

# BANYULE BABBLE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF BANYULE

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

OCTOBER  
2021

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## DENISE'S DATELINE

### The Roadmap out of Lockdown

Before the advent of GPS systems on phones and in cars, nearly every car had either a Melways or another brand of map book. A map is a useful tool that helps us know where we are, decide where we are going, and chose and navigate the way.

The announcement of the 'roadmap' out of lockdown from both federal and state leaders has been a welcome relief; it indicates that at last we have a plan on how we will begin to move forward in these uncertain times. Yet challenges remain to be navigated as best we can; there will still be some restrictions, but also encouraging movements.

Recently, our Parish Council has begun looking at another 'MAP' – our Mission Action Plan. This too is a tool used by many Anglican parishes across Melbourne and Geelong to think about WHERE WE ARE NOW, our DESTINATION (where we want to 'get to', or achieve as a parish serving God), and HOW we might achieve this. On the surface, this might seem an insurmountable challenge for us as a Parish: we are blessed with lots of properties, but limited cash funds; we are blessed with dedicated and loving parishioners, but with decreasing volunteer numbers due to increasing age and frailty. Yet God's vision for Banyule Parish is BIG! It is bigger than all we might imagine, for God's vision is for His Church to be life-giving centres for the proclamation of Christ as Lord, and for us to be known by our love of our neighbours. So, please pray for our Parish Council, and our Parish of Banyule – that we would be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit is what God wants to achieve through us and for His glory.

Feeding into our parish MAP, Parish Council also has on its 'plate' three large projects to do with our properties:

- The much-needed maintenance of St John's,
- The possible development of the St Andrew's site, and
- The Banyule Council development of a Watsonia Town Square very near Holy Spirit.

Of these, only the Watsonia Town Square will be new to you.

Each one of these would be enough to be considered a big project for one Church – but, by dint of our Parish being formed 18 years ago, we have three large projects to manage. I'm reminded of the riddle 'how does one eat an elephant? One bite at a time!'

I do want to acknowledge the hard work of Parish Councils past and present, since 2018 and way before my time as Vicar – sometimes things take a long time, and sometimes the timing just isn't right. In the last two years we have had great conversations and guidance from Bishop Kate and the Diocesan team who are helping us in asking the right questions and considering appropriate actions. Our roadmap is not yet set in concrete, but we are working on it as a guide to help us along the way, and to know how and when to prioritise each project. So please do PRAY for our Parish Council, that we will be open to the leading of God's Spirit in this work.

As we look forward to meeting together again as Church, face to face in our buildings, I am thankful that the Archbishop and the Diocese of Melbourne have provided guidance for how we can meet as God's people, whilst adhering to the government health directives. From this guidance, our Parish Council and Clergy will work out how our Parish will begin our Sunday Services again, probably from 7 November... YAY!! We will let you know just as soon as we can.

Denise



**Wanted:** A member of the parish with a small family is looking for somewhere to rent in the Banyule Primary School area, up to \$500 p.w. Good rental record. If you know of anywhere, please contact the Editor (9459 5852).

### STOP PRESS!

Catriona will be giving a talk on 23 Oct, and Bible study from 31 Oct. See inside!

### Thanks!

We have been informed that the late Ron White has left \$1000 to the parish, for which we are grateful. Readers may remember that a few months ago we also received a bequest from Steve Allen's estate, and last year we received a large bequest from Crystal Dunn's estate.

Parish Council has decided that bequest monies should be kept aside from our normal funds, and used for special projects near the donors' hearts.

Making a bequest to the parish in our will, or adding a codicil to that effect, is something we all can do. It is no substitute, of course, for our regular giving, but it is a relatively painless way of extra giving when money will no longer be of any use to us. Bequests can be given for specified projects, but it is preferable to make them usable by the parish in any way it sees fit.

If you specify a bequest must be used for a specific purpose, then there is trouble if that purpose cannot go ahead. It may, for example, require permissions that are not forthcoming. The money given may not be enough, and the parish may not be able to afford to make up the difference. In such cases your bequest then can't be used at all without a court order.

The diocese has an example bequest form of words you can use if you wish.

### mainly music: October 2021

With lockdown #6 being extended we only managed three sessions for the whole of term 3. While an attempt has been made to keep the families through email, it certainly isn't the same. For another year we have been unable to celebrate Father's Day. It would seem that with all the uncertainty even Jo, founder and CEO of *mainly music*, is uncertain about on-line sessions.

The question now is 'will we be able to open next term?'

Rosemary Bellair (9459 5394)

# This Month – October

Morning Prayer is available on Zoom at 8.30 am each Tuesday and Thursday at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9347862191>, and Compline is available on Zoom at 9 pm each Monday, Wednesday and Friday at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/79265369718?pwd=R0Q4aERJa3ZqV2FjdFBaanBjaTJadz09>

**Saturday 2nd:** 8 am Blokes Helping Blokes on Zoom

**Sunday 3rd Pentecost 19 / Trinity 18**

Acts 17:16–34

**Sunday 10th Pentecost 20 / Trinity 19**

**Sunday 17th Pentecost 21 / Trinity 20**

**Sunday 24th Pentecost 22 / Trinity 21**

**Sunday 31st Pentecost 23 / Trinity 22**

Readings for all the above services are still to be confirmed, all right, still to be organised

## Wanted

- Lots of churchwardens

## Money: August

Income:	Giving:	\$6,080.00
	Other:	\$17,874.11
	Total:	\$23,954.11
Expenses:		\$30,045.82
Deficit:		\$6,091.71

Giving was down. Hall, etc income was also down, as the lockdown started to bite; it will be worse next month. There was a special donation of \$7000 included in the other income, but it cannot be used and may have to be returned. Therefore the real deficit is \$13,091.71.

We paid annual council rates for some properties, but two more are to come.

### STOP PRESS

**Saturday 23rd Oct pm:** Catriona’s testimony on Zoom, with Antarctic slides.

**Sundays** from 31st Oct: 3:30 – 4:45 pm Bible study on Zoom, using Wright & Bird’s book.

For more information, see p. 5.

# Holy Spirit Mothers’ Union

Our meeting on August 25th was cancelled, due to the COVID virus lockdown. Our North/West MU Prayer Chain for August is for Diocesan Members. Our Spring Mia Mia (our magazine) was posted to us. Our order for 2022 diaries and Christmas cards was ordered by phone.

Our Link Secretary Coral Bellingham has written to our Link Branch St Mary’s Broughty Ferry Scotland.

The Seafarers sent an urgent email requesting beanies, as they have none left. I have posted two parcels in the past six months but was waiting to take another twenty beanies in, as I wanted a glossy paper copy of their *Ship to Shore* magazine, as a printed copy off my computer after being passed around twice is tatty, whereas a glossy paper will last, to be shared around our Knitters. So now we are back on the postage list.

Thank you to all our Beanie knitters—they are very much appreciated.

Our next meeting should have been on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September but it was cancelled due to the COVID Virus. The October 27 meeting will be our A.G.M.

Elsie Storr



**THIRTEEN** Blokes attended September’s meeting over Zoom. Glenn was in his truck, regrettably eating rubbish from a certain McEaternity. He was doing this in order to get the free coffee that this eatery gives to their customers over 60, in gratitude for these customers’ having acquired no sense of taste in so many years. (The Editor suggested they should be grateful for any customer over 16.) Glenn seemed to have two of these coffees, possibly in the hope that two from that source



Jim Cramb

would equal one decent coffee. Glenn was parked outside a customer’s home, which customer had to wait for our meeting to finish

before he could avail himself of Glenn’s services.

David Fitzgerald regretted that he had not seen his Kids’ Hope kid since second term. This was someone who needed some sort of stable reference, as he kept getting moved on and on from one extended family member to another.

Adam has also moved, moving after his divorce into a house in Heidelberg Heights.

He is doing consultations on Telehealth, but for vulnerable people in particular it is not as good as seeing them in real life. The rates of suicide and self-harm in young people, especially in the middle teens, is now much higher. There is a sense of helplessness. The lockdown has been especially difficult for those in foster care.

Adam had a painting on the wall that attracted much interest. It had been painted by a cousin who is a noted indigenous artist, and represented his totem.

David mentioned that he was distantly related to Lionel Rose, though he did not mention any special skill in boxing. However he did have skill in football, and recalled days in what was then the Macleod-Rosanna football team, which when he joined was near the bottom of the league ladder, and which he brought to an undefeated year, trouncing the number two team in the Grand Final. In one of the teams he played for Neil got the equivalent of the Brownlow.

There followed nostalgic reminiscing of former football days, when studs were nailed onto boots, and you could beat up the players of the opposing team as part of the game.

This did not shock the Editor, who has been often told stories by his wife of the Port Melbourne side, which not only beat up the opposing players, but also the umpires. (The wife was not in awe of these men, having during primary school reduced the future leader of the Port Melbourne toughs to a quivering jelly by means of a compass needle.)

Damien, who was passing under his Kung Fu name of Abbott.Da, said he wished he were in sales rather than a consulting engineer, because the marketing people just kept on selling, whereas for him things were slow and tough.

It was generally agreed that many people were doing it tough. Homeschooling was awful for all, and the kids were missing out on networking and working the room and similar activities needed to build up transactional social capital to get a professional position.

Jim Royston reported that even his students were not learning well, because the teaching and learning process does not work nearly as well over Zoom.

Allan's world continues to turn. His club is closed, but he is able to escape to his garage and turn things over. Allan's knitting bowl was again mentioned, and Glenn showed a picture of it from September's *Babble*.

At this, Stuart waxed wroth. That gutter press *Babble*, he complained, had said that he was expecting a baby, whereas it was actually his wife. The Editor said he had assumed that Stuart had probably had some part in the process, but if that is not so, he stands ready to retract the story.

Glenn and Stuart have put a steel hatch in the back fence that divides them, in order to pass beers across (see picture). The hatch is lockable, but the lock is on Stuart's side. This means that Stuart can stop the flow of beers, but not Glenn.



It transpired, however, that there was another good reason for Stuart's being able to lock the hatch. Glenn's backyard is so beautiful that he mistakes it for the Garden of Eden, and regularly walks around it in prelapsarian nakedness. Not only is he not ashamed, but there is the additional advantage that if Avon ladies or Mormon missionaries come round to the back to find him, it tends to put them off their prepared scripts. Unfortunately, a neighbour came round the back without knocking, and discovered that this was the wrong thing to do. So the hatch can be closed to prevent any repetition of a severe trauma.

Jon said he had wondered why he kept hearing the police helicopter.

Frank has been getting two of his trees removed, including one specially planted by Sylvia that had grown very prominent. He did not reveal whether this had metaphorical significance.

Glenn said that doing a YouTube search on 'idiots cutting down trees' revealed very many instructive videos.

Frank said that there was no reason to worry. These days you are either sick or well, and if well, no worries. If you are sick, you will either die or live, and if you live, no worries. If you die, you will either go to Hell or Heaven, and if in Heaven, no worries. And if in Hell, you will be spending too much time meeting your friends to worry.

Neil said he was like Allan and retreating to his carport to do woodwork. He was trying to work out how to cut a pattern in wood, at which many Blokes gave advice. Allan recommended the use of graph paper, glued on. Neil has bought a router, but doesn't know how to use it. He showed it to the Blokes, who gave further advice.



The Blokes noted that they had not forgotten Neil's prediction last year that Richmond would be in the finals for the next five years. Neil said he had just chosen the wrong year to start the prediction at.

Glenn has been making sauerkraut. He works on what we in chemistry call a heroic scale, starting with 16 kg of white cabbage and 16 kg of red cabbage. He used to stir the mixture by thumping it, which took eight hours and must have been exhausting, but has now discovered that if you use a commercial bakery mixer it takes ten minutes.

After putting it in kim chi pots the mixture is left to ferment in the absence of air for 21 days.

The Blokes felt that if Glenn has been consuming sauerkraut containing 32 kg of cabbage, they were glad he was a great distance away in his truck, and hoped that the electrical system would not spark.

Glenn shocked us by revealing that he spent his younger days in a life of crime. Emulating St Augustine of Hippo, he stole apples from an orchard, but without the saint's later contrition. He (Glenn, not St Augustine) swam across the Yarra (or perhaps the billabong) to get to the orchard, helped himself to forbidden fruit, then swam back again. The farmer could not easily follow, but did arm himself with a shotgun filled with rock salt. One of Glenn's companions whom he had led astray regretted his actions, as a backside peppered with salt was exceedingly painful.

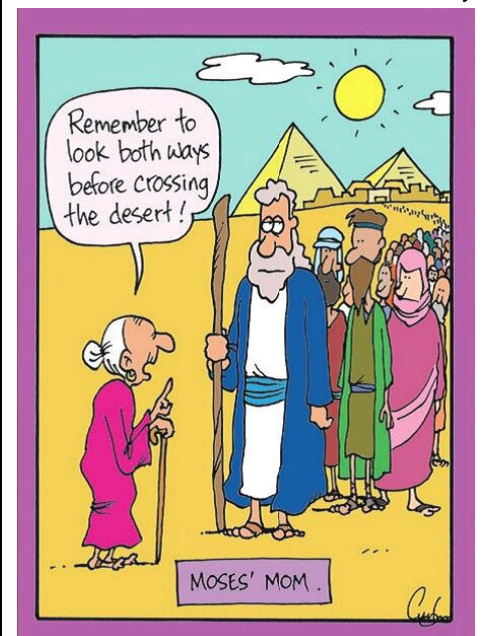
Jon is now able to visit his wife, who has been 2½ months at Peter MacCallum. She has two cancers, one of them rare. She is immunocompromised as a result of a heart transplant 12 years ago. Jon had great praise for the staff there. For his wife's birthday the nurses drew her a poster and gave her a quilt.

We were pleased that David Clifton was able to join us. He has haemodialysis every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening, which takes a lot out of him. He also happened to mention that he had got married.

Jim Cramb is OK, but very tired of the lockdowns. Allan mentioned that Joan is trying to keep up with exercise by walking on a treadmill, but the scenery is not very good. Glenn says he walks in a multi-storey car park, as this keeps the rain off.

The next *Blokes Helping Blokes* breakfast will be at 8 am on 2nd October, either by Zoom or at Macleod Community Hall, depending on the pandemic situation. We now have a big shed at the Macleod Community Hall, which will allow us to move the barbecue out of St Andrew's and have a barbecued breakfast (when COVID permits). Please let Glenn know if you are coming: 0487 852 808. All blokes are welcome!

Peter McKay



## The Rev'd John Edward Baumgardner

20 March 1938 – 6 September 2021



From *Clergy News*, 9th September 2021:

### The Reverend John Edward Baumgardner

John Baumgardner died on 6 September 2021.

John was ordained in the Methodist Church in NSW in 1969 and served there in parish ministry until he became an Anglican. He was ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Bendigo as a deacon and to the priesthood in 1978.

John served at the parish of St Margaret's Mildura as Assistant Deacon and Assistant Priest in (1978), as Rector at St David's Milloo (1978–83); Assistant Priest at Holy Trinity Cathedral Wangaratta (1983–88); Chaplain at St John's RV Wangaratta (1985–88). He then served in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne as Incumbent at St Stephen's Viewbank (1988–92) and then as Incumbent at St Peter's Box Hill and Police Chaplain from 1992 until his retirement in 2002.

John continued to serve the Diocese with a Permission to Officiate.

We give thanks to God for the life and ministry of the Reverend John Baumgardner and pray for his wife Alison and family at this time of grief and loss.

The funeral will be at St Paul's Westmeadows at 2.30pm on Monday, 13 September and the live stream can be viewed [here](#).

May he rest in peace and rise in glory  
Grace and peace in Christ Jesus  
+Philip Melbourne

Note "Incumbent at St Stephen's Viewbank (1988–92)". Though St Stephen's itself is no more, it is still part of our parish and its history, and people remain who remember John there, with respect, in what must have been a very difficult placement. Though his modernism did not align well with me, I found I had a lot to learn from him. I know no-one with a deeper sense of the love of God.



The funeral was taken by four clergy, including Bishop Kate Prowd. The hymn *For all the saints* was sung, and then Bishop Kate welcomed the few allowed to attend in person, and the many attending virtually on live stream.

John Baumgardner, she said, had seen many changes in his time, including herself, but he had taken them all graciously. She had not been aware that among John's many achievements, he was a member of the Order of Merlin, which did not mean he was a wizard, but was a professional-standard magician. This was not mentioned in the official diocesan stud-book.



The eulogy was given by Fr Ray Hartley, who described himself as a friend and colleague of John's for the whole of John's ordained life:

### The Reverend John Edward Baumgardner, 1938–2021

I used to live in the town of Junee, a town which styled itself as 'Gateway to the Riverina'. It wasn't until years later that I found out that on 20 March 1938 in that same Junee a son had been born to Thomas Edward Baumgardner and Hazel Florence, née Speer. John Edward was baptised in Junee Methodist Church.

A couple of years later the family moved to Goulburn and it was there that John went to school until he was aged 15, when he left to become a Junior Clerk with the NSW Government Railways in the Mechanical Branch. He transferred in 1958 to the Assistant Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office in Redfern.

He did his National Service at Pukapunyal and remained in the Army Reserve as Pay Sergeant of 14 Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery at Marrickville until 1962.

In preparation for training for the ministry John was a student at the Central Methodist Mission and completed his Leaving Certificate at East Sydney Technical College. He was at Leigh College, the Methodist theological college in Sydney, in 1965–67, and completed the Licentiate in Theology.

John had married Alison Mary Johnston in 1963 and they had two daughters, Susan and Kristen, by the time John was ordained by the Methodist Conference of NSW in October 1969 (almost 52 years ago!). John had a variety of ministry appointments in NSW Methodist Circuits: home missionary at Inverell, student pastor at Tempe Park, Probationer in the Newcastle suburb of Belmont, Superintendent of Boorowa, associate minister at Goulburn, and then Superintendent of Glen Innes-Tenterfield.

Through all this he continued to study, and had a growing interest in liturgy, completing the Diploma in Liturgical Studies in 1975. He worked on the NSW Methodist Faith and Order Committee and the national Faith and Order Commission during this time. His interest in liturgy was at least part of the thinking that led him to become an Anglican.

He was ordained deacon and later priest by the Bishop of Bendigo in 1978. He was curate of St Margaret's Mildura and Rector of Milloo before moving to Wangaratta where he was on the staff of Holy Trinity Cathedral. Then to Melbourne Diocese in 1988 to be Vicar of St Stephen's Viewbank and of St Peter's Box Hill (where he was also Police Chaplain) before his retirement in 2002.

By then he had been a member of the Diocesan Liturgical Committee in three dioceses. Here is a quick list of other positions: Member of the international and ecumenical *Societas Liturgica*, and the Australian Academy of Liturgy (where he was assistant Editor of the *Australian Journal of Liturgy*); Regional Minister for SE Australia of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis (and editor of the *Third Order Newsletter*); SPCKA Secretary for Melbourne Diocese (and member of SPCKA board and executive); and Consultant to the Archbishop of Melbourne's International Relief and Development Fund.





I spoke briefly at his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party and noted that he seemed to be associated with long words. He had just become an octogenarian. He had a long surname and his daughters have continued that tradition, Mesdames Overington and Sammartino. He had a life-long interest in magic, being not only a conjuror but also a sword swallower and fire-eater (this last activity contributing to his later emphysema) and hypnotist. He was a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. But the long word for part of this was prestidigitator.

Two other words that apply to him are not so long but are more important: liturgist (about which I have already spoken) and theologian. He had an ongoing search for truth and understanding. He called his theological position liberal. It was characterised by search and questioning and never being satisfied that an answer was final or definitive. Because of this he was a man of great faith. He reckoned that if you knew all the answers you didn't need faith. But always asking meant living by faith in a trusting relationship with God – whatever that meant!

He said when preaching at the Eucharist to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination on 20 October 2019, the last sermon he preached: "It seems to me to be not so much about understanding, about believing, about which brand of Christianity you cling to, because they're all different in so many ways, but it's about doing, about living, about being. It's about doing the will of God. We don't live to possess all the truth, to understand the truth, but to serve it. As St Augustine of Hippo said way back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, *If you have understood, then what you have understood is not God.* No, we are not here to understand the mystery. Try as we might, we don't understand. I don't anyway. I still don't. What we do is immerse ourselves in the mystery, which is what we do every week as we celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist, the 'sacred mysteries' as the Orthodox refer to it, immerse ourselves in the mystery, and do the will."

Words attributed to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan, Brother Giles, were valued by John as expressing his own thoughts. "All the wise and holy men who have been, are or will be, who have ever spoken or will speak of

God, have not said or ever will say anything about God compared to what he is, except as the prick of a needle is compared to heaven and earth and all creatures that are in them – and more than a thousand times less."

I want to use two more quotes from John so that I'm not just talking about him, but so that we can see a little into his heart and mind through his own words. John wrote in his final sermon at Box Hill. "I set my heart on God – Father, Mother, creator, giver of life who is somehow at the centre of the universe, not only this earth but the unfathomable depths of space, and who also, as John [that is, a different John] reminded us, is love. I set my heart on love, on God who is love; God is love. That's something to hang on to when life's getting you down, when there doesn't seem to be a lot of meaning to it, when you're not sure where to turn, or what to do, or what to believe, or what to hang on to. Hang on to God. Set your heart on God, who is love."

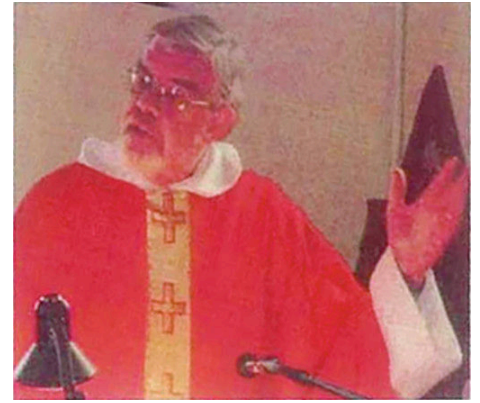
It is John's death that has brought us together today. Hear this that he said: "Death is the one certain thing in life. We all have to die... I suppose we fear death because we do not know what is on the other side. But aren't Christians supposed to believe that God is on the other side of death, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God?"

We can talk about John as a deep thinker and searcher after truth, a man of great faith, but there are other aspects also. John was great company and enjoyed a good discussion or argument about all manner of things. He was a practical person and indulged in lots of forms of handicraft and was skilled in desktop publishing. Alison told of his annoying habit of not finishing things – because he always thought he could do it better. He has been a good friend to many – and a mate of mine for over half a century.

And he was a family man with a lovely and loving and tight-knit family. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather. Alison, Susan, Liam and Hannah, Kristen, Pasquale, Isabella and Lucy: remember this man, give thanks for this man, celebrate his life.

John Edward Baumgardner, priest. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

RW Hartley  
St Paul's Westmeadows



There followed the readings: Romans 8:31–39 and John 14:1–6. Then the Rev'd Tom Pardy gave his sermon as a pre-recording, as he was unable to be present in the flesh. He commented that it was John who had taught him how to take his first funeral service, and how to write a funeral sermon. John pointed out that it was not only an occasion for grief, but also for praising God.

We can praise God for this life and for memories of lives that have run together, but also for God's promises of love. Tom quoted from the Gospel: *I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.* Because God is Father to each of us as if we were the only one, we can have confidence.

The sermon was followed by prayers, then *Love divine, all loves excelling*, then Communion and final prayers, ending with *Beat out Dat Rhythm on a Drum* from Carmen Jones.



## Zoom with Catriona

Saturday 23 October, afternoon:

### *How does a Scientist come to Faith?*

Come hear how a committed atheist realises that Jesus is the only one who makes the world make sense and gives our lives meaning. I'll present my testimony against a backdrop of slides from my time in Antarctica.

Sundays, starting 31 October:

### **Bible study, 3:30 – 4:45 pm**

*The New Testament you Never Knew: Exploring the Context, Purpose, and Meaning of the Story of God* (by N. T. Wright and Michael Bird): series of eight sessions.

# BOOKS OF THE BIBLE CROSSWORD

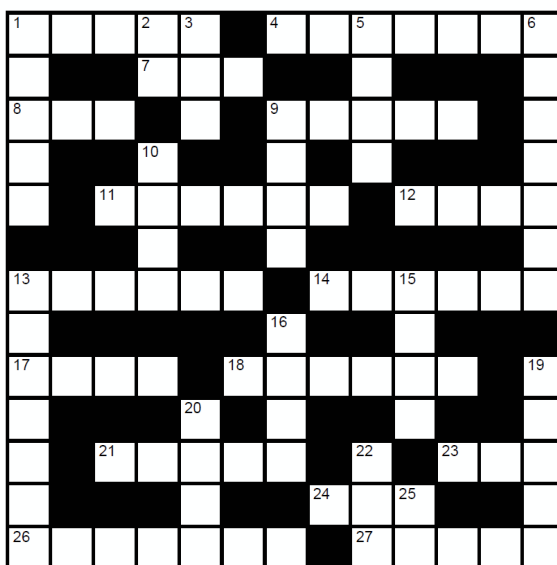
**Across**

- 1 A book of books (5)
- 4 Shortest book in the Old Testament (7)
- 7 The number of chapters in Philemon (3)
- 8 This testament contains 39 books (3)
- 9 Jesus' brother, who wrote a letter (5)
- 11 In authority before the kings (6)
- 12 His epistle contains one chapter (4)
- 13 Successor to Queen Vashti (6)
- 14 David wrote many of these, set to music (6)
- 17 Wrote about the restoration of the temple (4)
- 18 Originator, writer of a book (6)

- 21 Number of letters written by John (5)
- 23 Number of chapters in 13A (3)
- 24 Galilee, Dead, for example (3)
- 26 Paul wrote many of these (7)
- 27 He prophesied the birthplace of Jesus (5)

**Down**

- 1 There are 66 of these (5)
- 2 Behold (2)
- 3 Revelation comes in this part of the New Testament (3)
- 5 Donation of money to the poor (4)
- 6 This letter lists the faithful (7)
- 9 He prophesied of the 'day of the Lord' (4)

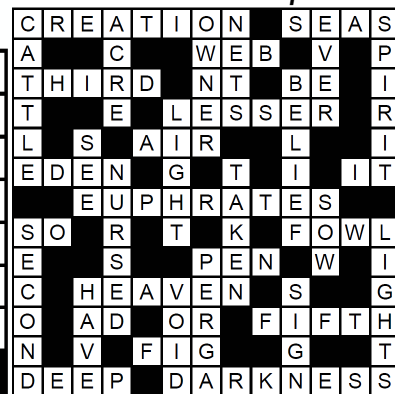


by Colin

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- 10 A faithful Moabitess (4)
- 13 He foretold the regathering of Israel in prophecy of dry bones (7)
- 15 A prophet who was a herdsman (4)
- 16 One of the gospel writers (4)
- 19 A prophet, reluctant to go to Nineveh (5)
- 20 Adam and Eve ate from this in the garden (4)
- 22 The border of a garment (3)
- 25 Joshua writes about this city near Bethel (2)

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



Bible Word Search mystery answer: **RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Last month's anagram:

- elness \_\_\_\_\_ lesson
- honorst \_\_\_\_\_ thorns
- aeilnpx \_\_\_\_\_ explain
- aefmrr \_\_\_\_\_ farmer
- adegnrr \_\_\_\_\_ garden
- agilnnp \_\_\_\_\_ planting
- deess \_\_\_\_\_ seeds
- deesw \_\_\_\_\_ weeds
- ckors \_\_\_\_\_ rocks
- gginorw \_\_\_\_\_ growing

## Bible Word Search – Acts 13

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\\_Acts13\\_0.htm](https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_Acts13_0.htm)

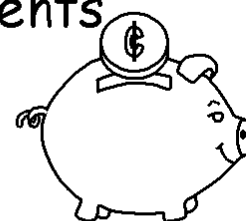
Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

Antioch, Baptism, Believe, Benjamin, Blind, Brethren, Chanaan, Cyrene, Disciples, Divided, Elymas, Galilee, Gentiles, God, Grace, Hundred, Iconium, Israel, Jerusalem, Lord, Lot, Minister, Nations, Pamphylia, Preached, Promise, Prophet, Sabbath, Salamis, Salvation, Seleucia, Sepulchre, Simeon, Suffered, Synagogue, Worthy, Years

P E Y H T R O W G A L I L E E  
M R C Y R E N E N A T I O N S  
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## Parable of the Talents Anagram

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## Acts 13:13–52

15th Sunday after Trinity, 5th September  
by Denise Nicholls

<sup>13</sup> From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. <sup>15</sup> After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak." <sup>16</sup> Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! <sup>17</sup> The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; <sup>18</sup> for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; <sup>19</sup> and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. <sup>20</sup> All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. <sup>21</sup> Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. <sup>22</sup> After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' <sup>23</sup> From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised. <sup>24</sup> Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup> As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

<sup>26</sup> "Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. <sup>27</sup> The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. <sup>29</sup> When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> But God raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup> and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. <sup>32</sup> "We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors <sup>33</sup> he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my son; today I have become your father.' <sup>34</sup> God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.' <sup>35</sup> So it is also stated elsewhere: 'You will not let your holy one see decay.'

<sup>36</sup> "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. <sup>37</sup> But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. <sup>38</sup> Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. <sup>40</sup> Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: <sup>41</sup> 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'"

<sup>42</sup> As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.

<sup>43</sup> When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. <sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. <sup>46</sup> Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

<sup>49</sup> The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. <sup>51</sup> So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Good morning friends, and thank you, Syd, for my own little intro!

Well, we remain in lockdown. We don't know how long it's going on for, this lockdown number 6, and so we're not meeting together, we can't go and visit each other for special birthdays that are happening this week—Happy Birthday to those people who are having birthdays this week, including our own Patrick\*—but we can't go and visit in each other's homes. Our churches aren't meeting. People are staying away from one another. And we do this because we want to serve and love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and abide by the law.

I wonder if you've seen in the news reports in the last couple of weeks that there have been lockdown protests. In the protests in Melbourne and Sydney and Adelaide there were pictures of people holding up signs that said, 'Jesus is my vaccine'. Also, a church in Sydney was fined last week because they continued to meet, breaking the law. They weren't wearing masks, they weren't QR-coding in; and in fact their pastor had encouraged them not to be vaccinated.

Are these the messages that Australians need to hear from Christians? That Jesus is our vaccine, so we don't need to worry about the pandemic? Is this the message of the Christian faith that should be shouted abroad?

Well, let me assure you that most churches in Australia are doing like we're doing, abiding by the law, staying apart for love for one another.

As we look at this account from the book of Acts—we're starting on our new series, looking at the second part of the book of Acts: we did the first part earlier on this year—and so here we see, from this point on, the gospel of the Lord Jesus moving out to other parts, outside of Jerusalem. And here we have the very long sermon—don't worry, my sermon won't be as long as Paul's (God

willing)<sup>†</sup>—but here we have, in this account of Paul's sermon, how he sets up the whole second half of the book. And he speaks to the people in the synagogue about God, and what is most important in the gospel of our Lord Jesus. So firstly he reminds them of God's faithfulness to his people, in verses 13–22.

What is the good news of the Gospel? Well, firstly it is about God's love. It's not firstly about us, it's about God, and God's love for people. The task given by Jesus to the disciple was to go into the world and tell them—not about how to make their lives easier, free from pain, free from difficulty—but to tell them about the risen Lord Jesus.

So in Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are in Antioch, that place where the believers were first called Christians. And as was their custom, they went to the local synagogue, to sit among Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. They were invited to speak.

And so Paul, very cleverly, starts with a reminder to the listeners about God's love and faithfulness right from the very beginning. He starts with what they know. He gives them, in verses 16–22, a brief reminder of God and his loving faithfulness to his people, from the time of Exodus, through to the Judges, through to the time of Kings, and finally to the greatest King, King David.

And he reminds them that God is faithful: God will keep his promises. And so we know that God's people were looking forward to the presence and the coming of the Saviour.

So firstly, the apostle Paul reminds his friends of God's love and faithfulness; and he uses this to open up about how God finally worked in the person of the Lord Jesus. Secondly, he speaks of the resurrected Jesus as the Saviour.

You know that TV show, *Who Do You Think You Are?* People are very taken with that, finding key people in their ancestors. Also, 'ancestry.com' has become very popular of late. Well here, the apostle Paul moves straight from King David, the great ancestor, to the promised Saviour who was to bring salvation.

In verse 23 of chapter 13 the apostle Paul says: *From this man's descendants—from David—God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised.* He speaks boldly about Jesus, and he doesn't shy away from Jesus' death at the hands of the Romans and the religious leaders of the day but shows how Jesus is the Saviour because of his resurrection from the dead.

Four times in the space of about seven verses the apostle speaks about Jesus being raised from the dead; and why wouldn't he? This is the key thing that showed God's vindication of the Lord Jesus Christ as the promised Saviour. In verse 30 he says *God raised [Jesus] from the dead.* In verses 32 and 33: *We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.* Verse 34: *God raised [Jesus] from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay.* And verse 37: *But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.*

<sup>†</sup> Paul's sermon as read by Patrick: 3 minutes 47 seconds. Denise's sermon: 16 minutes 26 seconds. Admittedly the record of Paul's sermon in Acts is no doubt a *précis*.

\* Patrick turned 30 on 2nd September.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is absolutely central to the Christian faith. It was preached about Jesus by the first witnesses to the resurrection. And the resurrection is still the fulcrum of the Christian faith: that which gives us all access to the Father and justification before God, the forgiveness of our sins.

I think for me, as I read through a number of times this sermon that Paul gives, a key section is in verses 38 and 39, when he says to those listening: *Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.* Jesus said that he would come and give his life for many, and after three days be raised from death.

When people try to put a wedge between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the apostle Paul in the later church, we see from this passage that there is no such disjunction. Here, as Paul preaches to the people about the resurrection of Jesus, it is the same message that Jesus gave before his death and at his resurrection. It is the same message that Peter gave to people at the beginning of the Book of Acts, and it is the same message for us today: that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed—through Jesus the Resurrected One.

Yes, Jesus' resurrection is the basis of our standing before God, and it is what makes him the Saviour and the Lord.

So Paul reminds his friends of God's love; he speaks of the resurrection of Jesus; and thirdly and finally he calls for a response. 'Yesterday's sermon is brought to you by the letter R for resurrection.'

In verse 42: *As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.* The preaching about Jesus aroused curiosity and interest, and no doubt more conversation and prayer, so that the following week, as they came back to the synagogue, it was packed to the gunwales. People had come from around the whole city to hear this news about the resurrection of Jesus.

Of course there were different responses to this message: some of jealousy—and a response of interest. A response of attack—and a response of welcome. That's always the way when the Good News is proclaimed. Some people hear it and receive it as good news. Others reject it.

It's also from this point on, in the spread of the gospel of Jesus, that we see that the Good News starts to move out from where it originally started. And it also sees a bit of a change in focus for Paul and Barnabas, when they decide to go and proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the Gentiles: to proclaim to them that all were welcome in God's family, not just Jews.

Now of course it doesn't mean that Paul or Barnabas never spoke to Jewish people, or Peter never spoke to Gentile people; but the focus or their ministries were different.

As some of the Jewish leaders became jealous and berated and argued with Paul, he commented in verses 47 and 48, quoting from Scripture (you notice he quotes from the Old Testament a lot during this sermon to prove his point about Jesus): *"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*

*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

Pain and joy followed the disciples as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus. We see right at the end of this section that Paul and Barnabas are expelled from this region. And yet how do they respond? They responded with joy.

We see that some rejected and some accepted the message of the risen Christ, the risen Lord Jesus. And it's the same today, isn't it? We, as Christians, respond with joy to the message of Jesus' resurrection. It's why we meet on Sundays as we celebrate his resurrection from the dead. We celebrate Jesus and his resurrection in our worship each week. We sing praises to him. We recall his death and resurrection when we share Communion together. And we always pray to God the Father through the Lord Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We worship Jesus, for, as Paul says in verses 38 and 39: *through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.* This we proclaim, this wonderful message. And we pray that many would also hear this message and respond with joy. We proclaim the risen Lord Jesus.

Well, I loved that we sang that Martin Luther hymn [*A mighty fortress is our God*] at the start of our service today. At the start of this sermon I also spoke about people who were saying Jesus is their vaccine. How do we respond, today, in the midst of a pandemic? Well of course we continue to rely on the resurrected Lord Jesus. But I found this letter—not I personally, it's been found for quite a while—that Martin Luther wrote to his friend, Johann Hess [Johannes Heß], at the time of bubonic plague. They were going through a really difficult time, the Christians there—the whole world, in the 1500s; and Johann Hess wrote to his friend, Martin Luther, What should we do in the midst of this? How should we respond as God's people?

And Luther wrote back to his friend (this is a little part of quite a long letter): *I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely . . . See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.<sup>‡</sup>*

<sup>‡</sup> From Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 43:113. The translation is by Carl J. Schindler. Full text available at <https://rockrohr.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Luther-WHETHER-ONE-MAY-FLEE-FROM-A-DEADLY-PLAGUE.pdf> Original German text: <https://archive.is/wJC0c#selection-136899.26-136899.39>

What is the message that all the world needs to hear in the midst of pandemic—that we need to be assured of in our faith? Well, as Paul preached to his friends in Antioch, we always need to be reminded of God's love; to remember that the resurrected Jesus is the Saviour of all who believe; and our response: we rejoice, and pray our loving God and heavenly Father, and sing praises to our risen Lord Jesus—even in this time of plague.

## Acts 15:1–21

The 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, 12 September

by Patrick Senn

<sup>1</sup> *Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'*<sup>2</sup> *This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.*<sup>3</sup> *The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.*<sup>4</sup> *When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.'*

<sup>6</sup> *The apostles and elders met to consider this question.*<sup>7</sup> *After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: 'Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles should hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.'*<sup>8</sup> *God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.*<sup>9</sup> *He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.*<sup>10</sup> *Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?*<sup>11</sup> *No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.'*

<sup>12</sup> *The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.*<sup>13</sup> *When they finished, James spoke up. 'Brothers,' he said, 'listen to me.'*<sup>14</sup> *Simon<sup>[a]</sup> has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.*<sup>15</sup> *The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:*

<sup>16</sup> *"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent.*

*Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,*

<sup>17</sup> *that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,*

*even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things" –*

<sup>18</sup> *things known from long ago.*

<sup>19</sup> *'It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.'*<sup>20</sup> *Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.*<sup>21</sup> *For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.*

## Introduction

Today marks the 39<sup>th</sup> day of lockdown 6. I am sure we all are so tired and over it. But, unlike last year where there was no clear end in sight, now we have vaccines and the next opening will not depend on the unrealistic and unsustainable zero cases. What is more, all our state and territory leaders came together and agreed on the path towards reopening Australia. Unfortunately, there is now division over the national plan. WA and Queensland have decided that it is not yet time for outsiders to be welcomed into their state. They do not want interstate or international arrivals. The only people allowed are those who already are in. The disagreement between our leaders surrounding their state borders has really tested the limits of our federation. Many have remarked that during this pandemic Australia has not at all felt like one country but more like six separate countries on one big island. It is surprising how powerless, at times, the Prime Minister has appeared, and how unable he is to make overruling decisions.

As we continue reading through the Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 15 today we also encounter division and disagreement. The church began in Jerusalem and was mainly a Jewish movement. But, as the story of Acts unfolds more and more non-Jews or Gentiles also become followers of Jesus. And the question arises: Are Gentiles allowed into the family of God as they are, or do they have to change and become Jewish? Fortunately for us the early church was not a federation with a powerless leader on top. Rather, the apostles came together and decreed that Gentiles are accepted as they are into people of God on the basis of their faith, their belief. Acts 15 recounts the very first church council to resolve a controversy, and it is the basis of the good news why all of us, even though we are non-Jews, can still approach God in prayer and worship as his own people.

## Acts 15:1–5

Our passage begins with Paul and Barnabas in the city of Antioch in modern day Turkey. Meeting at the church there, Paul and Barnabas share about the success of their journey, how a bunch of Gentiles and a numbers of Jews became followers of Jesus after hearing Paul's preaching. But we are told, "*Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'*" Certain Jewish Christians arrive at Antioch and tell the Gentile Christians that they do not really belong, they have not been fully saved. The men still need to be circumcised, they still need to receive the Jewish mark going back to Abraham, that a man really belongs to the family of God.

You might remember earlier this year in Lent when we read through St Paul's letter to the Galatians. In that letter this is the very same controversy he tackles, arguing against a group that was telling the Galatians they needed to uphold the whole Jewish law, including circumcision, in order to really belong to God's people. And there are some scholars who think that the group in Galatians is the same group that came down to Antioch here in Acts 15.

It is disheartening to suddenly place someone under burdensome laws and re-

quirements, especially if these threaten your new-found identity. This is exactly what has happened in Afghanistan after the Taliban gained power, and what has caused so much distress in the world recently. Under the western coalition, Afghan women and girls for the first time could study, get an education, and get prominent roles in society. They gained a new form of identity. Now, suddenly with the arrival of the Taliban and a new form of law, all that is radically gone. The Gentiles believed in Jesus, were baptised, and promised inclusion in God's family and the forgiveness of their sins. And now they are being told that none of this will happen unless they become Jewish through circumcision and uphold the Law of Moses. Believing in Jesus is not enough.

Verse 2 tells us all this causes a sharp dispute between them and Paul and Barnabas. And the disagreement gets so serious that they have to take it all the way to the National Cabinet—a meeting in Jerusalem with the apostles, the leaders Jesus himself appointed as his successors.

## Acts 15:6–11

In Jerusalem, the disagreement continues. The Jewish Christians open the floor with their position: "*The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.*" And again, there is much debate and discussion just like we see in Parliament. The speeches we have are probably just the highlights of that meeting.

St Peter is the first apostle to speak, and he makes a few points based on his own ministry experiences that we read about in chapter 10. First of all, Peter was chosen to preach the message of Jesus to the Gentiles by no one other than God himself. And not only this, but the Gentiles believed in Jesus and then received the Holy Spirit, just like all the apostles did at Pentecost. He says, "*God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted [the Gentiles] by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.*" Clearly, this shows that God accepts both Jews and Gentiles equally since both have received the Holy Spirit. There is no discrimination.

The second point Peter makes is that to demand that the Gentiles be circumcised before they can be saved is to place a negative burden on them, a heavy yoke that not even the Jews could carry. Because all people are sinners, it is difficult to uphold God's law, and the history of Israel clearly shows this. In the OT we see how generation after generation the people sin and become unfaithful. Peter concludes, "*it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.*"

Peter's speech to the church council is good and encouraging news for us today. It gets close to the central message at the heart of Christianity: That through Jesus and believing in him, God cleanses us from all our evil deeds and accepts us as his own people. It is by faith alone, a living trust in Jesus, that God promises to save us. Not faith plus something; faith plus circumcision, faith plus good deeds, faith plus being on the church roster. It is by faith alone that God welcomes us, accepts us, and makes us right with him.

This also has practical implications for the pandemic times we find ourselves in today. As more and more people are getting vaccinated, there will also increasingly be

people who refuse to be vaccinated for different reasons. I do not mean those who refuse for medical reasons, but those who refuse because they believe in conspiracy theories, lies and misinformation. As time goes on, there will be the increasing temptation to demonise and shame them. This is exactly what is happening around the world. In the US, there are people openly gleeful that unvaccinated people have died from COVID-19. But if God accepts us not on the basis of any of our status or accomplishments, but purely by faith alone without discrimination, then we cannot make vaccination status into a category. Of course, anti-vaxxers are wrong, and I want them to get the vaccine. But, we cannot regard ourselves as morally superior and act smug about it.

## Acts 15:12–21

Well, James is the next apostle to give a detailed speech at the council. He agrees with Simon Peter's main point, and he adds that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the family of God actually fulfils what the prophet Amos predicted long ago. James says, "*The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' — things known from long ago.*" The prophecy of Amos quoted here was actually made after Judah was exiled for being unfaithful to God, and the royal dynasty of David came to an end. But, the prophecy promises that God will not give up on his people but restore David's line—his tent—in such a way that even the Gentiles will be included. God's plan for Israel always included the Gentiles. For James, this means "*we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.*" The Gentiles must not be forced to be circumcised and follow Jewish customs in order to be accepted by God and saved. And with this, the whole disagreement and controversy is solved.

Still, there are practical applications for the Gentiles. They do not have to become Jewish in order to be accepted by God. They can remain Gentiles. But, if you belong to a holy God, then it follows that you must live a holy life. The four prohibitions James mention all concern idolatry, the worshipping of false gods. They all in one way or another boil down to the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods but me." If the Gentiles really belong to the God of Israel, it naturally follows that they must live like it too.

And so they are to avoid foods sacrificed to other gods, sexual immorality which is an umbrella term for unlawful sexual relations outside of marriage, eating meat that has been strangled and thus not properly drained of blood, and eating blood itself. Each of these were particularly offensive to Jews, and if Jews and Gentiles were to associate together in churches it was really important that the Gentiles avoided them in order to maintain harmony.

The decree of the Council of Jerusalem is wonderful news for us. Because Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins, and because he rose to new life and sent the Holy Spirit to also make us new, we are accepted by God, as Gentiles, by faith alone. We do not have to become something we are not, and we do not have to become Jewish. But, this does

not mean that we are free from God's law. After all, we regularly read the Ten Commandments as a way to live good lives before God. While we still follow and obey the law of God, this is a sign that God already accepts us. We do not earn our acceptance by keeping God's law; rather, we do it to offer up our lives as a living sacrifice to God.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, as our state and territory leaders bicker and disagree with each other, and the PM often seems powerless to make any overriding decisions, we can be grateful that the apostles had authority to make overruling decrees and decisions. Their declaration regarding the inclusion of Gentiles is wonderfully good news for us. God does not look upon status, achievements, or badges of honour. God looks upon those who put their trust in Jesus. All who believe in Christ God makes right with himself. He forgives their sins, sends the Holy Spirit to renew them, and includes them among the people he calls his own. And this is why we can confidently approach God even though we are not Jewish. We truly are his own.

AMEN.

## Acts 16:1–15

### Human Wisdom and God's Leading

17th Sunday after Trinity, 19th September  
by Denise Nicholls

<sup>1</sup> Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup> The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

<sup>4</sup> As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

<sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup> From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

<sup>13</sup> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Well, are you having mince for dinner, or chicken? Or perhaps you're thinking, hmm, will I get pizza from Uber Eats, or maybe Chinese. You know, we make decisions every day—from what we're going to wear, to what we're going to eat, to 'Are we going to leave for work on time?' (when we could leave for work in those days). Most of our decisions aren't that huge.

But some are big. When I became a Christian in the mid-80s, one of the big issues was, how can we as Christians make decisions that are godly? How can we make sure we are making decisions that are in line with God's will? So I've entitled our sermon today **Human Wisdom and God's Leading**.

I don't think it really matters to God whether we have mince or chicken for dinner; but as we read through the Book of Acts we see some of the things that happen, and how God changes the plans of his faithful people. How do we decide what to do? How can we be led by the Spirit?

Sometimes, it's just a good idea: we think, this is a good idea to do this or that. For example, Catriona coming to serve with us here at Banyule for the year: we had a conversation—a couple of conversations—on the phone, and we prayed, and then I left it up to Catriona; and she brought it before God, and she thought it was right for her to come here.

Today we're looking at Timothy, Lydia, and the Spirit of Jesus. And my first point is 'Whaat! What are you talking about?' Because here we meet Timothy, who becomes Paul's travelling companion. And I don't know if you noticed when the Scriptures were read—there was a bit of a jolt. Because remember last week, we were talking about that the Council of Jerusalem made a decision: did a Gentile have to be circumcised—become Jewish—to be a believer in Jesus; and the church and the leaders all decided 'NO!, a Gentile does not need to become a Jew to be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus'.

And yet, a bit of a jolt. Because right at the beginning, we see that as Paul meets Timothy he wants to take him along as a travelling companion. Timothy was a believer in the Lord Jesus. His mother was Jewish, but she was a believer in Jesus; also his grandmother as well—Eunice and Lois. Three generations in his family who had become Christian. But his father was Greek; yet we know from last week's teaching, as we read through chapter 15 of Acts, that Gentiles do not need to become Jews to be Christians.

And yet, did you read what Paul did? He decided, because he wanted to take Timothy along with him, and everyone knew that his father was a Greek, and so he had him circumcised. He was well attested to, well spoken of by people.

It's a bit like our student minister Catriona: as she is serving us here, she meets with me, and she also meets with her field committee, members of our own congregation here, who give her feedback. She writes a report to them about once a term, and they have to write a report for her, which will form the basis of my report to the college, and to her bishop back in Tasmania at the end of the year. This is all in preparation for her ordination at the beginning of 2023—God willing—then the bishop will be told that she

has been examined: people attest to her fitness for ministry.

So why does Paul really hammer home the fact that you don't have to be circumcised to be a believer in Jesus, and yet turns around and circumcises Timothy? What's going on here? Well, everybody knew in that area that Timothy came from a family where his mother was a follower, a worshipper of God, and his father was not. Because Paul wanted to take him along in his missionary journey, he wanted to do what would not be distracting for other people who were Jewish in the areas that they were going to. You see, even though Timothy was not circumcised he was still regarded as a Jew, but as **an un-circumcised Jew**; which meant that he would never be allowed to go into a synagogue; and him being with Paul, as Paul preached that Jesus was the Messiah, would be a distraction to the main message of Jesus. So what was going to be most helpful in their missionary journeys? Timothy agreed and Paul went ahead and had him circumcised, so that he could enter a synagogue.

It's a little bit like—not to the same extent—but a friend of mine works in an area of Sydney, one of the hot spots at the moment, among a lot of Muslim people. Now when she's one of my travelling buddies and when we go to Byron Bay we happily lay on the beach in our swimmers, and I think that that's totally fine. Yet when she is walking around and shopping in her area, or visiting her Muslim friends, she makes sure that she is covered up: her arms are covered, her legs are covered, she wears a long top to cover over her hips. In most communities she doesn't need to do that; but to be honouring to her friends she wants to do what is most helpful, what will not distract from the message of Jesus, and so she dresses modestly. She doesn't cover her head—she says that that's actually a real talking point: they say you dress modestly, why don't you cover your head? And she says, because I have freedom in Jesus; and in freedom she can choose to wear what she likes.

So this is why Paul—with Timothy, who becomes his travelling companion, and a great leader in the church, especially in Ephesus—this is why Paul went to this decision. And so we hear in verse 4 that as they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for the people to obey. So, the churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in number.

Yes, Paul wanted to make sure that there was a door open to the Gentiles, but he also didn't want to shut the door on any Jewish people whom he might come across, and who might believe in Jesus. So in some ways it was his human wisdom; in some ways it was pragmatism; but clearly it was God-led.

We know that Paul is clear about the issue of what does a person have to do to be a Christian: simply by believing in Jesus. We read that throughout 1 Corinthians, especially when he can go on to say, even despite what he's done with Timothy, to say 'Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not

become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. That's from 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

And a little later we see Paul's God-led pragmatism and his God-led wisdom in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, where he says: *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews . . . I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.*

Timothy joined Paul and became a faithful and very important travelling companion, and he underwent circumcision simply to make it easier for others to hear the good news of Jesus.

Well secondly, the good plan that the disciples had is in verses 6–10. They had a good plan, but it wasn't quite God's plan. They had journeyed to preach the good news—there was nothing wrong with their plan; but we read from verses 6–10 that God kept opening some doors and shutting others.

Let me read you verses 6–10: *Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

So despite the good plans laid out by the travelling band of people, who wanted to share the good news of Jesus with many, the Holy Spirit intervened. Did you notice that twice the Holy Spirit is mentioned here; and once he's called the Holy Spirit, in verse 6, and then, in verse 7, the Spirit of Jesus. So the Holy Spirit is known variously throughout Scripture as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Creator Spirit—all one Spirit.

You see, they were planning to go a bit more into Asia; and yet they were called over to Macedonia: the beginning of the spread of the good news into the area that we now call Europe. A number of years ago, I had the great fortune of visiting Istanbul: an amazing city, just incredible; and you can take a boat trip on the Bosphorus and on one side of you is a land mass that's Asia, and on the other side of the Bosphorus that you can just see—hop off on either side—is Europe. The Bosphorus is the region that splits Europe from Asia.

Paul and his companions are called through a vision to go to Macedonia. It was a significant thing. Sometimes we don't know what God is calling us to. Sometimes it might be an inner growing conviction. I know on occasions when I thought, "Oh no, I won't listen to that!" it's clearly been a direction from God.

Sometimes what our decision-making will do, will come from a growing conviction that this is a good thing to do, and it seems in line with God's Spirit. Usually for us, it'll be something that seems good to do, but we're

not quite sure, so we might push on a few different doors, as Catriona did with us. She spoke to a few different people about where she should serve her first year as a student minister; and lucky for us, the other church where she applied said, "We think you should go and work at Banyule for a year". Wasn't that kind of them? So thank you to that church at Moonee Ponds, because we've had the benefit of Catriona.

Sometimes we have a decision to make, and one way just seems a good thing to do; or we push on doors and see what opens. God closes some and opens some. Sometimes we might say, "I would never do this, that, or the other!" That's what missionaries say: "Don't ever say I will never go to this, that, or wherever place"—that often is the place they end up!

I always said I would never work in a private school, and for twelve years of my ministry career so far I have worked in private schools, even though I'd said I never would.

Did you also notice in verse 10 that the author of Acts, Luke, changes how he's speaking? It's clear that Luke has joined them, because he says "we got ready at once . . . God had called us to preach the gospel to them". So from verse 10 of chapter 16 onwards, we see Luke totally aware, intimately aware, of what was happening with Paul because he joined him on much of his missionary travel.

So they go to Philippi, a leading city of Macedonia, a Roman colony—a little bit of Rome plonked out almost in the middle of nowhere, away from Rome, under Roman law. Usually what happened in the Roman empire was, when they needed to give land to their soldiers, they would set up a town, like they did with Philippi. And so there were many Romans who were living there. Philippi, that great city, and the city where we hear of the letter to the Philippians.

And it's here that we meet Lydia. So point three: Lydia (verses 13–15).

The strategy of the apostolic team had always been so far to begin at a synagogue, where they could declare that Jesus was the Messiah who had been crucified and raised from the dead. A synagogue still today is only a valid meeting among Jewish people when there are ten men aged thirteen years or above (or in some of the more progressive synagogues today, ten adult people, not just adult men). It seems that there was no synagogue in Philippi. So on the Sabbath day Paul and his companions went where they thought they would find some God-fearing Jewish people: they went to the river and they gathered there. And who was there? A group of Jews and God-fearers, who worshipped the God of Israel—that's what a God-fearer means: someone who worships the true living God—but no men were there: simply a group of women.

So not losing the opportunity—seeing an opportunity that God has opened for them—Luke tells us that Paul and his disciples began to speak to the group of women. Verse 14: *One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*

The first person we hear of coming to faith in the Lord Jesus in Philippi is a Gentile woman. Lydia, a businesswoman, a dealer in the richest of cloth—purple cloth. This account of Lydia's conversion parallels the story of Peter's evangelism of Cornelius, the Roman soldier, that we see in Acts chapter 10.

Did you notice the emphasis on God's word, in bringing people to faith? The Scripture says she was a worshipper of God: the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. God does the work. The apostles, the travellers, they proclaim the message of Jesus; but it is God who brings people to faith: such that Lydia and her household—which would mean everyone living under her roof and her patronage, children, slaves, extended family—were baptised, knowing, loving, and serving the Lord Jesus. And she extended her patronage to the disciples and welcomed them into her home.

Human wisdom, and God's leading.

Paul and his companions had a plan, but it changed along the way.

A new companion joined them—Timothy—and so Paul had him marked as an observant Jew, so that for the sake of the gospel no Jewish person would be hindered in hearing the message of Jesus.

They had planned to preach in Asia, but the Spirit of God the Spirit of Jesus, said 'no'. They were given a vision of a man from Macedonia calling for them to come and hear the good news—so they go to Philippi, a leading city, expecting to find at least a man there; but the first person who responded to the message was a woman.

What can we learn from this? Well, we learn through this part of Scripture, these accounts in Acts, how God uses his people to accomplish his plans, and his purposes for people. And he still does. Think of the people who have helped you in your Christian faith, who have brought you to faith. Think of the people you have helped encourage. And yet God's vision is even bigger than our human vision.

Yes, of course it's fine to make plans and strategies: that's a good thing to do; but they need to be made under God and guided by the Spirit of God. At our Parish Council meetings we always pray that we would make good and godly and wise decisions. We want to be guided by the Spirit of God. And sometimes God does give to people, like he gave to Paul, a vision; but mostly he uses our plans and our openness to the leading of the Spirit.

He does this as we converse with one another: as we talk about ideas, as we hear wisdom from other Christians who've been in a similar situation, or who might have a greater understanding. We do it in the company of the Church, of our friends. And sometimes God brings to us opportunities that we had not foreseen—like Lydia, a woman, hearing the gospel.

So what is our vision for our Christian life? What is our vision for our church? Whatever it is, God's vision will be bigger! God will bring his purposes to fruition, and yet they will be bigger and bolder than even we can imagine. Human wisdom, God's leading, working together. God uses both, but we must always be under the leading of our great God and loving heavenly Father. Amen.

## Acts 16:16–40

### Responding in a Godly Way to Trouble and Persecution

26th September 2021

by Helen McAlley

<sup>16</sup> Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." <sup>18</sup> She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

<sup>19</sup> When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. <sup>20</sup> They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar <sup>21</sup> by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

<sup>35</sup> When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." <sup>36</sup> The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

<sup>37</sup> But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

<sup>38</sup> The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. <sup>39</sup> They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup> After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

### Paul the Persecutor

We can learn such a lot from the life of the apostle Paul. We know he led a different sort of life as a younger person, then called Saul. He was a zealous Jew and very clever. He knew all about the Jewish law. We read in Acts 8:3 that, in his zeal, he tried to destroy the newly emerging Christian church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them into prison. He participated in the terrible killing by stoning of Stephen. Speaking later on to King Agrippa, Paul explains that he cast his vote against Christians when they were condemned to death. Many times he had Christians punished in synagogues in order to get them to curse Jesus.

I would like to make a general observation about Paul before we go on to today's Bible passage.

### Leaving the Past Behind

Saul had that amazing experience of Jesus on the Damascus Road. Jesus told him that in persecuting the church he was persecuting Jesus Himself. He became a changed man. Later, maybe remembering how he had acted towards the Christians, Paul described himself as 'the chief of sinners.' He may have been tempted to be tormented by the memory of what he had done and thought he was not worthy to do God's work in any way.

We too can be tormented by the things we have done in the past. The enemy can whisper to us that we do not have the right to do God's work. Who do we think we are? We may think that we should just hide in a corner and let other more worthy people work for God.

Paul must have made a conscious decision not to let his past affect his work for God. He knew God had forgiven him and he would have chosen to forgive himself. Writing to the Philippians, he said, 'This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus'. (Phil. 3:13–14).

Does the enemy ever torment you with sins of the past? As soon as you recognise what is happening it may be helpful to say aloud: God has forgiven that sin. I forgive myself and I will not allow it to stop me from doing what God has called me to do today. I resist the enemy in the name of Jesus and I go forward in God's strength to do the work God has called me to do.

Paul went on to be an amazing Christian in God's grace and strength writing a third of the New Testament. He also went on a number of missionary journeys and planted many churches. And he suffered much pain and persecution in the course of these journeys.

### The Power of Jesus' Name

In our reading today, we find Paul with his fellow worker Silas at Philippi. Paul, Silas and Luke were followed by a slave girl who had an evil spirit of divination. Paul ordered this evil spirit to come out to the girl in the name of Jesus. The owners of this slave-girl were annoyed that they could now no longer make money from her. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities. They were stripped of their clothing and given a severe flogging. Then they were thrown into prison into the innermost cell and they were chained to the wall with their feet fastened in stocks. Can you imagine a more difficult predicament to be in?

Going back to the story of the slave-girl for a moment: notice the power of the name of Jesus to deliver her from the evil spirit? Paul could not do that in his own strength, but only because he was 'in Christ' and had the authority to use the name of Jesus. Some Christians do not like talking about the devil at all, and some become obsessed with the idea of Satan. I like the perspective given by the Christian writer Jeff Lucas in his book 'Notorious – An Integrated Study of the Rogues, Scoundrels and Scallywags of Scripture'. Lucas writes:

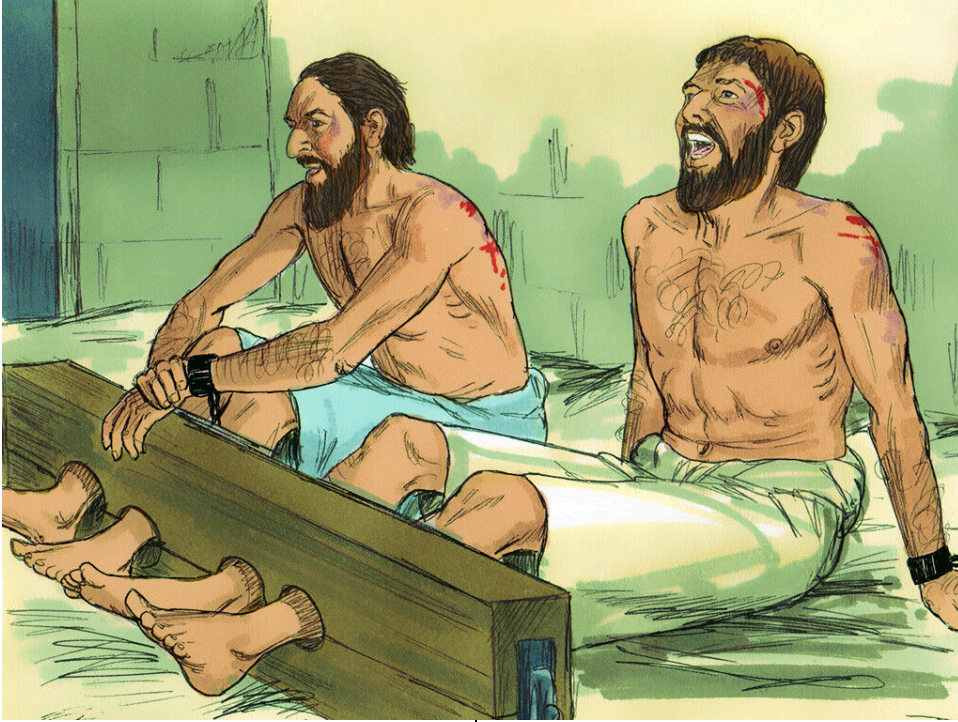
'It was during one of those prayer times that happen before a service. The little gaggle of leaders gathered in a circle and were sharing prayers and murmured "Amen's" of agreement. Suddenly, one of the group began to fervently intercede against the interference of the devil, loudly binding any satanic activity that might hinder the effectiveness of the service that was about to start. I looked up and glanced across the room to see a fellow leader staring back at me, rolling his eyes, an expression of "this is a bit over the top isn't it?" on his face. I understood his look. Some Christians are over-preoccupied with the enemy. But the other extreme, where we forget that we are involved in a spiritual battle, is equally dangerous. We are people of the light, and there are powers of darkness that seek to resist what we do in Jesus' name.'

### An Uncomfortable Time in Prison

But getting back to Paul and Silas in prison....How do you think you would feel if you were in their situation? They would have had open wounds from the flogging. They would have been in pain. They would have been hungry. They would have been in a most uncomfortable position. Sleep would have been impossible. How easy it would have been to bitterly curse those who had treated them so unjustly, especially as they were Roman citizens and it was against the law for them to be treated as they had been. But what did they do? At midnight, we are told, they were praying and singing hymns to God. This would not have been their natural inclination surely. It would have been a decision. And we also read that the other prisoners, some of whom would have been condemned to death and all in a hopeless situation in that terrible prison, were listening intently to Paul and Silas. Because they did not get bitter and trusted God in that situation, Paul and Silas were given a wonderful opportunity to witness to the saving power of the gospel.

### How do we Respond to Difficulties?

When we are going through difficult times, do we say to ourselves: this is too hard for me? Do we give in to self-pity and bitterness? It is so easy to do that. But if we can make that conscious effort to trust the Lord in that situation, however difficult, we too can become a witness to others. Paul himself wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:13, 'No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.' Jesus said at the Last Supper, 'In this world you will have trouble, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world'. However difficult our situation, Jesus promises victory.



In those difficult situations, we need to acknowledge our feelings. That is important. But then we might remind ourselves that we will not be tempted beyond our strength and thank God that He is giving us the victory even in this difficult situation. Then we can make the decision to praise God in that situation as Paul and Silas did. We praise God not because we feel like it. It is a decision. Paul also wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, 'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.'

Many of the psalms have a pattern of expressing very strong feelings about something that has happened. There might be feelings of anger and deep distress. But having expressed these feelings, the Psalmist will often then go on to affirm trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. We need to follow this pattern in our own lives.

Paul knew that he would have trouble in this world, but he also knew that he was a citizen of heaven. He had also been privileged to receive visions and revelations of the Lord Jesus Christ when he had been caught up into heaven. Jesus was very real to Him and heaven was very real to him (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). He had also experienced Jesus on the Damascus Road, as I've already mentioned. These experiences would have helped him to endure the many hardships that he went through. He was not afraid to die and heaven was as real to him as this world. We may not have had the experiences of Paul, but we do have many promises in Scripture to encourage us, as well as our own relationship with the Lord. We can remember how He has helped us in past difficulties, and have that reassurance that He will not fail us now. We also have the testimonies of other Christians who, over the centuries, have proved that God is faithful and will look after us whatever happens. In fact as Paul himself says, 'Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's' (Romans 14:6).

I don't want to sound trite or to suggest that it is easy. I'm talking to myself too and I'm old enough to have lived through some deep troubles and have struggled quite a lot with some of them.

### A Violent Earthquake and Salvation

As Paul and Silas were singing hymns and praying, there was a violent earthquake. The foundations of the prison were shaken, all the doors were opened and the chains of all the prisoners were unfastened. The jailor drew his sword and was about to kill himself. He knew he would be in trouble if the prisoners escaped. But Paul called out to him loudly, 'Do not harm yourself for we are all here.' We don't know what happened to the other prisoners. I would like to think they trusted in God for salvation as they had been listening so intently to Paul and Silas's prayer and praise. Maybe the jailor had also been listening to them because he rushed in and fell down trembling before them asking, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' This gave the missionaries the opportunity to explain the gospel to the jailor and his household. He and his family were baptised without delay. The needs of Paul and Silas were also ministered to. Their wounds were washed and they were given food to eat. What a wonderful end to this story! I doubt if there would have been an end like this to the story if Paul and Silas had been bitter and resentful, rather than praying and praising God.

When we are calm and trusting in God in our times of adversity, it is a witness to those around us. They may want to know what is the source of our strength. They may be encouraged by our example to trust God in their own difficult circumstances. As we decide to trust God, He is honoured as well.

### Encouragement and Departure

Paul and Silas were let out of jail the following morning. Paul was assertive requiring that the magistrates who had allowed them, as Roman citizens, to be treated so unjustly, must themselves come and let them out of prison. The missionaries received an apology and were asked to leave the city. Before they did, however, they went to the house of Lydia who, with her household, had received Jesus as Lord and Saviour and who had a group of Christians meeting in her home. We are told that, before they departed, Paul and Silas

encouraged the brothers and sisters in Lydia's house. This is a reminder to us that, whatever we are going through, or have gone through, we need always to be thinking of how we can bless and encourage others.

### Prayer

Shall we pray: *Dear Lord, help us to follow the example of Paul and not to allow our past sins and failures to prevent us from following your will for us. When troubles come, help us always to remember that you are with us, helping and strengthening us. May we always be strong in the face of trouble and persecution and may we always be a witness to others that you are faithful. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Helen McAlley

### COME TO JESUS

Souls of men! why will ye scatter  
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts! why will ye wander  
From a love so true and deep?

Was there ever kindest shepherd  
Half so gentle, half so sweet  
As the Saviour who would have us  
Come and gather round His Feet?

It is God: His love looks mighty,  
But is mightier than it seems:  
'Tis our Father: and His fondness  
Goes far out beyond our dreams.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea:  
There's a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven;  
There is no place where earth's failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.

There is welcome for the sinner,  
And more graces for the good;  
There is mercy with the Saviour;  
There is healing in His Blood.

There is grace enough for thousands  
Of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations  
In that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind;  
And the Heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make His love too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify His strictness  
With a zeal He will not own.

There is plentiful redemption  
In the Blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.

'Tis not all we owe to Jesus;  
It is something more than all;  
Greater good because of evil,  
Larger mercy through the fall.

Pining Souls! come nearer Jesus,  
And oh come not doubting thus,  
But with faith that trusts more bravely  
His huge tenderness for us.

If our love were but more simple,  
We should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

Frederick William Faber

## Parish Council Notes

### Zoom meeting of Monday 20th September

#### Diocesan standards

- Progressing. Info being looked for.

#### OH&S: COVID 19

- Latest Diocesan Advice. Abp & others addressing State Govt road map with them. Don't want to turn people away from worship over vaccination status.

#### Vicar's report

- 19 Sept Victorian 'Roadmap' gives some indicative dates:
  - Cannot meet indoors at church before Nov
  - Outdoor vs indoor services needs consideration
  - Insistence on double vaccination taken up by Bp Paul Barker – hopeful of some compassion
- Last month quite busy, despite lockdown.
- Patrick off sick last week and most of this week, suspected bronchitis.
- Continue to record Sunday Services on Tues mornings. Thankful to Patrick, Catriona, Syd and Helen. Helen will preach this Tuesday. Syd's 80th birthday Sunday.
- Thursday Bible study continues to meet by Zoom – usually 8. Break over school holidays.
- Morning Prayer (me: Tues, Thurs 8:30 am) and Compline (Patrick: Mon, Wed, Fri 9 pm) services have begun. Compline (up to 6) is proving more popular than MP (2). Believe these opportunities for prayer are important for us to keep pursuing.
- Ongoing Pastoral Care has continued through clergy, & folk keeping in touch with each other.
- Still on track for Patrick to move to half-time with Merri Creek Anglican from 4 October. Yet to finalise which days he will be with us.
- Interviewed proposed new cleric, went really well, will offer.
- Have received donations of \$7000 and a further pledge of \$7000, for new cleric. However Bp Kate hopes money may be found from trust, and donors reimbursed.
- 23 Aug Zoom meeting with Banyule Council and Dio people re Watsonia Town Square project. Council prefers to acquire our car park, diocese prefers to retain and get annuity. We await offers. Should we push to sell?

- Meeting with Bp Kate re Rosanna on 8 Sept went very well. Thanks to those there. Bp Kate full of praise. Have contacted Nick White (Parish Partnerships in the Diocese) who will organise a guidance/alignment meeting.

- Draft Mission Action Plan: to be discussed.

- After three emails, Zoom meeting with Mark Lane on Wed 22 Sept. Reason for lack of communication unclear.

- Applied for Ministry/Curacy grant with Diocese – hopeful.

- Spoke with Bp Brad Billings about prospect of curate for 2022: more parishes looking for a curate than curates needing placing.

- 2-day clergy conference by Zoom 17/18 Aug: *Reimagining the Future – ministry post COVID-19*.

- 19 August full day Ridley College Master Class on Strategic Planning.

- Met my coach for our 4–6 weekly catch up.

- A few extra Area Dean duties with the sudden illness of a cleric last week.

- Pentecostal group wanted to rent Holy Spirit on Sunday mornings: said no. Hope eventually to plant a new Anglican congregation

#### Warden's report

- Because of lockdown, little done.

- Working on evacuation diagrams corrections, placement.

- Probably no strategy meeting this year.

- Our agents now using PropertyMe. Have set up the account, with difficulty.

- Suggest a hybrid in-person + Zoom Annual Parish Meeting as last year.

#### 18/12–16 Jika St

- Downstairs toilet leak because old Caroma cisterns squirt water at their lids. Inlet valve replaced.

#### St John's

- Tennis net post largely fixed (\$331).
- Reza's new contract signed by both parties.

#### 30 Invermay Grove

- Hot-water service failed, replaced (ca. \$2000).
- Bad mould on bathroom ceiling. Negotiating with tenant for him to fix it.

#### 80 Watsonia Rd

- Shed door needs replacement.

#### Holy Spirit:

- After three emails, meeting BSL Wednesday.
- Phone to be cut off in November, so signed up to AussieBroadband 25 Mb/s, at \$69 per mo + phone calls: cheapest business service. No ongoing contract. NBN connexion scheduled 24th Sept, phone ported on 8th Oct.

#### Op shop report: Tabled.

#### Finance report

- Bad month, a lot of income dried up: halls, tennis, etc. Next month will be worse.
- Income includes \$7000 donations for the new cleric, but this can't be used; so our real deficit is \$13,000.
- In August paid Council rates for whole year, except for Jika St and Gloucester Dve, which are stuck in diocese. If we don't get them soon we may have to pay penalty rates.
- Asked for land tax for one property.
- Tiny Dancers hasn't paid for second term.

#### EY/Dio/Banyule discussions

- Last meeting very positive. Awaiting confirmation of new meeting.

#### St John's building subcommittee

- In abeyance due to lockdown. Exemption possible?
- 3 big projects on boil at once: can we cope?

#### Mission Action Plan, Reimagining the Future

- Deferred to a special meeting on 4th Oct.

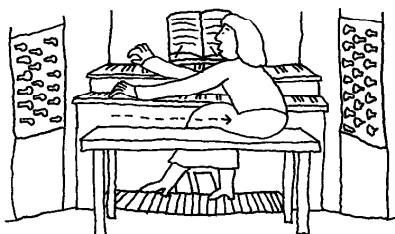
#### General Business

- Abp's visit for 170 years of St John's to be deferred to early next year.
- Received with thanks a bequest of \$1000 from the estate of Ron White. Also \$2000 from the estate of Steve Allen, and Crystal's bequest, and \$7000 for the St John's ramp. Decided:
  - Bequests should go into special projects.
  - Funds should as far as possible be quarantined from normal operating monies.
  - *Babble* article expressing thanks for bequest, encouraging others.
  - Bequest monies to be put in Crystal's account.
- To apply for new Banyule Council Place Enhancement Grants for the St John's car park.

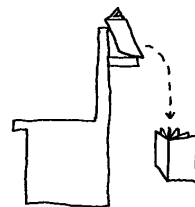
*Minutes and précis by Editor*

## CHURCH CLEANING

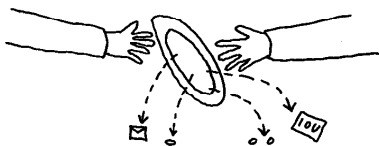
THE PERILS OF OVER-ZEALOUSNESS



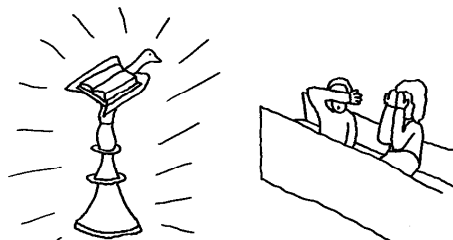
AN UNSECURED ORGANIST



SLIDING HYMNBOOKS



SLIPPERY COLLECTION PLATES



DAZZLING BRASSWORK

## The Hand of God

Little Philip was spending the weekend with his grandmother after a particularly trying week in infant school. His grandmother decided to take him to the park on Saturday morning. It had been snowing all night and everything was beautiful.

His grandmother commented, 'Doesn't it look like an artist painted this scenery? Did you know God painted this just for you?'

'Yes, replied Philip, 'God did it and he did it left-handed.'

This confused his grandmother so she asked him, 'What makes you say God did this with his left hand?' 'Well, 'said Philip, 'we learned at Sunday School last week that Jesus sits on God's right hand.'

[https://www.funny-jokes.com/jokes/clean\\_christian\\_jokes.htm](https://www.funny-jokes.com/jokes/clean_christian_jokes.htm)