation, the truth of our connection has risen to the fore. Although our fear-based structures are more fragile than we thought, the bonds of human kindness contain the strength of godly love. We give you thanks that beneath this worldly tumult and within our beaten hearts we know that God is with us and will be with us still.

**Amen.**

*From our diocese:*

## **PRAYER IN A TIME OF EPIDEMIC DISEASE**

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

To people who are sick, bring healing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.



## Blokes Helping Blokes on Zoom

September's *Blokes Helping Blokes* was held on 19th September, but October's meeting will revert to the usual date of the first Saturday in the month.

This month the effect of the lockdown was all too evident, with a number of Blokes having let their personal grooming go. Stuart and Jon were exhibiting nasty growths at the head-neck junction area, while the parish's Allan Way was sporting some alarming foliage on his upper lip. It appeared that he was trying to emulate Frank Webb, or possibly wished to be able to sweep up crumbs from his breakfast table. He said that he was trying to emulate Albert Einstein.

Len informed us that he was undergoing radiation treatment for prostate cancer, and all the Blokes wished him complete success. Apparently the radiation machine resembles a space capsule moving about you and zapping you with radiation. Considering the location to be treated, the Editor was worried where it would go.

Jon's wife had been in a very bad way with cancer, but they had tried in desperation immunotherapy, and this had done wonders.

Glenn announced that he wanted the Blokes to inform them of their birthdays. He threatened that he would then sing 'Happy Birthday' to them in the style of Marilyn Monroe singing to JFK. The Blokes, alarmed by the prospect of Glenn calling them 'Mr President' in a breathy voice, and wondering how much further it might go, wanted to know how much it would cost to keep their birthdays secret.

There was some discussion of breakfast food, with debate as to whether the addition of liver to bacon was a good thing or a bad thing. Someone else put in a word for haggis, which led Glenn to recount another anecdote from his misspent youth.

*(Cue wavy dissolve to a much younger and much thinner Glenn.)*

Glenn was not doing well in his studies and getting Cs. How could he avoid competition from the other guys? He had a brilliant idea, and became the first bloke ever to do Home Economics. They tried to stop him; they said it couldn't be done; but he insisted that it could, and he did. Furthermore, being surrounded by better-looking fellow-students increased his morale no end, and he changed from a C student to a AAA student, a grade they had to make specially for him.

At the end of the course each student was to prepare a masterpiece, a *chef-d'oeuvre*, for judging by the panel. That year's topic for the competition was 'ethnic food', so Glenn chose haggis. He minced up all the horrible ingredients and stuffed them hard into the sheep's stomach, tied it up firmly, and set it to boil for the eight hours or so required to convert the whole into something that human teeth could penetrate.

Unfortunately Glenn didn't realise that an adhesion had developed between one side of the stomach and one side of the softer aluminium pan, and this led to a regrettable weakening of its structural strength against the pressure within. It was only after the haggis had been placed on a plate, artistically surrounded by lettuce (such as no Scot would ever contemplate, unless battered and deep-fried), and placed in front of the judging panel, that some rumble from the revolting ingredients deep within caused the whole to explode.

*(Cue wavy dissolve back to the pedestrian present.)*

The Blokes discussed their reactions to the present. For some it was like Groundhog Day, but supported by family or being able to go outside with the dog, trying to avoid all the cyclists. Adam has bought one of those electric bikes. Glenn told us he had been on a bike for the first time in many decades, but had failed to continue upright, as once his beer gut decided to go to one side the rest of him had no choice but to follow.

The highlight of Frank's day is the birds on his large deck, sometimes several at once. He knows he is not supposed to, but he gives them something to eat. The other Blokes in the area discovered that the flock of cockies that chew up their woodwork and excrete on their patios are in fact Frank's minions, in his pay. I regret that some of the language used cannot be repeated here.

We shall move our stuff from the Ivanhoe place to the new place in MacLeod as soon as Stage 4 restrictions are lifted, but the next monthly *Blokes Helping Blokes* meeting is expected to be on Zoom at 7.45 am to 9 am on Saturday 3rd October. Call Glenn (0487 852 808) for an invitation.

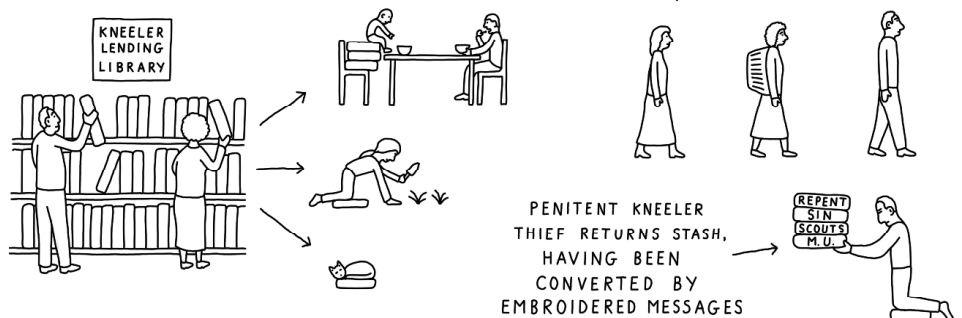
Peter McKay

## THE KNEELERS

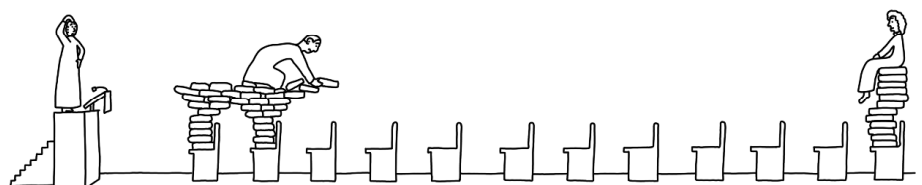
HOW THEY ARE BEING USED DURING THE PANDEMIC

SOME WERE LENT OUT BEFORE THE START OF LOCKDOWN

A FEW WERE PILFERED  
(VERY TRICKY TO DETECT)



THE CLERGY USE THE REMAINDER FOR (SOCIALLY-DISTANCED) TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISES



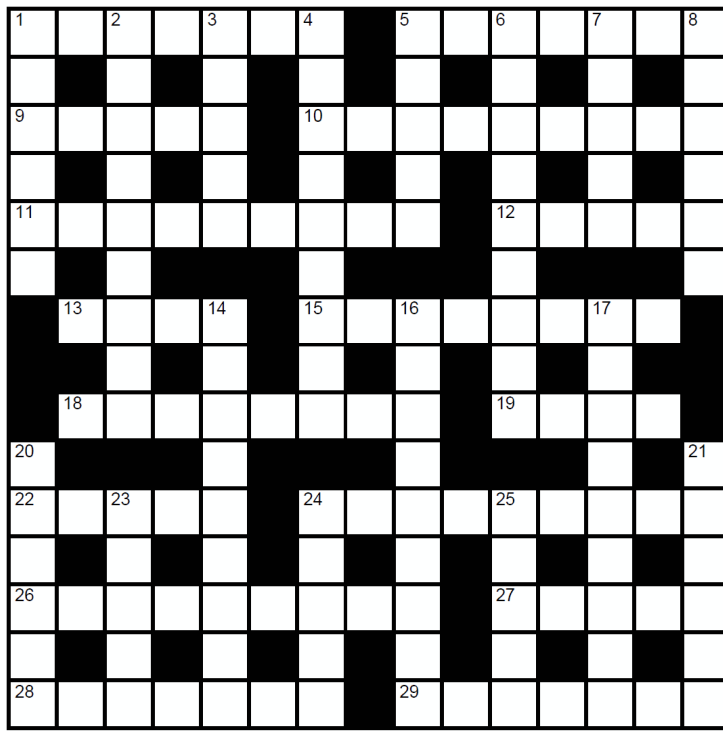
# BIBLE CROSSWORD VII

**Across**

- 1 Wife of Isaac (7)
- 5 Resplendencies (7)
- 9 Stories (5)
- 10 Judges, elders, tax collectors, for example (9)
- 11 Catastrophies (9)
- 12 Father of Ahiam (5)
- 13 Hades (4)
- 15 Eunuch from here was baptised by Philip (8)
- 18 A sound of joy (8)
- 19 Vessel (4)
- 22 Up on high (5)
- 24 First meal of the day (9)
- 26 Hard (9)
- 27 Solomon made a throne out of this (5)
- 28 Furious (7)
- 29 Decorated (7)

**Down**

- 1 Repair (6)
- 2 David committed adultery with her (9)

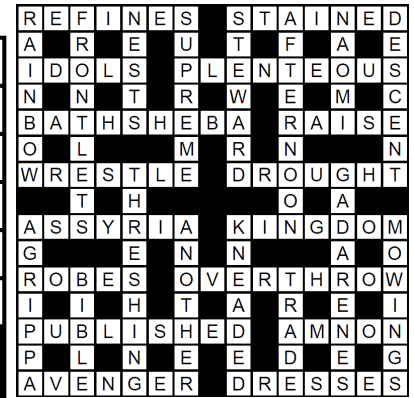


by Philologus

© BiblePuzzles.org.uk

- 3 Barrels (5)
- 4 Propitiation (9)
- 5 Jesus was given three as a child (5)
- 6 Times (9)
- 7 Father of Esau and Jacob (5)
- 8 Killed by Jael (6)
- 14 Heavenly flash (9)
- 16 Reaped (9)
- 17 Copycats (9)
- 20 Horse rider's seat (6)
- 21 Remained (6)
- 23 Tender (5)
- 24 Tied (5)
- 25 Abraham was going to kill his son with this (5)

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



Bible Word Search mystery answer: **THANKSGIVING**

Last month's anagram:

- achiinrst Christian
- aabelluv valuable
- aehrt heart
- elov love
- aeehnv heaven
- aeelnrt eternal
- efginorv forgiven
- afilmy family
- aeprry prayer
- aceln clean

## Bible Word Search – Living Water

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

[https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws\\_LivingWater\\_0.htm](https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_LivingWater_0.htm)

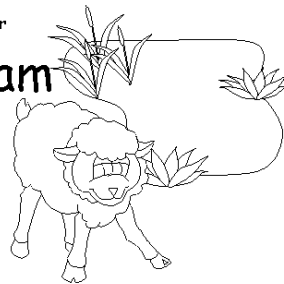


- Believe, Bubbling, Bucket, Christ, Come, Deep, Disciples, Drinks, Dry land, Eat, Fields, Gift, Give, Harvest, I Am, Jerusalem, Jesus, Jews, Living water, Messiah, Mountain, Mount Gerizim, Prophet, Ran, Ripe, Rivers, Rope, Salvation, Samaria, Samaritan, Satisfy, Surprised, Sychar, Thirsty, Time, Tired, Truth, Water jar, Well of Jacob, Will of God, Work, Worship

Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

## Psalm 23 Anagram

[www.dltk-bible.com](http://www.dltk-bible.com)



- abenqtu \_\_\_\_\_
- efloorsvw \_\_\_\_\_
- ainnot \_\_\_\_\_
- degnooss \_\_\_\_\_
- deehhprs \_\_\_\_\_
- ehosu \_\_\_\_\_
- almps \_\_\_\_\_
- degiu \_\_\_\_\_
- eefforrv \_\_\_\_\_
- ceoprtt \_\_\_\_\_

## The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, 30 August

by Lynette Pearson

*Denise:* Our preacher today is the Reverend Dr Lynette Pearson. Lyn and I have known each other since we were teenagers. She's one of my travel buddies, but that's not her main claim to fame—although she wouldn't claim anything for herself for fame. She's a woman who is ordained here in the Diocese of Melbourne. She's a priest who has a very wide remit of duty. She works as a doctor; she also works with Interserve, the mission organisation, with which she and her husband served for many years in Central Asia. She also knows Katrina and Sunny because they too were with Interserve.

Lynette holds postgraduate degrees in theology and in medicine, and is currently taking some studies with brothers and sisters from Africa and Asia in the area of Peace Studies. Lyn is a fine preacher, someone who loves the Lord Jesus, and offered to give us this sermon today, and we're very thankful for that. So over to you.

*Lynette:* Thank you. Hi everyone, I'm glad to be with you, even though it's a digital service: greetings from Geelong! I'm going to teach from the passage of Philippians, particularly looking at citizenship. Let me share my screen with you.

So I want to focus mostly on Philippians 3:17–21. Let me read that with you:

<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

It's a very familiar passage for many of you, especially if you've been following Jesus for a long time, but I want to particularly look at that issue of **citizenship**. One of the things that I'm doing at the moment in my studies relates to looking at this group of people who live in Australia with this thing called a Temporary Protection Visa Subclass 785. Now I've been doing this course in a thing called Peace Studies and my focus has been on this group of people, because it's come to my attention that so many of them are struggling with where they fit, and how they belong.

This particular class of visa is being given to people for three years. It's given when people arrive in Australia without any other type of visa, and it can be renewed every three years; but it's a sort of limbo-land that people are living in. Usually they have to be shown to be people that are refugees of some sort, or seeking asylum.

It's interesting, when I was looking at what a citizenship actually means:

**Citizenship**, relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection. Citizenship implies the **status of freedom with accompanying responsibilities**. Citizens have certain rights, duties, and responsibilities that are denied or only partially extended to aliens and other noncitizens residing in a country. In general, full political rights, including the right to vote and to hold public office, are predicated upon citizenship. The usual responsibilities of citizenship are allegiance, taxation, and military service.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica, May 2020*

I just want to point your attention to that *allegiance and entitled to protection and certain rights, duties, and responsibilities*. Now do you remember, Denise has been preaching, through this letter of Philippians, that Paul (who we believe is the author) was a Roman citizen, and being a Roman citizen was really such a privilege. Being a citizen of Rome was really the lynchpin of democracy in its time.

And citizenship matters; and in a day of border closures and people scrambling to get back to places where they have passports—if they have passports—your citizenship matters. It's really tough if you don't actually belong anywhere, or you don't have your paperwork. One of my friends is someone who married, and within two days was separated from his wife. Why? Because they held two

different passports, and they were in a transit getting back to a third country, and at the airport he was sent back to America and she was sent to the Philippines—and only two weeks ago they got reunited. So from March till two weeks ago they actually hadn't seen each other. Citizenship matters: it's because of where they had their passport from—that's why they had to go back there.

So what has that got to do with our passage? Well, I think it has to do with citizenship and identity:

Citizenship relates to **identity** . . . who a person is, or the qualities of a person or a group that makes them different to others.

*Cambridge Dictionary*

It was a really big deal to have the citizenship papers for my boys. Some of you know that I'm a long-term friend of Denise, and she's followed this story—some of you may have heard it—that we have two boys who were not born in Australia; and actually getting their citizenship papers was a really big deal. They came from a post-Soviet country, and here they are, they're now Australian citizens.

It's a really big question about who you are, when people ask, 'So where are you from?' Tricky question, you know. People often ask me that too. I actually was born in Melbourne; and so was my mother; and so was my grandmother. But it's a very difficult question, and your citizenship is really important, because it relates to your identity.

So that's a definition taken from the Cambridge Dictionary about citizenship and identity. We want to look at identity based on the Bible. Where do we actually get our understanding of our identity? Well we want our identity to come from the Bible and based on this scripture of Philippians chapter three that's what we want to get it from. And there are three main issues that Paul points to, in how we get our identity: he points to **behaviour**, he points to **values**, and he points to **expectations**.

So you've already gone through the background to how Philipians came to be: how it's one of Paul's prison letters on the Second Missionary Journey; he founded the church there; and Lydia was one of the first people in the church in Philippi, opening up her house.

### BACKGROUND

- Written by Paul from prison, probably from Rome (in 61 AD)
- In his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 16:1–40) in AD 49 he was in Philippi and the church began. Lydia a key leader.
- Topics:
  - catch up
  - thank you
  - his plans
  - address problems of false teaching and discord
  - Christian living based on the example of Jesus and even his own life and JOY (mentioned 16 times)

But what was his **behaviour** that he's pointing to? He actually says *imitate* and *observe*, and live accordingly. You know it's a pretty big call to actually say, 'Follow me in what I'm doing'. Is that something that you could do? You know, 'Imitate my behaviour'; but it was something that Paul was quite comfortable saying.

Also there in the Scriptures we read that **values and belief** inform our behaviour, but also give a clue to where we belong. Our values and belief reflect who we are: our identity. And basically, Paul is saying, 'Be a friend of the cross. Keep your mind on heavenly things. Be a friend of powerlessness and humility'. You know, you read back there in chapter two of the significance of this powerlessness, and that state that Paul was in; and later on, if we read in chapter four, you'll see that he's saying, 'You know, think on these things—whatever is true, whatever is honourable, . . .';<sup>†</sup> but I'll let Denise talk about that part.

<sup>†</sup> Phil 4:8: *Finally, beloved, 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.* <sup>9</sup> *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.*

\* See <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/temporary-protection-785> & <https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/publication/temporary-protection-visas>

And then the next and third thing: your **expectations** also point to who you are, your identity. And the expectation is that we are to be ones who wait for Jesus in his second coming—we are ones who wait for the transformation of our body, as one who will come, Jesus, will transform a body of humiliation.

## IDENTITY

### • Behaviour

- *Imitate* and *observe* and live accordingly, Paul and others (holding onto Christ and a life lived like Him, worthy of Him)

### • Values and Beliefs

- Be a friend of the cross, *mind on heavenly things*
- friend of powerlessness and humility

### • Expectations

- of the appearance of Jesus
- transformation of body to the one of his glory by the power that subjects and all things to Jesus

Compare that identity just given there, to the identity of enemies of the cross. Their **behaviour** is in boasting, trusting in self, in sin, and in their belly. Their **beliefs** are all about the here and now: they don't think beyond this life. They're only concerned about how things work here, and in carrying out the works of the law. **Expectation**: well, Paul says quite clearly their expectation is destruction and shame.

## IDENTITY OF ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

- **Behaviour** is boasting, trusting in self, sin and in their belly
- **Beliefs** are all about here and now on earth and works of the law
- **Expectation** is destruction and shame

Let's just focus down on what it is to **expect** something—but particularly expecting Jesus, because he says, you know, we're people who are waiting and expecting<sup>‡</sup>. What is it actually looking like? Our citizenship is in heaven. That's where we belong—that's where our true citizenship is—and it's from there that we're expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So expecting looks like suffering for Christ. It looks like proclaiming Christ. It's about speaking out against false teaching, like Paul is doing here. It's about seeking peace. It's about physical service—hospitality and visiting the needy, just like Epaphroditus, and just like Timothy. It's about bringing gifts to those in need, just like they carried the gift to Paul from the church. It's about living a life of service, worthy of the gospel, in humble obedience, just like Jesus, just like Epaphroditus, just like Timothy. And it's about a life of prayer and praise.

So expecting isn't just sitting around. Our citizenship being in heaven—and it's interesting it says **'is'**<sup>§</sup> it's not like 'will be' in heaven: we're actually citizens *now*. We are passport-carrying citizens of heaven now. And it's there that we are expecting—in some translations it says we're *eagerly expecting*. And 'eagerly expecting' looks like all those things: it's **active**.

<sup>‡</sup> *Apekdechometha* – WE (pl) *awaiting/expecting*—present middle or passive and continuous (it happens to us, we do not make it happen)

<sup>§</sup> *Hyparchei* – *exists* (singular)—present active continuous (it is in the heavens)

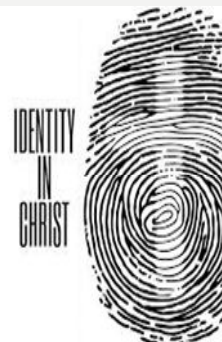
## EXPECTING LOOKS LIKE.

**But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ**

- Suffering for Christ
- Proclaiming Christ
- Speaking out against false teaching
- Seeking peace
- Physical service/ hospitality/visiting the needy
- Giving for relief/care/ministry of those in need
- Living a life of service and worthy of the gospel
- Humble obedience
- Prayer and Praise

So let's go back to **identity** again. So our **identity** is wrapped up in our **behaviour**, our **values and beliefs**, and expecting **expectations**. If our identity is in Christ, then, that should show. The definition of identity is: who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world, and the characteristics that define you. That's our identity.

## IDENTITY?



The definition of identity is who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you.

So if it's in Christ, then what does it look like? So citizenship in heaven is in heaven,<sup>\*\*</sup> expecting Jesus. This is what our identity is: we are citizens of heaven. You know, in these days of stress and COVID uncertainty, how are we to live? Well we're told, 'Our citizenship is in heaven', so our **behaviour**, our **beliefs**, our **expectations**, need to demonstrate that's where our citizenship is.

I remember one of the first times I came back to Australia, I flew on Qantas—yeah, a long time ago, and probably going to be a little while yet before we fly on Qantas—and I remember it was so nice hearing an Australian accent. Even though it was a very *grating* accent, it was just so nice to be amongst other Australians. I clicked with them, I click with the idea of *'I'm nearly home, I'm amongst my own'*.

So when we're in this day of uncertainty and stress, is that what people see in us? Do they see our identity in Christ? Do they think, do they see, that we are not just people who live in Melbourne, people who live in Banyule, people who live in stage four lockdown; but do they actually perceive that our citizenship is in heaven? Can people tell where we're actually from?

Can you take a look inside and say, 'Yep, that's where my citizenship is. That's where my true home is. That's where my people are?' They are the people of God. They're the people who belong to Jesus. They're the people who have the behaviour of being able to say, 'Imitate me. Be like Jesus. Take on the attitude that he had, who humbled himself, who didn't grasp at equality with God, even though he could'. That is the behaviour we're to adopt. Our attitude as well; but also our values and our beliefs—they define us; and we're to wait expectantly.

Can people tell where you're from? I pray that they would see, and that they would know, that you are, that I am, a citizen of heaven. We belong to the King.

Let's pray: *Lord, I thank you that you are indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and you've called us to belong to you. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that every knee will bow before you. We eagerly expect your coming. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Please work in us, that we may live lives that are worthy of your Gospel. Amen.*

<sup>\*\*</sup> NOT parochial but a world-on view; counter-cultural.

## 'An Antidote to Worry'

### The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

6 September 2020

by Patrick Senn

#### Philippians 4:1-9

*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!*

<sup>2</sup> *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.* <sup>3</sup> *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.*

<sup>4</sup> *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!* <sup>5</sup> *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* <sup>6</sup> *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* <sup>7</sup> *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>8</sup> *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.* <sup>9</sup> *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.*

#### Introduction

Hopes for a vaccine against the coronavirus are dominating the hearts of everyone. Currently, 36 different vaccines are being tested on humans. The race is on for an antidote against the deadly plague. We do not like to dwell on our limits, and we are overly optimistic. I don't doubt that there will be a successful vaccine, but how quickly did we go to just assuming that there inevitably will be one? What if there won't? And even if there is, recent tragedies where a teenager was killed by a shark, and a little boy hit by a tree, remind us that death will still be a threat beyond the pandemic. This year, we are regularly reminded that life is fragile and uncertain. Worry and anxiety were already very common, but in the past year have skyrocketed. This leads us to ask: besides an antidote for the coronavirus, is there an antidote to fear and worry?

There is, and St Paul offers it to us in our reading today. Paul was no stranger to our experiences and fears of 2020. The first century was a brutal world full of danger and death. A world of crucifixions, a world where if you get a fever, you most probably would die by the end of the day. A world where someone in their 40s is elderly, and a healthy baby is the exception, and tragic births the norm. St Paul himself wrote Philippians from prison, hardly a place of rehabilitation and more like death row. Despite living in such a world, St Paul offers us today an antidote to worry.

#### Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!

From his dark, damp, and gloomy prison cell, Paul commands us "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" Joy is a prominent theme in this letter, and Paul once more returns to it here. Joy is not a spontaneous reaction to external circumstances. It's not the rush of endorphins we feel when something good happens, like seeing the number of infections go below 100 last week,

or finally getting a raise in your work. Christian joy, to rejoice "in the Lord", is to perceive God's activity in every circumstance. Christian joy is a defiant 'Nevertheless!'

Yes, Paul is in prison; yes, he has enemies that oppose him. Yes, we are in lockdown; yes, the world is pretty bleak. *Nevertheless*, Jesus died for our sins and rose again, our citizenship is in heaven, he has claimed us as his own, and will raise us too to eternal life. To rejoice in the Lord is to keep in front of us this defiant 'Nevertheless!' at the end of the long list of things that trouble us.

#### Peace comes from God

St Paul goes on: "*The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*" God is not distant, he is near. He is closer to us than our own hearts, and because of this we can pray. We can bring our worries and concerns before him. Paul is not indifferent to worry and anxiety; he is not saying 'toughen up' and 'master yourselves'. This is what the Stoics held, an ancient philosophy that is still popular today. St Paul says, we deal with our worries by reminding ourselves of the great 'Nevertheless!', and bringing before God those things that really trouble us, always from a place of gratitude for the good things we already enjoy.

The result of this: "*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" Right now, our state borders are heavily guarded. Our governors are fighting over whether to open up the borders or not. Without a permit it seems impossible to pass. Just recently a woman was jailed after sneaking into WA. They are heavily guarded. St Paul says, if we rejoice in the Lord, if we remain grateful for what Christ has done for us, and if we continue to cry out to God for our needs and troubles, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds. It will guard us, like the police is guarding our borders, because it transcends our understanding. The peace of God is not the result of our efforts and achievements, nor does it come when we finally master ourselves. When we are at our end and we can't do any more, we cast ourselves on God, and his peace that surpasses our understanding comes in.

#### 'Whatever is True'

Paul's first command and antidote to worry; rejoice in the Lord, and remain steadfast in prayer. In the last few verses he gives us the second one: "*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. 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.*" We are to dwell and immerse ourselves in things and people that are true, noble, right, pure, etc.

Our society has forces that are specifically designed to get us to dwell on the opposite of virtue. So many shows on TV highlight the worst of humans, and the news no longer is about the news but primarily about generating interaction, and the more outrageous the more engagement.

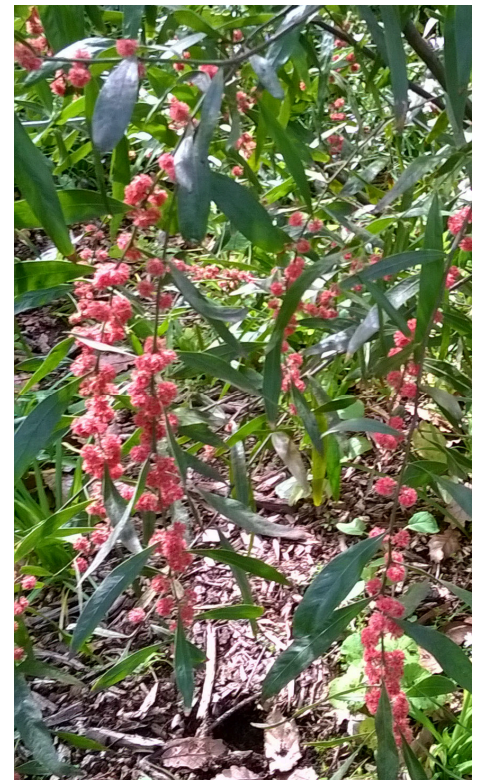
This second lockdown has been much harder at times for me than the first, and it usually got difficult when I dwelt on the news and scrolled too much on Twitter. I know I'm not the only one who did this because there is now a word for this: 'Doomscrolling'. But, when I listened to St Paul's advice, when I remain committed to daily prayer, reading holy Scripture, and going for walks around nature, dwelling on what is good, pure, and lovely, I feel much better. St Paul tells us that when we do these things, "*The God of peace will be with you.*"

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, in our passage today St Paul offers us an antidote to worry. His words are not flippant, he is not offering superficial advice from an ivory tower. St Paul lived in a world much worse and more inhospitable than ours today, and his very words we read today were penned from a dark Roman prison cell, basically death row. He offers us two commandments that will yield peace in a world of worry. Rejoice in the Lord at all times, keep before yourselves the defiant 'Nevertheless!' that Jesus is victorious and will make us reign with him. God is near, and we can call upon him. Secondly, if we dwell on what is good, pure, holy, and lovely, the God of peace will be with us. While we wait and anticipate a vaccine, an antidote to the coronavirus, we now already possess an antidote to worry.

"*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!*" AMEN.

## Red Wattle



*This photo of the red wattle was taken in the 'native corner' of St John's garden. It was a beautiful sight this year and the puff-balls were huge. However, I am letting the garden go back to nature and by next year the trees will be inaccessible.*

Rosemary Bellair

## The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

13 September 2020

by Denise Nicholls

### Philippians 4:10–23

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

<sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. <sup>21</sup> Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. <sup>22</sup> All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Good morning, friends! As Patrick said, this is our last sermon in our series that we've been doing on the lovely book of Philippians: that book which has many themes running through it, but chiefly that of joy and rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

We began this series just as the Stage 4 restrictions began, and we chose this, hoping that it would be for you a time of encouragement—that it would see us through just this level of Stage 4 restrictions, and it was supposed to finish and coincide with the end of Stage 4 restrictions. But alas there are more to come for us in Stage 4, as it has been extended. However I think we can take the lessons from Philippians, and the joy that we have in being united in Christ and united together in him, as we continue on in our lives.

Today, as we look at chapter 4:10–23, I'm going to focus on the partnership in the gospel that the Philippians had with the apostle Paul: their long time and ongoing support in the ministry of proclaiming Christ as Lord. At the start of this time of pandemic, and at the start of the restrictions, many people were saying, "We are all in this together". Do you remember our Prime Minister saying, "We are all Victorians", knowing the difficult situation that we particularly in Victoria were going through? At that time there was no political wrangling, but there was a concern for us all.

Yet lately we started to see that fracture somewhat: with borders being introduced, with Victoria having the title of 'Victoria Bitter', about one of our beers, on the front page of, I think, one of the Queensland newspapers; and so there's a bit of fracturing of this 'we are all in this together' and perhaps a little bit of a setting free of us as Victorians from the rest of the country. We're not sure, but we think at one point there was a little bit of a disjoint between the apostle Paul and the believers in Philippi. Perhaps there was, for a short time, some fracturing of the relationship—and different commentators have different views on this.

But what do we remember from the book of Philippians? Remember right at the beginning of the letter, Paul says in chapter 1:3–5: *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* So that was at the very opening of the letter, straight after the greeting. And now at the end of the letter, towards the end of chapter 4 he returns to this same theme of partnership that he had with his friends. Verse 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.* I wonder if you notice that in both these instances—at the start of the letter, and here, as Paul introduces his concluding remarks—notice that he thanks God for the Philippians. He thanks **God** for them both times and rejoices **in the Lord** for the gifts that they have given to him.

So he not so much thanks *them* but thanks *God*. This was important in a culture of patronage, where there were gifts and expectations—where there were expectations that if one gave a gift, then the receiver was therefore in some way beholden to the giver. I wonder if you remember that old saying 'Whoever pays the piper calls the tune'. In the Roman world of the day there was this type of patronage, where if someone gave a gift, there was an expectation that there would be a reciprocity given.

Many years ago I was visiting friends in Pakistan, and I was admiring my friend's home, saying, "Oh, that's so beautiful"; and straight away she kept saying to me, "You can have it", and I was really shocked—until my friend Lyn (whom we heard from two weeks ago) said, "You know that if you admire something in this culture the person has to offer to give it to you: that's a part of their cultural awareness". So I had to stop my natural effusiveness of admiring things in her home.

'Whoever pays the piper calls the tune'. Paul was making sure he avoided this with the Philippians, and with everyone else who would read the letter, by thanking God for them.

Do you know in some churches ministers are regarded as employees, and it's not uncommon for a church to freeze out a minister that they don't want, simply by stopping them from being paid. In our Anglican system, for which I'm very grateful, we—Patrick and myself—are appointed here by the Archbishop. Yes, we are paid by the giving that comes from the parish here, and from the earnings from various hall rentals and things like that, but we are appointed by the Archbishop to a cure of souls.

The Philippians were clearly partners with Paul, and part of this partnership was not only prayers but their offerings—their gifts that they gave for the support of his ministry of proclaiming Christ. I wonder about *your* support of ministry. (I'm not speaking about particularly giving here at church.) Are there some aspects of your partnership in ministry that you're involved with, by your prayers or by your offerings, that perhaps might need to be renewed or reviewed? Maybe you have had a windfall: there's an opportunity to give in a way that you haven't been able to give before.

So firstly Paul praises God for his friends who are partners with him in ministry, and secondly he speaks of an ongoing partnership with them. Paul praises God for the evidence of God's work in the lives of the people of Philippi, for they shared in his work even when they knew he was in trouble. Look at verse 14: *it was good of you to share in my troubles.* There's very much that sense that they are in it together. Paul comments that they were the first church to contribute to God's work through Paul; and not only the first, but they did it again and again.

Look at verses 15 and 16: *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; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.* They gave to Paul, not because they particularly liked him (though they probably did: they loved him), but they gave to Paul because in doing that they were giving to God's work of life, in Paul proclaiming the word of life through the good news of the gospel.

Notice that Paul regards their gift in a particular way. In verse 18 he speaks of their gifts as a *fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.* He does not focus on himself, and it wasn't so much about relieving his personal needs—though there certainly was that. This may have been the prompt for them to give, but notice that Paul speaks of their ongoing partnership: they were the first to give; they gave again and again when he was in Thessalonica; and here when he is in Rome they even send their friend Epaphroditus to go and physically take care of his needs and provide for him.

What a wonderful ongoing long and true partnership the Philippians had with Paul. And the partnership was all rooted in Christ.

The gifts we give to ministry contexts, whether it's an ongoing one or a one-off gift, are really important. The money that Christians give to supporting Christian good works, to proclaiming the Lordship of Christ throughout the world, through our missionaries, through our churches, through the work of people doing good works in the name of Christ, are important. As Christians we are expected to give. We are expected to give regularly, and in a planned way.

Now let me echo what Paul says: I'm not speaking for my own behalf. These are a fragrant offering between you and God. Can I encourage you in your giving? Even in this time of pandemic—when we, as the ministers here, and the church council, have been blown away by the generosity of you, our people, and the way that we can continue to support our missionaries through CMS.

Continue to set aside your giving. Continue in an ongoing partnership, so that just as you received Christ as Lord, other people through gospel work can hear and receive Christ as Lord. A partnership: a true partnership, and an ongoing partnership.

But before I move to the end of our series on Philippians, I want to give a little aside about this verse in chapter 4:13: *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* Or as it is often said, *I can do all things through God who strengthens me.* This is a verse that is often taken out of context, and people say, 'Well I can achieve anything because God will have strengthened me to do that'. 'I can get a hundred percent in my test, if God wants me to, even if I haven't studied that much'. Or for myself, Denise, perhaps I could set my mind on being a member of the Bolshoi ballet next year, for after all 'God will strengthen me'. 'God, I can do all things: I could even, amazingly, learn ballet'—that would be hilarious. Or 'I can achieve——': you fill in the blank.

This verse is often taken out of context. Notice what Paul says here in verse 12. Remember Paul is in prison and he says that whether he is in need or plenty, whether he is well fed or hungry, whether he is living in want or very comfortable—and he has endured all of these, in his work of taking the gospel to people—he is able to endure all these through Christ who gives him strength. He is able to endure only through Christ.

And notice that he says he has learned contentment in Christ, and through Christ. His reliance is on Christ in every up and down circumstance of life; and he has certainly had each of those a number of times. He learned it through experience, and exposure to the ups and downs of life. He learned contentment through Christ being with him, knowing Christ Jesus as Lord, and being in union with Christ.

So what Paul is saying here—*I can do all this through him who gives me strength*—is not about his great achievements, but his endurance. Remember he is in prison. And he knows that God will strengthen him, his child, because he is in union with the Lord Jesus Christ, in whatever circumstances he finds himself, whatever learnings he undergoes in the ups and downs and the seesaws of life.

People who are married—and I have to rely on them to tell me what that's like—say that when they stand and declare together, "all that I am, and all that I have, I honour you", they absolutely mean it, as they make those marriage vows; and yet they also need to learn together what it means to live together as husband and wife. They need endurance, and they learn this contentment through them. And even if, like me, you are single and never married, or if you are single because you are widowed or divorced, it's learning contentment through being who you are in Christ.

Whatever our circumstances—whether we're, like on a seesaw, whether we're going through a high or the other extremity of low—most of us like to get somewhere a bit in the middle, and more highs, and not so many lows—but Paul encourages his friends, that God will strengthen them, and us, in whatever circumstances of life, as we remain in Christ.



*"It's a pickle jar, Tom... Twist the lid, not scripture."*

Well, as I said, I had hoped that our Stage 4 restrictions would be over this week; but, as 2020 has shown us, there are more downs than ups in this year. The lessons that we have learned from this wonderful book of Philippians—lessons about joy and rejoicing in Christ—are clear. As Christians, even though our Stage 4 restrictions continue, and life can be really tough, and we can be grumpy, we can have joy in Christ, because of our salvation, our union, with him.

We rely on Christ alone: not in any badges of ethnicity, or obeying the Old Testament law, but simply upon Christ: his death on the cross, and his resurrection. We imitate our Lord Jesus, who himself was humble. So we live a changed life, a counter-cultural life.

As we join with other Christians, we seek to put others' needs before ourselves; for we are citizens in heaven: we are joined with our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we can pray to the Father in all our circumstances of life. We need not be anxious about anything, but in everything pray and give thanks to God. And so in all our circumstances of life, we can live out the reality of our joy in Christ, and continue as partners in gospel ministry with our Lord Jesus.

So finally, my friends, from Philippians 4:20–23, as we finish this wonderful encouraging book on Philippians, *to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*



*In Sunday club we too spent about 7 weeks looking at the Letter to the Philippians, and we concluded our studies by making spoon characters for the St John's Riverside Community Garden.*

## Homily for the Feast of St Matthew

Trinity XV, 20 September 2020

by Patrick Senn

### Introduction

We all are sinners and we love to create boundaries and lines in order to hide from our own sin. Instead of acknowledging, confessing, and repenting of our sins, it is much easier to focus upon the sins of others by distinguishing between 'us and them'. This is easy, neat, and tidy. Rather than doing the hard work of humbling ourselves over the evil lurking in our own hearts, we can simply point the finger at the enemy. There are many recent examples. In the ongoing dispute between our leaders over the borders, there is seldom a moment of introspection, but always attacks on the offensive. Each state is on its own, the enemy is clearly 'them'. Moreover, you might remember when Victoria came out of the first lockdown. In solidarity, we were all in this together until some suburbs became hot spots. And then, when people from metropolitan Melbourne visited regional areas, there were reports of them getting abused on the basis of their license plate number.

The last few weeks, sadly, anti-lockdown protests have been gaining momentum, and these protesters have now clearly been outed as 'COVIDiots', us versus them. They are the bad ones, and much energy is spent on keeping it that way.

Even a long time before the plague arrived, during the Royal Commission into the financial sector, the clear villains were the big banks. This last example is especially relevant as we encounter St Matthew in our Gospel today.

### Matthew the Tax Collector

Human nature does not change. We have become wealthier, healthier, more technologically advanced than our forebears in the first century, but we still share the same hearts. They, like us, also preferred to divide and create boundaries between 'us and them', and this was especially the case with those despised tax collectors. Not only did they extort and collect more than was officially necessary, they did so on behalf of a despised and colonising Roman Empire, betraying their own fellow Jews. So, when Jesus walks along and passes Matthew at the tax booth we would expect him immediately to boo Matthew. He is the outsider, he is the evil one, he is the traitor. And yet, Jesus commands him 'Follow me.' This goes against custom, honour, and respectability. Earlier, Jesus already called a group of fishermen to follow him. They are not exactly noble nor do they brighten your image. But a tax collector is straight-up evil and will only bring a bad name upon yourself. Surprisingly, Matthew gets up and follows him.

### Dinner with Sinners

From the same story in the Gospel of Luke, we know that the dinner that follows happens in the house of Matthew, along with a lot of other sinners and outcasts. This is a big deal. In the Middle East, a meal is a significant and intimate event. By sharing a table with someone, you are endorsing them wholeheartedly. And while this is not as strong in our culture here, we still understand this.

You might remember three years ago, we were in the lead up to our state elections. Matthew Guy was the Liberal candidate, promising a state tough on crime, based on law and order. And then the explosive news: Matthew had a lobster dinner with an infamous

mafia boss. No one said 'It's just dinner. What's the big deal?' No, we understand the significance of sharing a meal with someone.

Jesus, by sitting at the table with Matthew and others, embraces these outcasts, breaking down the barrier between 'us and them'. It does not take long before outrage and public outcry erupt. "*When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'*" The Pharisees, the strict law-abiding religious leaders object. Not directly to Jesus since he was inside the house of Matthew, and Pharisees would not even enter the house of sinners. No, they object to some of the disciples, "What is wrong with *your* teacher? Why does he associate with these evil folk?" The Pharisees distance themselves from Jesus, and draw a very firm line between good and evil, 'us and them.'

### The Doctor of Sinners

How does Jesus respond? He quotes a proverb: "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.*" Sin, our human condition, is like a sickness. And he goes on to quote the prophet Hosea, "*Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'*" God is about the spirit of the law, not its letter. And the Pharisees entirely miss the point by using the law to crush and denounce, at the expense of mercy, to build up and elevate. The mission of Jesus, his purpose on earth, is to be a doctor for sinners. "*For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"

### Application

We live in a world of law that condemns, restricts, and burdens. But on this holy day we encounter Jesus, and he shows us once again the beauty of grace, of undeserved one-way love. Matthew's response shows that grace, not law, has the power to change us. At every press conference the premier urges Victorians 'To do the right thing.' But with fines being handed out every day, and anti-lockdown protests growing, this command alone, enforced by the law, cannot instill a love and desire to do what is right. People might obey, but they will never desire to, much less love to.

Jesus does not approach Matthew, nor us, with the law. He does not denounce him for his sin, nor avoid him like the Pharisees. Instead, he shows grace—undeserved love. Even though Jesus is the only perfect human who never sinned, he invites Matthew to

'Follow me'. Law does not create love. Law can compel, threaten, and even force, but it cannot transform. Law begets law, love begets law-abidingness, a sincere desire to do what is good. Matthew did not deserve the love of God, Jesus still gives it to him. This is grace, and it is grace alone that transforms him into the saint we know today. We know very little of Matthew, basically that he was a tax collector, called by Jesus and transformed, made an apostle, wrote one of the Gospels, and died a martyr. That is all we know for certain. But his life is an example for all of us.

Today, God reminds us that following Jesus is not for the comfortable and respectable, but for sinners. Those who are guilty, those who are burdened by the law, those who know they are unworthy. It is the sick and unwell that Jesus calls. Matthew repented of his wrongdoing only after Jesus called him in grace. Only after we realise what grace means, can we be transformed and made new. And this is really good news for sinners.

This lockdown is hard, and if you are anything like me you have seen your ugly and dark side more often than you like. But in our worst, Jesus embraces us, loves us, forgives us. He is the divine physician who heals our sin. And the people in your house or social circles, remember that they also are sinners whom God forgives. When we really learn of our need for God's mercy, it becomes so much easier to extend to those around us. Jesus always approaches us with grace, which can transform us and make us new.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we all are sinners. Most people try to ignore their own sin by focusing on the sins of others and drawing the line between 'us and them'. This is what we do today, this is what the Pharisees did in the first century. Grace is the power that cuts through our boundaries and that eases the weight of the law. It is what, as we prayed in our collect, freed Matthew from greed and selfish love of money, and will also free us of the same. Whenever you feel guilty, when you feel ashamed, when you feel frustrated with others, Jesus stands ready to receive you.

"*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'* For I came NOT to call the righteous, but sinners." AMEN.



From Caravaggio, *The Calling of St Matthew* (1599–1600)

# Parish Council Notes

*Zoom meeting of Monday 21st Sept*

**Child safety, professional standards**

- Patrick: diocesan Child Safe training October.

**Correspondence**

- Send forms for APM by post, not email.
- Andrew to support Denise with Parish Roll.

**COVID-19**

- Andrew to modify St John's COVID-safe plan for Holy Spirit, Watsonia.

**Finance report**

- Staff paid twice in July, not in August.
- New JobKeeper form.
- Denise to write in *Babble* to ask people not to give to Olympic Village (no longer exists).

**Review of Mission Action Plan**

- 2021 initiative: all positive to move forward.

**Vicar's report**

- All pleased to see numbers declining, yet opportunity to meet for Church services remains a long way into the future. I do pray that we will be able to have SOME form of Christmas Service, but may not be able to meet inside, have congregational singing, or gather afterwards for fellowship.
- Recorded Sunday services for 6 months now! A good groove, and great feedback on our series on Philippians. Care homes have been appreciative of our efforts with DVDs. In 2021, consider recording one of our live services each week, distributed to the homes the next week. Thankful to our anonymous donors for their financial support of the DVDs.

- Bible Study and Sunday Club are on a 3-week break, will resume in Term 4.

**Professional Development**

- 14 July – 11 Aug: 5-week course 'Being an agent of healing in a time of crisis' through Transform4Life: international ZOOM course by Sunny Philip (Katrina's Husband) whose work revolves around helping people in trauma.
- 15 Sept online lecture by Mike Bird: 'Jesus among the gods'

- Still waiting for update from Mark Lane re op shop MOU.

- *2021: next steps in our parish development.* I have been thinking and praying a lot about what we as a Church should/could be doing to advance the Kingdom of God in our part of the world. I have prepared a paper for discussion that will be presented separately.

**Curate's report:** presented orally

**Wardens' report**

- Working on getting all bills put in Parish of Banyule's name, with generic warden contact.
- *57 Gloucester Drive:* A sliding door jammed. Cannot be fixed until stage 4 restrictions lifted.
- *St John's*
  - A garden tap failed. As not reported until Saturday after trade shops closed, water had to be shut off until Monday.
  - Courts car parking end date 5th October confirmed, to be invoiced.
  - Car park and ramp: have talked to three engineering consultants. No decision made. The wardens will discuss this further with the vicar.

– Church building: meetings and talks with Peter Harper, ascent of the tower. Church roof is in good condition, but some louvre slats need replacement, and access must be by expensive scaffolding. We should try to do as much maintenance work as we can at the same time. Tower roof is galvanised steel sheet beginning to rust, and paint and rendering coming away from the walls in places. The bell is not very securely supported. Some guttering and down-pipes need replacement. Wooden window frames should be repainted after proper preparation. Peter will prepare an estimate, but expects it will run over \$100,000. Try for grants.

- *30 Invermay Grove:* Carport timber structural work done. Waiting on delivery of new guttering, but close to completion.

- *St Andrew's – Footscape:* Agreed to \$3600 for year after 15th November, then \$400/mo for second year, with option after first year of termination with six months' notice. Will not have monthly meetings with them.

**Diocesan reports:** tabled

**Op Shop**

- Denise to contact BSL re COVID-safe opening of op shop.
- Talk to Barbara Andrews about piece in *Babble* re Op Shop volunteers.
- Discussion with BSL re MOU or contract: Still waiting on Mark Lane.

*Minutes by Patrick, précis by Editor*

## 'Nearer my God to Thee' (Judy T)

In an effort to find more work to do, the less respectable of our two wardens went up St John's tower for the first time, with Philip Trowse dragged out of his comfortable retirement to show the way, and Peter Harper there to find things that need fixing.

For those unfamiliar with the tower, it starts at the bottom with an unremarkable open porch, but soon gets more interesting after one has gone up the spiral staircase and climbed up the uneven railings and into a narrow rabbit hole. There in Stygian darkness it is necessary to twist one's body, without any external support, into an oblique position, while climbing over, through, around, under, through again and over again and around again bits of organ that fill the whole of three-dimensional space and none of which may be touched—if any are touched the organ will stop working and go out of tune and Syd will wax wroth. If you achieve this the reward is a rickety ladder up a very narrow vertical space to the next level. It was while climbing this that my pants fell down around my ankles.

On the next level there is the pleasure of looking at the bell (bigger and heavier than you would think), and noting its rickety support and how the bell-rope changes to a fraying steel cable that is slowly over the centuries sawing its way through a support beam—all seen in the half-light from the windows with louvres that need replacing, in one of which an ancient hatchway leads onto the steep roof and immediate death. Alternatively, if one admires the sights too unthinkingly, there is the hole in the floor leading not only to death but also organ damage.

Finally there is a higher and even more rickety ladder. You must step over the beam it goes under without putting your weight on it, or the bell might fall down and destroy the organ. Through another narrow hatchway and you are on the tower roof, which you notice is rusting, and you can see all the paint and render peeling off.

But the view is good.



Our Vicar had not accompanied us on this expedition, but I knew she wanted to. So when Peter Harper said he wanted to do it again with some more builder blokes, I told him to tell her that she had to accompany him. On the day she showed some slight reluctance, but this was overcome by vigorous

use of the verbal equivalent of a cattle-prod. And she was pleased when she got up there:



Indeed, the experience was like the thrill of completing Dreamworld's Thunder River Rapids Ride without dying, except that you know there has been even less attention to safety.

There remains the need to get back, performing all the same manoeuvres in reverse. Your Editor had the experience of a handhold rail that had survived 169 years coming away and being destroyed by his weight. The Vicar had the experience of missing her footing right near the end, but fortunately her fall was broken, as she fell on the Editor.