# BANYULE BABBLE

The Newsletter of the Anglican Parish of Banyule
St John's Heidelberg ⁂ Holy Spirit Watsonia

**OCTOBER 2025**

Office: 1 Burgundy Street Heidelberg 3084 ph. 9457 1144
Ministers: Canon **Denise Nicholls** 0438 856 376 **Xiaoxi Lou** 0400 063 307
**Weiyi Lou** 0415 959 861 **Helen McAlley** 0447 372 972
Internet: www.banyuleparish.org.au email banyuleparish@gmail.com
*Editor (author of all unsigned articles):* Peter McKay 9459 5852 petergmckay@hotmail.com

## THE X FACTOR

Happy Spring everyone! Hasn't the year gone quickly? (Although I do feel like winter could have been shorter…😉) Having been with you all at the Parish of Banyule since the end of January, I'm finally starting to really settle in and the rhythms of the church feel much more automatic and 'normal'.

This past Sunday (7/9/25) I headed down to Sandringham to preach at Sandringham All Souls Anglican church. Their church is preaching through the Apostle's Creed and I had the privilege of preaching on the phrase 'the communion of saints'. For our Parish we have just started including and looking at a bit of an overview of the Old Testament (including Exodus, Habakkuk, 2 Kings, Amos and Deuteronomy!) it's reminded me of just how big this 'communion of saints' is! Reaching as far back in time as Exodus, we have saints that trusted in God so far back! This 'communion of saints' include prophets, priests, and kings! This communion of saints experienced the parting of the Red Sea; the kingdom including some of the most famous kings in the Bible, and has prophets that experienced visions aplenty!

What a great 'cloud of witnesses' that has come before us! And just as the community of All Souls was reminded:

*[24] And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, [25] not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*[*]

We're no different from the community of saints at All Souls, even though we are almost an hour's drive away. As we head into the second half of the year; as we meet with one another and encourage one another; as we look forward to our new Archbishop joining us all the way from England; and we look forward to Christmas, let us join with the assurance that we are a part of this greater community that spans all times; covers the whole world; and includes all age groups and cultures: let us continue to meet regularly to worship our Great God.

*[21] Since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*[†]

Let us hold tightly to the knowledge of the love and grace we have been shown by our God, through His son Jesus: our brother who was willing and did die on the cross in our place. May we continue to remind each other of this when we forget; and may we continue to turn back to him, even when things are hard and when we are weary.

God bless you and *[23] Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

Amen.

*Xiaoxi*

[*] Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV (UK)
[†] Hebrews 10:21–22 NIV (UK)

## *mainly music:* October 2025

Although term three was a short one, the team are **delighted** to be on a school holiday break! None of us are getting younger.

Two dads and one grandad attended our Fathers' Day celebration and morning tea. It was a joy to see them join in the music activities with their child.

My previous reports have mainly concentrated on the benefits of the music, actions, words and equipment/props used during the structured half-hour session of the weekly program. This time I wish to introduce the topic of socialisation, particularly during the unstructured **play** time after children's morning tea.

Dr Stuart Brown, MD says 'Nothing lights up a child's brain like play.' (No idea who he is, but I liked his comment).

We provide a large variety of books, puzzles, toys and equipment for children's use. This can be anything from a tea-set, 'phone, drawing/deleting board, duplo blocks, xylophone, pull-along caterpillar, etc. Some children tend to gravitate to the same thing each week, but most focus on the variety and learning to master the operation of something new or different. As this year's group of children is very young and small in number, we have used the same toys, etc all year, whereas previously, different options have been introduced during the year.

Socialisation is a fundamental aspect of human development, and its importance is particularly evident during the toddler years. It plays a pivotal role in shaping toddlers' personalities, emotional intelligence and establishing the foundation for future relationships. In other words, it's important in developing and enjoying **friendship**.

At *mainly music*, children are provided with the opportunity to experience a new, safe environment that enables them to develop essential social skills. Interacting with peers, family members and other adults helps children learn how to communicate, share, take turns and express themselves. These early interactions lay the groundwork for effective communication and cooperation in the future. Children are great imitators and learn much by observing how the adults around them interact with others. Emotions such as joy, frustration and empathy are just a few that may be experienced.

In summary, socialisation for toddlers significantly contributes to their language and cognitive development; provides positive social experiences that help them develop essential life skills; form meaningful relationships and navigate the complexities of the wider world as they continue to grow.

*Rhonda Taylor*

## This Month – October

**Wednesday 1st**: 11 am Iris Grange; 3.30 pm Strathalan

**Sunday 5th** *Pentecost 17, Daylight Saving starts:* 9.30 am St John's (all-age); 5 pm Holy Spirit
*Habakkuk 1:1–4, 2:1–4; Luke 17:1–10*

**Sunday 12th** *Pentecost 18:* 9.30 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit
*2 Kings 5:1–3, 7–15c; Luke 17:11–19*

**Sunday 19th** *Pentecost 19:* 9.30 am Combined St John's: Dr Lyn Pearson preaching
*Jeremiah 31:27–34; Luke 18:1–14*

**Wednesday 22nd**: 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers' Union; 3.30 pm Roshana

**Sunday 26th** *Pentecost 20:* 9.30 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit
*Joel 2:23–32; Luke 18:15–30*

## Wanted

- More op shop volunteers

## Money: August

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Income: | Giving: | $7,261.05 |
| | Other: | $20,181.13 |
| | Total: | $27,442.18 |
| Expenses: | | $39,660.01 |
| **Deficit:** | | **$12,217.83** |

Giving was down again. Expenses were high because we were required to update switchboards etc.

## *Holy Spirit Mothers' Union*

Meeting held on **September 24th** at 10 am:

After our usual cuppa & chat, then our MU Service page 10, with two songs from *Covenant Songs*. Then *Correspondence In & Out* and the *Treasurer's Report*, and *General Business*.

**Saturday 18th October**, AGM/Council Meeting 11 am Barbara Darling Room, St Paul's Cathedral. Bring in new Christmas cards to be given to Dame Phyllis Frost and Tarrengower Women's Prisons.

(The Christmas cards from MU, as always, were so gratefully received. Fiona distributed cards to Tarra and she relayed the same message of sincere appreciation from the women. Words can never convey what goes on in the heart, but God knows; and the joy from within when we know someone cares.)

Our meeting finished with midday prayers, praying for Altona MU diocesan members, and Defence Chaplains serving on shore and at sea.

*Elsie Storr*

## *Clergy working hours*

The *Babble* reported in August that the Clergy Remuneration and Working Conditions Committee was looking into the issue of how many days a week clergy should be expected to work. We can now report that they have recommended a five-day working week instead of the current six days, and this recommendation has been accepted by Archbishop-in-Council. There will be no change in stipends.

The implementation date has not yet been announced.

The referral to the Clergy Remuneration and Working Conditions Committee was originally made by Synod in 2023. One of the movers was our own Andrew Bowles. (After he left us, Andrew was Assistant Minister at St John's Diamond Creek (2013–2017), then Vicar of St Mark's Emerald (2017–2024). He is now Human Resources Officer at the Catholic College Wodonga.) Synod normally meets in October, but there will be no Synod in October this year because the new Archbishop will not be installed until 30th November.

## *Mission News*

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

**PRAYER POINTS:**

- Ken Spackman, one of our Mallacoota wardens, has been accepted for Ordination as a Deacon happening at Sale Cathedral on Saturday 18 October. We ask for your prayers for Ken and his wife Anne, as he prepares for ordination. We give thanks for his ministry in the church and community, especially his ability to be a listening ear for many in the community who seek out his advice and wisdom. Pray that this will be a time of great blessing for Ken, Anne, the Parish and the Diocese as he joins the clergy.
- As winter gives way to spring, pray that the new life, growth and energy that the physical spring brings, can be reflected in people's lives and faith.
- As businesses look for summer staff, may the right people move to town.
- Give thanks for our op shop and the ministry of care and listening that it enables. Pray for enough volunteers for summer, and that volunteers will have courage to share their faith.

*(Yuliya Pauliukevich, vecteezy.com)*

*See also the article on Mallacoota on page 6.*

***Rowan in Indonesia***

There have been major protests across Indonesia against the government recently, with reports of ten deaths and hundreds injured or arrested. Rowan assures us that he is safe and well, and the part of the city where he lives is quiet and peaceful. He thanks those who sent emails and messages to see how he was, and those who prayed for him.

He says, 'While the situation across the country has calmed somewhat in comparison to a few weeks ago, it is still unclear whether this is temporary or not.' He asks us to pray, in the words of the Indonesian Anglican Prayer Book, that God will *Bless and guide President Prabowo Subianto, give wisdom to all in authority; and direct and guide this and every nation in the ways of justice and of peace; that all people may honour one another, and seek the common good.*

Rowan also talks about his privilege to be able to explore the Christian faith with three attendees at his church. He asks for prayers for them 'in their journey of faith and discipleship, for their physical and spiritual safety and wellbeing, and for wisdom as I meet with each of them to read the Bible together'.

**PRAYER POINTS:**

- Rowan asks us to thank God for the current peace and calm across the country; and for the courage of those making courageous and costly decisions.
- He also would appreciate prayers for wisdom for the Government as it responds to the recent protests and the issues underlying them; and for safety and protection for those making courageous and costly decisions.


# *Blokes Helping Blokes*

There was something new when the Blokes met again on 6th September, because Glen had been clearing out his house, and had brought his newspaper collection to see if any Blokes wanted any of it. His collection contained some very interesting issues, including announcements of the declaration of the Second World War in the *Herald* and the *Argus*, an announcement of the end of the war in the rare *Pacific Post*, a short-lived 1945 daily newspaper for the British Pacific Fleet; and a wartime issue of the *Daily Guardian* of (apparently) Freetown Sierra Leone, a newspaper unknown to the internet.

These papers and others were offered to the Blokes, and Jim C, who is interested in historical things, took some of them.

Once more we were blessed by the generous gift of eggs by two residents of the Viewbank Gardens Estate, for which the Blokes were very grateful:


Another change this month was that the new dishwasher had arrived. However, Allan insisted that all the plates had to be washed before putting them into the dishwasher, which rather nullified its value. Allan did not himself use the term 'washed': he said that the plates should be 'rinsed'; but as he meant by that that all visible traces of the Blokes' breakfasts adhering to the plates (often very firmly) had to be expunged by use of detergent and vigorous brushing, the Editor will say 'washed'.

Allan said that the Blokes' breakfasts were so cohesive, and so tenacious in their adhesion to the crockery, that no dishwasher, no matter how heavy-duty, could be expected to handle them unassisted.

Rob relieved our fears by informing us that he had had no speeding fines in the previous month. However he did refer to cars following him with flashing 'Christmas lights', so the Blokes were then not so sure.

We were saddened to learn that Len is not at all well. He is currently in 'Twin Parks' care home (the Editor's notes say 'Twin Peaks', but he didn't think that could be right), but it is not known if he will be staying there.

We had an apology from Neil B, but were glad to welcome back Jim R.

Glen is still looking for a 16 mm film projector, but the Blokes still don't have one. One Bloke did make a suggestion where he could go.

Glen had specified that the topic for discussion was 'What has changed in your occupation in the last 40 years?', and he called on Jon to open the discussion. This was a topic on which Jon had very definite views, and he spoke with force.

Jon's occupation is teaching, and he pointed out that while some other Blokes also had professional experience in that area, in fact all the Blokes had experience of that profession, as all of them had been to school at some point in their lives, no matter how distant. Jon's experience of 'then' and 'now' was more dramatic than most, as he went straight from university to a school in Noble Park North in 1987–8, then spent 35 years in the Public Service, and then returned to teaching again. He said some things were better now, but many things were worse.

In 1988, hitting kids with canes or straps had been recently abolished. There was discussion about this. Glen said he had been hit a lot at school, and it did him no good at all. Allan said he used, at Castlemaine Tech in Years 10 & 11, to get six of the best on double hands, and you couldn't feel your hands for the rest of the day. He could not support that.

There was a view that it was all right that students should see violence, because violence was part of life. Jon said violence was better than humiliation. He said it was possible to teach without physical violence, but it was harder. Nevertheless he felt that teaching in 1988 hit the right spot. There was no corporal punishment, but there was still strong discipline.

There was general agreement that student control was a *sine qua non* of teaching, but Jon said that in teacher training there was nothing whatever about behaviour management or discipline—not then, and not now, despite its importance.

Now, he said, teachers were being assaulted.

Some things were better—for example, gay students had an easier time—but teachers' workload was far greater due to 'nonsense bureaucracy', and the idea that all students should get individually tailored teaching. In the old days outside class hours teachers only had marking and lesson preparation, but now you might have 150 students and all have email access. Teachers were expected to answer students' emails individually, but there was no allowance for this: it was all on top of existing work.

Jon felt there was now much too much emphasis on the individual, and not enough on society or the community. Teachers were expected to give 'personalised learning' tailored to each student, but with 25 students in each class that would mean each student only got two minutes per period. Parents were often the worst, and one unreasonable mother could take an hour out of his weekend.

The Editor said that he had seen a survey that found that Australia had the world's worst classroom behaviour, and he noted that in societies with strong emphasis on community the teaching profession was respected very highly, unlike here. Another Bloke later commented that passing on knowledge and values to the next generation was of very high importance to society, and ought to have appropriate esteem.

Jon is now working at a private school, and he says they have 'sky-high expectations'.

Jon was particularly scathing of the reports he has to write, which he described as bovine excrement. He had to write ten sentences for each student, but he was very limited in what he was allowed to say. David F said that was one reason he got out of teaching: he couldn't be negative, which meant he often couldn't tell the truth.

[The Editor once had a student who showed him his school reports, and it was all too obvious that the teachers couldn't remember who he was.]

Students with disabilities are now better off, but the resources have not been given to schools for the extra staff needed. For example, some students who are a danger to themselves or others need to be 'shadowed' in the playground, but this needs a dedicated person, and should not be left (as it usually is) to the teacher on general playground duty.

Jon spoke strongly about these issues, and said that part of the problem was that a lot of teachers had swallowed the Kool-Aid. He said that it was now hard to get people to do jobs that involved a lot of contact with the public because the public was so awful, knowing rights but not responsibilities.

David F said kids would deliberately goad teachers, then record their reactions on their phones and publish the result.

Glen referred to some of his work training teachers to deal with people who were outside the norm. He said the strap didn't work, but he taught how you could control children, especially those with low verbal skills, with your eyes. He also stressed the importance of working with families.

Jon blamed the universities, especially education departments, and said they were in la-la land.

The Editor said that university education departments were an example of the adage that those who could do something went and did it; and those who couldn't, became teachers of what they couldn't do; and those who couldn't even teach, taught teachers how to teach. He added that there was a general problem in the university system, that bad management did not lead to business failure, and there was therefore a lack of accountability.* The only measure of student learning that was used was pass rates, and pass rates depended on internally-set assessment. During the Editor's time at a certain Victorian institution there had been a marked lowering of standards to increase pass rates, and the recent graduates would not have passed the older exams.

An excessive number of administrators had been appointed, and each sought to justify their appointment by making unnecessary changes that involved the teaching staff in a great deal of extra, futile, work, which was costed internally at zero. A time survey had been carried out in which it was found that the staff were working 70 hours a week, mainly on unproductive administration; but this did not lead to any improvement, and was simply ignored.

[Nevertheless, the Editor is glad he was not teaching at secondary level, because at tertiary level he did not have to write student reports, and discussion of student progress with parents was in fact forbidden.]

David F said that the best teachers went into the world first, to learn how it works, before going into the classroom. (It was said by someone that the police now require their recruits to have five years' experience in the workforce, but the Editor has since found this is not so.)

Jon's strength of feeling had taken up all the time, so there remained only a reminder from Glen that the football umpire Craig Herman would be speaking in October. Craig, whose wife is a goal umpire, had been senior umpire for 659 games in July, and Glen is sure that he will by October have broken the all-time record for most games umpired. He usually charges a lot to speak, but we are getting him for free.

The next Blokes Helping Blokes will be on 4th October. If you would like an invitation, call Glen on 0487 852 808.


* Australia's universities are blighted by a "culture of consequence-free, rotten failure", according to the former chair of a senate inquiry examining governance at public universities . . . "There's no other sector in the country where failure is rewarded so handsomely and with so little scrutiny." *https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-19/senate-inquiry-interim-report-university-governance/105795694*

# Joyce Evelyn Quinn

*14/04/1923 – 25/08/2025*

The funeral of Joyce Quinn was held at St John's on 11th September. Denise took the service and said it was an honour to do so. Joyce was a powerhouse of a woman and it was hard to believe she had really passed on.

Rhys Arvidson played the organ—he is organist at St Peter's Eastern Hill, and also at St Francis' Catholic Church in the city.

We sang *Now thank we all our God*, then Anne Stone read Psalm 139:7–12 about God being anywhere we run away to.

There were four eulogies. Joyce's first-born, Ian Quinn, said:

Mum..... She was a very motivated person, she was always doing something, she was never sitting idle.

Mum knitted or crocheted most of the children's jumpers and cardigans. A couple of years ago she was still knitting socks for Carolyn.

She sewed and embroidered dresses for the girls and for years she was voluntarily making smocked gowns for still-born and premature babies that had died.

She was always baking cakes and biscuits. She made all our birthday cakes. She was also baking cakes for the church stall at St Andrew's. She was our Mum.

Joyce's daughter Beth Batey said:

It is difficult to condense a 102 year life – but I will try some highlights.

Joyce Evelyn Quinn, née Wild. Born 15th April 1923 in Edmonton, London.

Both parents were Londoners, her mother being born within the sound of Bow bells, making her a Cockney. In her mother's earlier years she was a part of the suffragette movement, hence Joyce was still voting at 101 years... this was a must as she knew she would be seeing her mother sometime soon. Joyce had an elder brother, George; being six years older there was a certain amount of rubbing along..... well.

The family moved to Melbourne when Joyce was three and they rented a house in Fitzroy, and Joyce remembers playing in the Fitzroy Gardens watching the kind lady who carved the Fairy Tree still in the gardens today. Joyce's Mother discovered Aussie Rules in Fitzroy and became an ardent supporter, which in part rubbed off onto Joyce, but definitely many in the family.

Joyce's schooling was in the depression years and she made it to Grade 8, achieving her Merit Certificate. Her working life began in factories, but she always wanted to be a nurse. She applied and was accepted at Austin Hospital Heidelberg, where she completed her General Nurse training and became a Registered Nurse.

Whilst on holiday at the end of her training she met Stewart at a dance in Dromana. Stewart at that time was based in Mt Martha with the Army Small Boats. They married the week the war ended, and moved to Port Pirie for Stewart to demob. They spent ten years there, and three children later made the big decision to move to Melbourne, mostly for work. They settled at 6 Lewellin Grove and Joyce was there for 70 years before her final move to Vasey House Bundoora.

St Andrew's Rosanna became a big part of family life. Joyce was secretary of the Ladies' Guild and Stewart was Leader/Secretary of the Church of England Boys' Society. The Sunday School of approximately 1000 children required a four-carriage red rattler train to transport these children to Aspendale Beach for the Annual Sunday School Picnic. Joyce was a part of the mammoth food supply for hungry mouths on this wonderful day.

Joyce was also a Mothers' Club member at the very beginning of Rosanna Golf Links State School. With all this busyness, the all-important family birthdays, Christmas and high occasions meant Joyce's kitchen became control centre and produced some of the best eats in the world!

When Stewart became sick, he was in the Repat for what was a long time for this girl of nine years. Joyce needed to return to work to pay some bills. Her first job back at the Austin Hospital was on the TB kids ward, afternoon shift in charge. This led to ten years of night duty: she could sleep while we were at school, but was home if needed. Joyce attended the Austin's nurses' reunions and enjoyed catching up with past trainees.

In the meantime Stewart was now working for the MMBW Preston depot, and had joined their Social Club. The best event each year for us kids was at the Christmas picnics, which were huge and always at one of the beautiful reservoirs. Later a group from Material and Testing used to snatch a weekend away – hiring a mini bus and off to the Murray River, where there would be the essential golf course, and a wander around country towns.

Joyce retired and joined a group of crafters: you took a craft and learned a craft. This group remains today crafting away and was where Joyce made firm friendships.

Joyce's other strong interest was Rosanna Probus Ladies. She went on wonderful holidays with great company and all-important chatter.

Dad's passing was a great blow, but these interests kept her going with wonderful people.

Moving to Vasey House was a big but needed move. At this point I need to mention Mum's favourite doctor, Katrina [Philip]. Her appointments always seemed to turn into a social occasion, with Joyce telling all she would have to change her doctor as she could not find a thing wrong with her! Well she got her change at Vasey, to Dr Rasheed at Vasey, who cared for her excellently. Mum settled in well at Vasey and became a social butterfly. She loved every one of her bossy nurses and the food, telling the cook she must have learned her trade from her old mother. The family are very grateful for the wonderful care from all sections of Vasey – they get 5 stars.

My mum was forthright in her opinions and was a good manager. She had years of directing teenage nurses and junior doctors, some of whom turned into top surgeons and physicians, who in their senior years often sought her support and opinions.

Joyce loved our family animals in her life. She travelled the world and was there when needed, even on the other side of the world for me. Her family was her life.

Joyce's youngest, Mike Quinn, said he was the 'baby' of the family, and it became clear that he felt it, and often clashed with his mother, whom he described as 'very opinionated'. 'We weren't always wrong', he said. She only watched Sky News, and was still voting at 101.

Nevertheless it became clear that despite differences, Mike was the most distressed by his mother's passing.

We then heard from one of Joyce's grandchildren, Tanya. We heard from her that 'Nan' never minced words, and would sometimes say things that were really inappropriate. She was stubborn, and she was cheeky.

But she also had an attitude of 'what can I do for you?' She brought a batch of her cup-cakes to every event. She was known for her pizzas and her sponges. She made 'teeny-tiny' clothes for premature babies who had passed away. Though her grandchildren were very different, she treated them all equally.

Joyce liked to quote, 'The only thing constant in life is change'. She saw the last horse-drawn tram, but was able to talk to her family by FaceTime.

We sang *The Lord's my shepherd*, then Lynette Rose read John 6:35–40 about Jesus as the bread of life.

Denise preached:

102 years: that's a good innings to be celebrated! It is also a day of sadness, as we farewell dear Joyce: Wife, Mother, Nanna, Nanna Joyce, Aunty, sister in law, dear friend & neighbour . . . A faithful member of St Andrew's Church at Rosanna for decades: cake maker extraordinaire, the flower roster, the Ladies' Guild, the fête . . . She knew every tree and flower and bush at St Andrew's and told me about them! We praise her forthrightness.

Death does not stop us loving the ones who have gone before us, and longing for the one who has gone from us. The wrench is real. But Christians like Joyce hold out the hope of eternal life. She had a good and full life of family and friendship and faith.

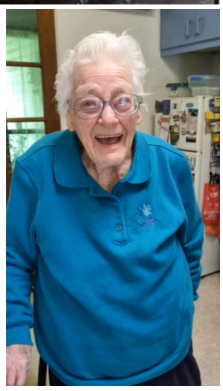
We sang in Psalm 23 the life of fullness and satisfaction that God promises to those who trust in him. God promises the cup of life will be full to the brim with the goodness and mercy of God, and Joyce got that, knowing God and God's blessings, as we heard in her long, full and good life.

Week by week, Joyce worshipped at St Andrew's Rosanna Church, where she sang praises to the Lord Jesus Christ, who in John 6 proclaimed himself the Bread of Life. Joyce made cakes, but bread is essential to life: Jesus promises satisfaction and fullness for our spiritual yearning, our spiritual hunger and thirst. Joyce knew that promise of the Son of God: generous, open-hearted Jesus who welcomes all who will come to him.

He gives eternal life to all who come to him — to Joyce, whom we can be confident he will raise up on the last day. Her ashes will rest in the St John's and St Andrew's Memorial Garden, now being constructed. We have hope in Christ and his promise for Joyce: we can be assured she is safe in the hands of Jesus.

Yes, Christians have faith and hope, but our grief is still real and painful. The hole she leaves in our lives will not, cannot, be filled by anyone else. The wound of death is great, even when it is expected at 102 years, and so we grieve, we mourn, we cry; we laugh and tell stories as we remember dear Joyce and all she has been and has meant to each one gathered here and to all who loved her. But death does not separate Joyce from God, as Psalm 139 tells us. He is ever-present to those who know and love him. In the midst of grief, entrust Joyce to her Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has conquered death. Jesus gives to Joyce that full, eternal life with God.

We saw photos of Joyce; we prayed; and we sang *Be still, my soul*, before committing her to the goodness of God, and farewelling her to Parry's *Jerusalem*.



## *Eileen Broadway*

*24/06/1925 – 22/09/2025*

The *Babble* regrets to record the death of Eileen Broadway at the age of 100. Her funeral will be at St John's at 10:30 am on Friday 3 October, and will be reported in next month's *Babble*.

## Bushfire survivors still camping years later amid construction backlog

The ABC news site has published a recent (23rd September) article on Mallacoota, reporting that some residents are still without homes, five years after the 2019–20 bushfire.

In the afternoon of 28th December 2019 a lightning strike near Wingan River started a bushfire, which travelled south, increasing in intensity. Mallacoota was full of holiday-makers: perhaps 10,000 people in total, including the approximately 1183 permanent residents. Official advice to Mallacoota was bungled: at first the town was excluded from all warnings, then on the 29th the highway to Melbourne was closed and people were told it was too late to leave, even though the road to NSW was still open. The same advice continued even when the Melbourne road was temporarily reopened. A meeting at 11 am on the 30th advised everyone to leave, but only through NSW; all roads were then closed two hours later, leaving perhaps a thousand residents and three thousand visitors still in the town.

*Jude Benton leading worship on the beach as fires threaten Mallacoota*

The bushfire reached Mallacoota at about 8 am on the 31st. 80% of the town was burnt out, with at least 127 homes destroyed; but fortunately the central part of the town where people were sheltering was saved, thanks to firefighters and a wind change, and there were no human deaths.

The town remained cut off for weeks. On 3rd January a navy ship evacuated people (and later the Air Force also), but most residents had nowhere else to live, and remained. Mains power was not restored until early February.

Then, of course, came the pandemic.

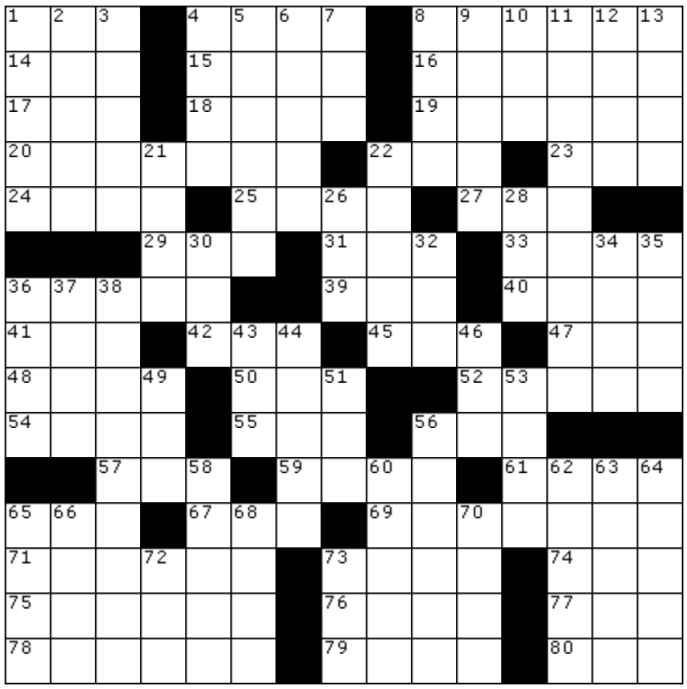
The ABC is reporting that some residents are even now still living in makeshift accommodation, still waiting for proper homes to be built. Two people are interviewed: one is sleeping in a horse float, working in a caravan, and cooking in an open-air camp kitchen; another family is living in a large shed.

The problem is the isolation of the town, so they are very dependent on local tradesmen, and there aren't enough. A local builder is quoted as saying, 'There was enough work to keep everyone busy before the fires, but once the fires came it was way too much for the local tradesmen.

'There were a series of things, from COVID to when the government put out a $20,000 grant if people built a new home, which virtually booked out builders for years and years. [It] meant that a lot of people who weren't ready to build were put further down the queue.'

He said, 'It isn't a nice feeling going to work and knowing that the next family is living in a caravan. It's been quite difficult — we are lucky to have work but it's also quite overwhelming.'

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-23/mallacoota-builders-struggle-five-years-after-black-summer-fires/105562838



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

**ACROSS**
1 Lab animal
4 What children learn
8 Student's programming language
14 Lyric poem
15 Asian dress
16 No longer at sea
17 OT city
18 Stuck up person
19 Hinder
20 Hates
22 Garden tool
23 Former U.S. pres
24 Canal name
25 Wan
27 Brazilian city
29 Rapid eye movement
31 Rascal
33 Oak
36 Capital of Jordan
39 Trinitrotoluene
40 Wall support
41 Central Intelligence Agency
42 Morse code dash
45 Tell
47 Bard's before
48 Land measure
50 Marsh
52 Brother of Moses
54 Transaction
55 Taxi
56 Madagascar franc (abbr.)
57 Pinch
59 Biblical word for You idiot!
61 Do __ others
65 Farm credit administration (abbr)
67 Consume
69 Greek
71 Fatal
73 Herr's wife
74 Abdominal muscles (abbr.)
75 Cling
76 Ceases
77 Digit
78 Do not throw __ before swine
79 Blessed are the __
80 Scorching

**DOWN**
1 Makes a sound like a lion
2 Adios
3 Taut
4 Association (abbr)
5 Small domestic bird
6 Where Jesus died
7 Bro. or sis.
8 El __ (Texas city)
9 Flowering herb
10 Reserved
11 Holy Spirit
12 Dry
13 Look
21 OT history book
22 Religious songs
26 Strike
28 __ a small world
30 Stop
32 School group
34 European monetary unit
35 Adam & Eve's garden
36 College (abbr.)
37 Rodents
38 Come, O Lord! (Aramaic)
43 American Football Conference (abbr)
44 Biblical seat of emotions
46 Sweet potato
49 Samuel's mentor
51 BB association
53 Water (Spanish)
56 Building face
58 Ocean jewel
60 Chili con __
62 Under, poetically
63 No-no
64 Beginning
65 What birds' wings do
66 Surrender
68 Beers
70 Outer layer
72 Possessive pronoun
73 Female (abbr)

## Bible Word Search: Generosity

*https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_Generosity_0.htm*

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

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

**Ability, Blessings, Cheerfully, Clothing, Encourage, Generous, Gifts, Goodness, Grace, Gracious, Greedy, Helpful, Helping, Hungry, Integrity, Kind, Leadership, Lonely, Needs, Offerings, Pleasant, Respectful, Reward, Satisfaction, Service, Share, Sick, Speaking, Time, Unselfish, Visiting, Volunteer, Willingness, Words**

### Answers to last month's puzzles:

*Bible Word Search mystery answer:* **FOUND MY SHEEP**

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

THERE WILL BE MORE REJOICING IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS THAN OVER NINETY-NINE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE WHO DO NOT NEED TO REPENT.

*Luke 15:17*

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

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | | | | 9 | | | | 1 | | | | | | 19 | | | | | | 3 | | | | | |

__ __ E __ I __ __ __ E O U __ __ E __ __ O __ __ I __ __
26 16 9 18 1 22 16 26 9 19 3 7 5 9 18 7 19 12 20 1 10 10

__ I __ E __ __ __ I __ __ A I __ __ __ U __ __ E __ __
10 1 13 9 4 25 16 1 7 17 11 1 26 16 17 3 10 12 9 7 7

*Habakkuk 2:4*

# Pentecost 11

24th August 2025

**Isaiah 58:9b–14; Luke 13:10–17**

*Sermon by Denise Nicholls*

**Isaiah 58:9b–14**

*'If you do away with the yoke of oppression,*
*with the pointing finger and malicious talk,*
*10 and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry*
*and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,*
*then your light will rise in the darkness,*
*and your night will become like the noonday.*
*11 The LORD will guide you always;*
*he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land*
*and will strengthen your frame.*
*You will be like a well-watered garden,*
*like a spring whose waters never fail.*
*12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins*
*and will raise up the age-old foundations;*
*you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,*
*Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*
*13 'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath*
*and from doing as you please on my holy day,*
*if you call the Sabbath a delight*
*and the LORD's holy day honourable,*
*and if you honour it by not going your own way*
*and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,*
*14 then you will find your joy in the LORD,*
*and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land*
*and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.'*
*For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

**Luke 13:10–17**

*10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, 'Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.' 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.*

*14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, 'There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.'*

*15 The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?'*

*17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.*

During my 31 years of ministry there have been a number of recurring challenges. Challenges such as people who want to have their child baptised, but who don't come to church again until the next baby is born. This has been a challenge for me and the congregations I have served.

Yes it is great that people want to have their child baptised, but it is challenging that they attend church only very occasionally.

So, do we operate on ***grace***, or on ***law***?

Sometimes I asked people to complete a short course before their child is baptised – and I've observed that people will jump through almost any hoop we ask them to.

Or the minister at a beautiful old church in Sydney, much like St John's, where loads of young couple wanted to be married. He instituted a rule of attending ten church services before their wedding, and he even had a little booklet made up where their attendance could be stamped. I knew one couple who came to every church service held over a two week period to have their book stamped! They obeyed the requirement, but not the intent of the rule.

Do we as Christians operate under ***law*** or ***grace***?

We know that we are saved by Grace, but often we operate under Law.

So, Jesus' healing on the Sabbath: was that right or wrong?

**1.Grace embodied**

Jesus was teaching about God in the synagogue for all who would hear about God.

Jesus' actions on that Sabbath showed that God's surprising GRACE is much wider than our human understanding.

Jesus sees a woman bent over for 18 years—perhaps she had scoliosis, or spondylitis. She was there, despite her condition, faithfully praising God and listening to God's word.

Jesus calls to her, pronounces healing upon her and lays his hands on her – and she was **straightened up** by God.

Her response was immediate: Praise to God for his healing through the Lord Jesus Christ. God!

Yet while we hear the sounds of her praises in one ear, in the other ear we hear a warning.

**2.Offended by Grace**

The synagogue leader was indignant. He observed the healing, but he regarded Jesus' miracle as working on the Sabbath. He really was a **killjoy**.

He speaks to the people: *'There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.'* v.14

His words ring of rebuke; it's as if he is saying to the people 'Don't get too excited by this aberration, this is not what God is about.'

For the synagogue leader, everything was clear: he had the Law, and his understanding of God was all tied up in a neat package. He expected no surprises from God. For he had God in a Box.

And so he does not praise God!

I was at Sydney Synod many years ago when there was a discussion about working on Sundays. I recall a dairy farmer almost in tears, as he said that had 'broken the Sabbath' for years! All because he milked his cows every day.

No wonder Jesus calls the Synagogue leader a hypocrite! He challenges what the leader was saying by pointing to people's own animals who are fed and watered even on the Sabbath.

In a clever play on words, Jesus says that they would LOOSE an animal on a Sabbath, but keep this woman BOUND – shouldn't He LOOSE or UNTIE her on a Sabbath day?

Which is Greater? Law or Grace? Jesus reminds all the people and the synagogue leaders that the Sabbath is God's gift of Sabbath rest for his people.

The synagogue leader's attitude and pronouncement was an inversion of God's gift and grace!

Jesus embodies grace in his re-creation of the woman, who was the passive recipient of God's Work on God's holy Day

Our Isaiah passage this morning reminds us:

*13 "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day,*
*if you call the Sabbath a delight*
*and the Lord's holy day honourable,*
*and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,*
*14 then you will find your joy in the Lord…*

For the synagogue leader, there was no joy in the Sabbath, no joy in the healing of this woman.

**What does this Scripture teach us about God?**

That God is a God of surprises! That he exercises MERCY and GRACE.

I wonder, do we expect God to surprise us? Or do we think that God will always act as WE think he should?

God's Grace has been shown to us – will not God show his grace to others?

Even God will break HIS law for his love for people to show his mercy and grace.

**What does this Scripture teach us about US?**

The woman who has been straightened up by God overflowed with praise to God at receiving his mercy and grace. Do we do the same? Or do we sometimes have an image of God in a box? Let's not be like the synagogue leader who was a killjoy in the presence of God's mercy and grace. May we be people who, like the woman, overflow in our praise of God's mercy.

# Has Science Made God Irrelevant?

**Reflections on Psalm 19 and the Two Books of God**

31st August 2025

*Sermon by Chris Mulherin,*
ChrisMulherin@ISCAST.org , www.ISCAST.org

**Psalm 19**

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

*1 The heavens declare the glory of God;*
*the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*
*2 Day after day they pour forth speech;*
*night after night they reveal knowledge.*
*3 They have no speech, they use no words;*
*no sound is heard from them.*
*4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,*
*their words to the ends of the world.*
*In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.*
*5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,*
*like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*
*6 It rises at one end of the heavens*
*and makes its circuit to the other;*
*nothing is deprived of its warmth.*

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect,*
*refreshing the soul.*
*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,*
*making wise the simple.*
*8 The precepts of the LORD are right,*
*giving joy to the heart.*
*The commands of the LORD are radiant,*
*giving light to the eyes.*
*9 The fear of the LORD is pure,*
*enduring for ever.*
*The decrees of the LORD are firm,*
*and all of them are righteous.*

*10 They are more precious than gold,*
*than much pure gold;*
*they are sweeter than honey,*
*than honey from the honeycomb.*

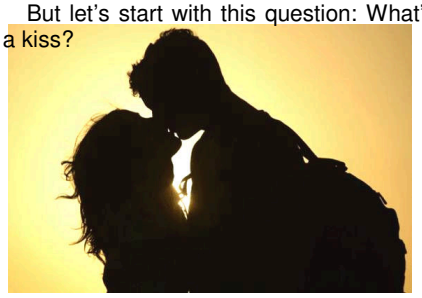
*[11] By them your servant is warned;*
*in keeping them there is great reward.*
*[12] But who can discern their own errors?*
*Forgive my hidden faults.*
*[13] Keep your servant also from wilful sins;*
*may they not rule over me.*
*Then I will be blameless,*
*innocent of great transgression.*

*[14] May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart*
*be pleasing in your sight,*
*LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

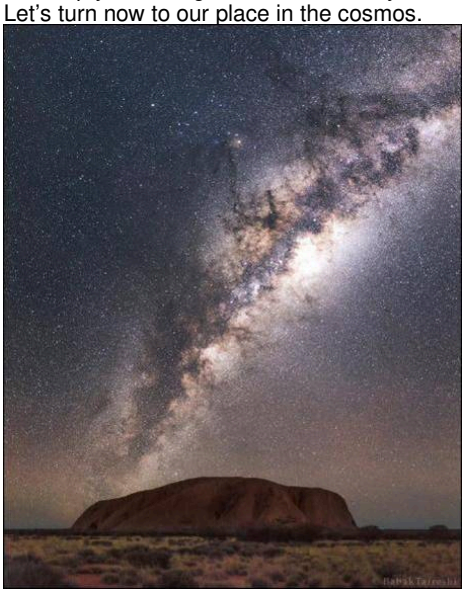
Has science made God irrelevant? I'm not sure what you think about that, but to many people in the street and students in schools, the answer to that question is yes. So, let me ask, what would you say to your neighbour or child or grandchild who says that science has disproven the existence of God or at least made God irrelevant?

Today, we will ponder the wonders of the universe and think about Psalm 19. And we will also meet some of the Christians who are big names in science. And we will finish with a clue or two about how to understand the relationship between Christian faith and scientific knowledge.

But let's start with this question: What's in a kiss?



If you remember the answer to this question, then the next time someone asks you about how science and faith can get along, you will have one way of explaining it. But I will keep you waiting till the end of today's talk. Let's turn now to our place in the cosmos.



*The Milky Way rising over Uluru (Babak Tafreshi)*

We live in an amazing universe! From the very small, at the sub-atomic level to the very large in a universe of billions of stars, indeed, billions of galaxies, each one with billions of stars. It is simply incomprehensible.

Of course, not everyone sees it that way. In 2010 I attended the World Atheist Convention and I remember clearly as the most famous atheist in the world, Professor Richard Dawkins, started his talk like this: *'The fact of your own existence is the most astonishing fact you will ever have to confront. Don't you dare ever get used to it.'* Professor Dawkins then went on to tell the audience that we live in an amazing universe and that we ought to 'give thanks for our existence.' But, he said, there is no one to give thanks to; it's gratefulness in a vacuum, he said. (Global Atheist Convention, 2010: https://youtu.be/kGGmuUvA2Mg.)

Professor Dawkins says that we live in a universe of blind physical forces. People get hurt, people get lucky, but there is no rhyme or reason in it, and there is no justice, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference, he says. (*River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life,* 132)

On the other hand, for the Christian the universe is cause for wonder and praise of the creator: **'The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands',** says the psalmist.

In my work as Director of ISCAST (aka Christians in Science and Technology), I mix with people who love both science and the Creator. But I also regularly come across people—in schools often—who say there is a total conflict between science and faith. 'I believe in science' they say, so 'I couldn't be religious.'

In fact 60% of students in faith-based schools think that science and Christian faith are in conflict.

It makes me very sad and frustrated too, that they don't understand either science or Christian faith. If they did, they would realise that science and faith can get along.

So, let's allow Psalm 19 to remind us of what Christians for many centuries have called the two books of God: the book of God's word in the Bible, and the book of God's works seen in the magnificence of the creation.

Let me give you a taste of the universe … of God's creation.

*(NASA and European Space Agency)*

This is a photo of a star breeding ground, the Westerlund 2 cluster in our own Milky Way galaxy. The light in this photo travelled for 20,000 years before it was captured by the Hubble Space Telescope. There are about 3000 baby stars there; they are only about 2 million years old.

And here, closer to earth, is the Horsehead Nebula where the cosmic dust is being pulled together by gravity to form stars. This photo captures light that has travelled for 1600 years to get to us.

According to mainstream science we live in a vast and very old universe. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, has some 200 to 400 billion stars and billions of planets. It's about 100,000 light years across; that is, it takes light 100,000 years to go from one edge to the other. By the way, light goes around the earth about seven times a second, so these distances are, well …astronomical.

Beyond our galaxy, there are hundreds of billions of other galaxies, each one with billions of stars. Yes, it is true that there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on all the beaches and deserts of this planet.

Meanwhile, according to the best science, the universe began about 14 billion years ago, and the earth is about 4 billion years old. So, if you compressed the earth's 4 billion-year life into one year, life on earth would look like this:

The first signs of life arrive about Easter time, in the one-year view of earth. Multi-celled organisms arrive in November. The dinosaurs die out at Christmas time. Humans arrive on the scene in the last half hour of the year. Jesus died about 15 seconds before the end of that year. And you and I will live all our lives in the last second of the year that is the earth's lifetime.

Here ends our taste of the wonders of the amazing creation that science reveals.

Let's turn now to ask, how have Christians thought historically about the relationship between science and faith?

For centuries Christians have talked about God's two books: about the two ways that God reveals himself to us: one way is in the Bible, another way is in the work of his hands that we see in the creation.

As long ago as Augustine, some 1600 years ago, we hear of the importance of God's two books as well as a warning not to confuse them: Augustine warned Christians about being clear about the worth of 'scientific' knowledge and not confusing theology with knowledge of the natural world.

And more than 1000 years later, Galileo Galilei, one of the giants of the scientific revolution, said this: 'The Bible teaches how to go to heaven not how the heavens go.'

In fact, perhaps the most famous scientific book ever, started with an affirmation of God's two books. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, right opposite the title page had the words of Frances Bacon, which, in my rough and ready paraphrase, said this: 'Be sure to study both God's word and God's world. Both science and Christianity help us to know the truth about life, the universe and everything.'

So there is a long history of Christians seeing the works of God, the creation, as showing us something about the creator.

Now, let me introduce you to the person who took those photos of the universe we saw.

"To conclude, therefore, let no man out of a weak conceit of sobriety, or an ill-applied moderation, think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works; divinity or philosophy; but rather let men endeavour an endless progress or proficience in both."

BACON: *Advancement of Learning.*

Jennifer Wiseman works for NASA; she is the senior project scientist on the Hubble Space Telescope. She is a public Christian who grew up loving nature, the stars, and who sees God's hand in the amazing photos that we have all seen, which are taken by the Hubble.

History is also full of giants in science who were committed believers, some of whom actually did more theology than science. If you have studied science at all you will know some of them.

At the top right is Johannes Kepler, who was going to be a Lutheran priest but thought that he could glorify God more by doing science. He gave us the laws of elliptical planetary motion.

Under Kepler is René Descartes. Do you remember the X–Y plane in maths? What's it called? The Cartesian plane, named after Descartes, mathematician, philosopher, and committed Christian.

In the middle row on the left is Isaac Newton, who gave us the laws of gravity and force but who wrote more theology than he did science.

I could go on but I won't right now. You get the gist. The giants of the scientific revolution, almost all of them, were both scientists and Christian believers.

And, fast forward to today, Australia too has its giants of science who are Christians. Two of the people involved in ISCAST have won the PM's prize for science. And another one is one of Australia's most well-known scientists.

Graeme Clark gave the world the first successful bionic device, fulfilling his dream that people born deaf would be able to hear and speak. Graeme has changed the lives of thousands of families around the world, and it's lovely to hear him speak of the difficult journey developing the bionic ear. It was a matter of constant prayer he says. His goal as he describes it was to help people and do God's will.

Graeme won the Prime Minister's Prize for Science, as did two other ISCAST scientists: Ken Freeman, a cosmologist based in Canberra … and Cheryl Praeger in Perth is an eminent mathematician who has paved the way for women in mathematics in the last 50 years.

Here's another famous scientist whom you probably don't know. He's a Christian—no, not the man on the left. It was George Lemaitre, mathematician, physicist and priest, who gave us the theory of the primeval atom; today we call it the big bang theory, which is the accepted theory about the history of the universe.

Finally, closer to home, I have to mention the man who is a global rising star for the way he put his scientific and technological training into practice by discovering and promoting Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration. Do you know, due to Tony Rinaudo's work, there are 6 million hectares, in just one country, Niger, that is now dryland forest regenerated from the desert.

Tony is a member of St Alfred's Anglican Church in Blackburn and winner of the Australian Christian Book of the Year. (Yes, you can buy the book from me afterwards.)

What do all these people I have been talking about have in common? They believe that God 'speaks' through the creation, through the work of his hands.

For many of these people, like Johannes Kepler, their science was explicitly a way to glorify God, uncovering the truth about the world we live in: the book of God's works.

Throughout history Christians have referred to God's two books: his works and his word; and it is often Psalm 19 they speak of. Hear the psalm as it begins by proclaiming the book of God's works and then turns to the book of God's word:

**1 The heavens declare the glory of God;**
**the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**
**2 Day after day they pour forth speech;**
**night after night they reveal knowledge.**

The universe speaks! And we hear an echo of this again in Romans chapter 1 verse 20: *'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.'*

Something of God is revealed in the natural world!

The Psalmist continues, first recognising the metaphorical, pictorial language, and then launching again into praise of the Creator and the creation:

**3 [The skies] have no speech, they use no words;**
**no sound is heard from them.**
**4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,**
**their words to the ends of the world.**
**In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.**
**5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,**
**like a champion rejoicing to run his course.**
**6 It rises at one end of the heavens**
**and makes its circuit to the other;**
**nothing is deprived of its warmth.**

Sure, the heavens don't literally speak, they don't have a voice. God has not pitched a tent for the sun. The sun does not rise and make a circuit. This is metaphorical language, poetic language to declare the truth.

The truth is that the awe and wonder we experience connects us in some way to God, speaks to us of the creator. And, by extension, science, uncovering the book of God's works in the creation, can also lead us to worship of the creator.

And now, at verse 7, God speaks in another way. The psalmist turns to the words of God found in the Torah or the law: the first five books of what we call the Old Testament: the book of God's word

**7 The law of the Lord is perfect,**
**refreshing the soul.**
**The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,**
**making wise the simple.**
**8 The precepts of the Lord are right,**
**giving joy to the heart.**
**The commands of the Lord are radiant,**
**giving light to the eyes.**

We won't dwell on the rest of this psalm today but note that the psalmist, who started with God's first book, the book of nature, of creation, and then moved to the second book, the book of God's word, finishes by pointing to the need for more than just knowledge of God. Read it again later for yourself. You will see that the problem of sin and the need for forgiveness have to be dealt with.

Our other reading today from Colossians, speaks of God's ultimate revelation in the Son. As Christians know, it is God's revealing himself in Jesus Christ that will deal with the problem of all that is wrong with us and the world.

Now let me finish with a couple of thoughts about how we might understand the science and faith relationship, so that you have a clue or two in your pocket next time someone asks you about it or you even have a niggle about it yourself.

We know the atheist naturalist view …

*In a universe of blind physical forces and genetics, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.* (Dawkins, *River Out of Eden)*

This is the view of life and the universe without God.

But we know, don't we, that science is not enough? It can never answer the most important questions of life.

First let's be very very clear that science is limited. Anyone who thinks science will have all the answers is wrong. Anyone who thinks science is the only way to truth is wrong. There are a host of questions that science cannot answer. And the foundations of science rest on assumptions that science must take for granted.

Let me mention three types of questions science cannot help us with.

***Questions science can't answer***

**Moral questions**

- *Should we use weapons of mass destruction?*
- *Should we legalise euthanasia?*
- *Is torture wrong?*

**Philosophical questions**

- *What are the limits of science?*
- *How do we know science leads to truth?*

**Existential questions**

- *What is the first cause of the universe?*
- *What is the purpose of human life?*
- *Is there a God?*

If you want answers to any of these sorts of questions you have to look elsewhere. Science can't help. You have to look to philosophy or religion, and for the Christian, we look to God and the Bible as the source of answers to the big questions.

Having said all that, let me ask, why are people so confused about science and its relationship to faith? Why do people think there is an irreconcilable conflict between faith and science?

We are puzzled because we confuse questions of *meanings* with questions of *mechanisms.* We confuse questions of purposes with questions of particles.

Let me finish with two examples. If I could imprint these examples on your memory I would, because they capture the way to understand science and Christian faith.

You go into the physics classroom and the teacher asks why the water is boiling. A bright student pipes up: 'The water is boiling because the heat of combustion in the gas is released and heats the molecules of water which eventually turn to bubbles of water vapour.'

Then the teacher takes out a teabag and says, 'Actually, it's because I want a cup of tea.'

There are two questions in one here, aren't there? And both answers are correct.

One is a question about **mechanics**: *'What causes the water to boil?'*

The other is a question about **meanings**: *'What is the purpose of the water boiling?'*

And if we confuse questions of mechanics —that's science—with questions of meaning, which our faith deals with, then we may think that science and faith collide. Yes, science is great, but it can only answer certain sorts of questions. And Christian faith is not science; it deals with the big questions, the philosophical and moral and existential questions.

So, the next time your neighbour or your grandchild ask you how your faith can be reconciled with mainstream science, remind them of the difference between questions of meaning and questions of mechanism.

Now, I promised to return to the kiss.

I go home today and give Lindy a kiss. She says, 'What's that about?' I say, 'It's a kiss!' She says, 'What's in a kiss?' I say,

*A kiss is the juxtaposition of two orbicular muscles in a state of contraction and the reciprocal transmission of carbon dioxide and millions of microbes.*

A correct answer perhaps, but not the one Lindy hoped for.

So, I think you can see that there are different sorts of explanations for things and those explanations don't have to conflict.

In summary,

Science searches for the mechanisms and laws of the universe. It

- *answers the 'how' questions*
- *doesn't answer the 'big' questions*

Christianity is different. It

- *offers answers to the 'big' questions*
- *is not interested in 'how' questions*

In the words of Galileo: *The Bible teaches how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.*

So, what will you say next time someone tells you that science and faith are at war? I suggest you remind them that Christianity is not science, and that science has got on very well thank you with Christianity for millennia.

And remind them that most of the giants of the scientific revolution, and many prominent scientists today, were and are also convinced Christians.

And remind them that science is limited and can't answer our most profound questions.

And perhaps give them my email address or point them to the ISCAST website where there are 800 pages of articles and resources dealing with science and Christian faith.

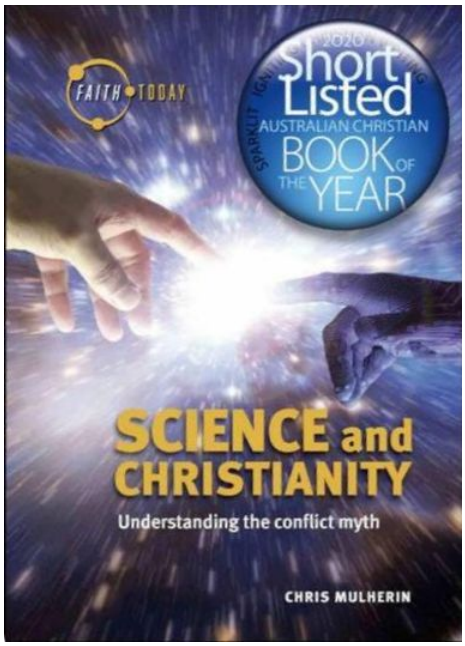
Let me finish with the oft-used final verse of Psalm 19:

**14 May these words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts**
**be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

*There followed 15 minutes of questions. Chris said that the perception that science and faith were in conflict was largely due to two authors in the nineteenth century, John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White, who argued that there was an historical conflict. Their work is no longer taken seriously by scholars, but it was influential. One often-quoted incident involving Galileo was actually a personality issue.*

*In 1961 a book propounding a literal interpretation of Genesis arose, giving rise to Young-Earth Creationism, which Chris considers both incorrect and a stumbling-block to many.*

*Chris has written a book:*




# *Following Jesus*

7th September 2025, Holy Spirit Watsonia

**Luke 14:25–35**

*Sermon by Helen McAlley*

*25 Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

*28 'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, "This person began to build and wasn't able to finish."*

*31 'Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

*34 'Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; it is thrown out.*

*'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'*

**PUTTING JESUS FIRST**

Peter and I knew an Indian man called Paul Pillai. In 1960, he established a mission called the Indian Inland Mission which had the aim of reaching India for Christ. Many people have been saved through this mission, which reaches out to people in many ways in India. Children are brought in from living in the streets and cared for in children's homes. There is a ministry of evangelism, in spite of laws, in this Hindu country, which state that it is illegal to convert anyone to Christianity. The mission also works with widows and refugees. Over the years they have seen some amazing miracles including healing. On one occasion the mission workers were rejected by a village in the north of India. They prayed and the Lord revealed to them where to dig for fresh water. This village did not have its own supply of fresh water so the people were willing now to listen to the message of salvation. The head person in the village became a Christian and many in the village followed his lead. This is very typical in these small villages where the culture is more like that of the first century AD than our own Australian 21st century culture.

But there is a cost to following Jesus in this way. When I last heard, there were 50 pastors from this mission in prison simply because of their faith. You can imagine the distress this would cause to both them and their families. But rather than asking for the persecution to stop, they asked that their supporters would pray that they would have the courage to continue their work in spite of the persecution.

Paul Pillai, the founder of this mission came from a Hindu family. When he became a Christian, he was rejected by his family and never saw them again. What a cost that must have been! But to him, following Jesus was the most important thing in his life. His determination to put God first in his life regardless of the cost has been an inspiration to me.

**EXCUSES**

In our gospel reading today, we find Jesus talking about the importance of putting God's kingdom first in our lives. He tells a parable which shows how people are too 'busy' to follow Him. They were invited to a big dinner party but they made excuses:

'I have bought some land. I must go and look at it.'

'I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please convey my apologies.'

'I have just got married and I am sure you will understand I cannot come.'

The servant of the man who invited them reported back to his master who was annoyed and said to that servant, 'Hurry out now into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring here the poor and crippled and blind and lame' and when there was still more room, he said, 'Now go out to the roads and hedgerows and make them come inside, so that my house may be full. For I tell you that not one of the men I invited shall have a taste of my dinner.'

Those who made excuses represent the people who have no time for the Lord and for His kingdom because they are caught up with worldly things. We need to ask ourselves if we are so busy with the things of this world, that we have little time for God.

It seems the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame and the homeless were more willing to accept the man's invitation. They accepted the invitation gladly because they realised how poor and needy they were and had probably given up hoping that things would improve for them in this life. I have sometimes walked past a homeless person in the street and offered them a gift of money and a tract which would explain to them the plan of salvation, God's love for us and how we can become a follower of Jesus. To my surprise, no one has ever rejected the tract. They thank me for it and sometimes go on to explain what the Lord Jesus means to them. One man said how sad he was to think of all that Jesus had suffered before and during the crucifixion. Another assured me he would take the tract very seriously.

**HOW DO WE PUT JESUS FIRST?**

Most of us are not homeless and in fact, by world standards, we are wealthy. For example, we are all wealthier than the rich young ruler who came to Jesus (as I once heard in a sermon). We need to be so careful to put Jesus first in our lives. Are we willing to spend time with Jesus in prayer and Bible study? Are we willing to do what He directs, or do we want to be in charge of our own lives? Are we willing to share our faith when the Lord gives us the opportunity? Are we willing to have our day interrupted by someone who needs us? Can we say each morning, 'Lord interrupt my day as you see fit. Make me a blessing to others today. Set up divine appointments that I might share my faith and make me willing and able to do so.' Are we willing to be generous giving our money to God's work? Can we choose to love and forgive those who wrong us? Are we putting God's kingdom first in our lives?

**HATING ONE'S FATHER AND MOTHER**

Jesus continued to explain the importance of God's kingdom in our lives by saying to the crowds that followed Him, 'If anyone comes to me without first hating his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, he cannot be a disciple of mine. The person who will not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps cannot be my disciple.'

How can Jesus be saying this? Hating our family members? It may help us to realise that Jesus was using a figure of speech called hyperbole to make His point. Speakers of His day would frequently use hyperbole, or we could call it exaggeration, to make their point. Speakers today use hyperbole and we ourselves use it all the time too. We might say:

'I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!' or

'I have a million things to do today' or

'This bag weighs a ton' or

'I'm freezing.'

Nobody takes us literally when we say these things. They understand that we feel hungry, busy, weighed down or cold. In Jesus' day people would have also understood that He was exaggerating to make His point.

We also should not take a verse in isolation. In the Ten Commandments, we are told to honour our father and our mother, and we also know that when Jesus was suffering so much on the cross, He made sure that His grieving mother would be cared for by His beloved disciple John. He certainly did not hate His mother.

Jesus was simply saying that when people had to choose between Him and their family (as Paul Pillai was forced to do), they should put Him first.

**THREE SHORT PARABLES**

Jesus continued His teaching by telling three more short parables. One was about a man who set out to build a tower but did not have the money to complete it. Those around him would make fun of him because of his situation. Jesus was telling people here to think carefully about being His disciple. There is a cost involved which needs to be considered.

Then there was the king with ten thousand men who was considering going to war against another king who had twenty thousand soldiers. If he decided he would not be able to win the battle, he would do well to try to make peace with the other king. Jesus was again making the point that one should count the cost of following Him. Total commitment is required – a commitment which follows careful and thoughtful consideration.

Finally, the follower of Jesus was likened to salt which was good as long as it retained its flavour. The salt of first century Palestine was often impure and therefore lacking in flavour. Once the salt lost its saltiness, it was unfit for use and had to be thrown out. This is like the person who begins following Jesus but then decides to go his own way. That person has failed to count the cost.

If we become followers of Jesus, the message in our whole Gospel reading today is that we must put Jesus first in our lives. Jesus said that we must take up our cross daily, which means putting aside our own selfish desires and seeking each day to follow Him as we are guided by the Holy Spirit. What is the alternative to following Jesus if we decide the cost is too great – and many people, especially today, sadly make that decision? We will be in charge of our own lives certainly, but that is a very hollow thing compared to the love, joy and peace that we have as followers of Jesus. We will not have the blessing of sins forgiven and the hope of heaven. And we will miss out on the blessings and joy that comes from following Jesus day by day as we seek to bless others and proclaim His kingdom. We must remember that the process of sanctification or being made holy is a process, not something that we achieve all at once. What the Lord looks for is hearts that love Him and are willing to serve and obey Him whatever the cost.

Shall we pray: *Dear Lord, help us to take our commitment to following Jesus very seriously, to determine that we will follow Jesus whatever our circumstances and whatever the cost. We thank you that following Jesus is the only way to true joy and blessing. We ask that your Holy Spirit would work in our hearts so that we will always want to put Jesus first. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

# *Pentecost 14*

14th September 2025

**Luke 15:1–10**

*Sermon by Denise Nicholls*

*15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. [2] But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'*

*[3] Then Jesus told them this parable: [4] 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? [5] And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders [6] and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." [7] I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.*

*[8] 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? [9] And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." [10] In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'*

Have you ever found something that you thought was lost? Perhaps Mike can tell us today about losing his phone earlier today, and he had to search and search for it, because it was on silent. Where did you find it, Mike? [*Mike:* In my jeans pocket.] In his jeans pocket!

I once lost some car keys in the street. Could not find where they were! It was the day I was being made priest in St Paul's Cathedral. And I was racing around everywhere trying to retrace my steps. I went to the police station that's in Flinders Lane. And I said, 'I've lost some car keys.' They pulled out a box probably about the same size [as the font] and said, 'Go for your life.' Well, there were some quite interesting car keys: Porsches and Mercedes and everything. And, yeah, that didn't work on my little Corolla I had at the time.

Or on two occasions I've lost one earring. That is really frustrating! And once I was moving house, and a friend was helping me, and she found one in the lounge room, in a little basket in the lounge room where I had pens and stuff. And I was so excited because I bought those earrings in Sri Lanka. It's really great—the joy of finding something that you thought was lost.

Or think about when we hear of someone lost in the bush, or lost at sea. We throw everything at finding that lost person.

The two well-known passages that Elizabeth read so well for us today are about things that are lost and found; and how Jesus uses these stories, these parables, to tell us what God is like.

Now, of course, the context of the parable is most important. Did you hear the first verse? Luke tells us, *'Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus; but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."'* So Jesus was spending time with people who were definitely on the margins of polite and religious society in Jesus' day. Not the good, nice, religious people—and he was actually eating with them: a sign of acceptance, a sign of willing to be associated with them.

So to explain to these religious people what he was doing, who were offended by Jesus' association with people that they thought were not quite right, not quite good enough, Jesus tells three parables, of which we're looking at two today. And in these parables, he tells us what God is like, who God is interested in, and the lengths to which God will go to redeem people.

I'm sure when you were hearing those parables read, they resonated for you. There wouldn't be many people for whom these parables would be new. Perhaps Rafi because he's little. But for all of us, we will have heard the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. And what's the third parable that usually goes along with it?—the prodigal son. So we have these two well-known parables about the sheep, and the shepherd's search for the one lost out of a hundred; and the woman's search for one coin of ten that has been lost. Both the parables speak of something that is lost which is valuable.

I've worked in a number of schools, and the amount of lost property that you find in schools is extraordinary. It even happens in the dance school here—at the end of every term Kallista puts out jumpers, water bottles, shoes, hats, lovely little jackets, which, if they're not claimed, get washed and taken to our op shop. And I've even found that in the schools where you pay more, there is more lost property. Even when it has the children's name in it, they don't come and get it. A jumper in a private school would probably cost about $150. Do they come and get it? No! They just think, 'Oh, well, mum or dad will go and buy another one for me.' I have benefited from these—not with the jumpers, but for things like beautiful towels after swimming carnivals, that were otherwise just going to be thrown in the bin. So I have a couple of towels that I keep in the car for the puppies to sit on, that were found in lost and found.

In these parables, Jesus speaks of the search for something that is valuable; and they speak of God's character. In the first one, we have Jesus speaking of God, the shepherd of Israel—a theme that recurs throughout the Old Testament, that God is the shepherd of his people, Israel. And in the parable, the shepherd is not content with having 99% of his herd. That's pretty good odds, 99%. He wants them all, and he will search. This person was moderately rich with about a hundred sheep. Yet he would even leave the 99 in the field—perhaps some might say, even irresponsibly—to search for the one because they are all precious.

In the first parish where I worked many years ago, there was there had been a bit of conflict between some of the parishioners and the cleric who was there. He was challenged by some members of his congregation who were cranky about his passion for evangelism: his passion for being involved with people who were new to the church, to share the good news of Jesus with them. They felt they were being neglected. They thought he wasn't caring for them. And he pointed to this parable and said, 'What's the response of everyone else in the parable when one is found? It is joy.' And Jesus says the joy that is shown in heaven is something that we should be expecting when someone comes to know God. Jesus says, 'I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who do not need to repent.'

Who needed to hear Jesus' message? He was willing to share it with everyone, including the people on the margins, the dodgy ones, the ones who would hear, and clamoured to hear; that they were important to God, that God was interested in them too. Not just the people who gathered at the synagogue, not just the people today who gather in churches, but God is interested in *all* people.

Next, the relatively poor woman with only ten drachmas. Perhaps the coins were part of her dowry. She takes the initiative and searches intently. And her response is one of joy. And both the shepherd and the woman in the stories that Jesus tells call on their friends to rejoice with them in what has been found. Showing that each is important to God. Jesus again says at the end of this second parable, 'In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Back to our questions. What is God like? Who is God interested in? And to what lengths will God go to redeem his people?

In these two short parables, Jesus tells us that God is like the shepherd and the woman. He takes the initiative. He searches intently. He seeks for the one who is lost, and rejoices in the one who is found; and then there's a party in heaven.

As you know, I used to work as chaplain at Melbourne Girls Grammar. And when I was telling them about this parable of the lost sheep, I was saying to the students, 'Well, imagine I took all of our preps out for a walk in the Botanic Gardens' (which is quite close to Melbourne Girls Grammar). 'And I came back with most of them, but I'd left one behind. That would be all right, wouldn't it?' The horror on the faces of the little girls who said, 'No, all the preppies are important.' I said, 'Well, they can't do much. They can barely write, they can't spell, and you know, they have to be reminded to go to the toilet. You know, it doesn't really matter if I lose one.' They were horrified. 'No, Reverend Denise, they're all important!'

Or if you ever watch those shows about rescues, maybe Bondi Rescue; or when there's a natural disaster and a flood occurs: we don't just say, 'Well, we'll grab the easy ones and the rest can float down the river.' Or, 'We won't bother searching for one. We've got most of the people.' Even as humans, we see the value of every human life.

Who is God interested in? Everyone, not just the majority; and not just us, the good people who sit in church on Sundays. God cares and is interested in the people who give God no thought whatsoever.

To what lengths will God go? He will go to the discomfort and dissatisfaction of others, like the religious people who heard that people were gathering around Jesus. He will go to the extent of breaking down the religious expectations. He will go to the extent of the cost of his own humiliation, and loss of his Son, for our redemption by Jesus' death and resurrection. It is all about God's grace, God's initiative, and God's joy.

To put it another way, we're going to have a look at something on the screen. Rafi, you might like to watch this. It's a story about Cecil. [*Denise reads to the congregation the story of 'Cecil the Lost Sheep'*]

What sort of animals do you think this man has? Do you think he has rabbits? No, he doesn't have rabbits. What about giraffes? Well, he might have giraffes, but they don't get a mention in this story. Sheep? Yes, he has sheep. One hundred sheep, including one called Cecil.

One day, Cecil was daydreaming. 'Boring, boring, boring. All I do is hang around with sheep, eat grass, maybe wander down to the river for a bit of a drink and eat more grass. Maybe I could run away and, and . . . get a bike . . . or join a band!' Cecil looked right. Cecil looked left. He jumped over his rock . . . and hid. From behind the rock, he snuck behind the tree. And from behind the tree, he ran over the hills . . . to the mountains! YES, THE MOUNTAINS! He reached the mountains and discovered they were very high, and very steep. But Cecil was not deterred. He began climbing higher and higher. It got steeper and steeper and steeper!

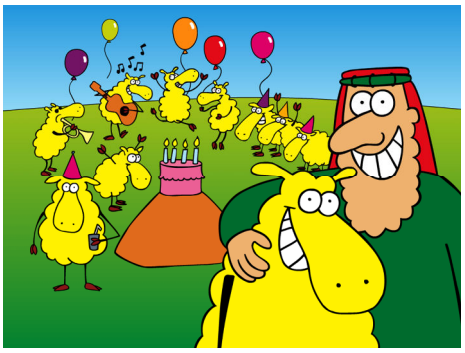
He climbed and climbed until he couldn't climb up . . . and he couldn't climb down. Cecil was stuck! He sat on the edge of the ledge and started thinking. 'I could shout for help, but what will happen if the shepherd finds me?' He was a bit worried. 'He might whack me with a big stick! Crack! Then grab me by the leg and drag me home. Bump, bump, bump! And tie me to a tree without any dinner.'

Back at home, the shepherd was counting his sheep. One: Terry. Two: Kevin. Three: Bronwyn. Four: Lucinda . . . 96: Meredith. 97: the other Meredith. 98: Amir. 99: Amalie! 1, 2, 3, 4 . . . 96, 97, 98, 99! Cecil is missing!


Andrew McDonough, © 2013 Lost Sheep Resources P/L

The shepherd ran to the rock and found hoof prints leading behind the tree. He ran behind the tree and found hoof prints heading over the hills . . . to the mountains. YES, THE MOUNTAINS! Oh, the mountains were very high and steep, but the shepherd climbed higher and higher and it got steeper and steeper. When he thought he couldn't climb any further and wasn't sure if he could climb back down, he heard a noise. 'Baaaaaaaahhh! Baaaaaaaahhh!' Cecil was saved!

What did the shepherd do? Did he whack Cecil with his big stick, crack? No! Did he grab Cecil by the leg and drag him down the mountain, bump, bump, bump? No! He was so glad he found his lost sheep that he put Cecil on his shoulders and carried him home. When they got home, did the shepherd tie Cecil to a tree without any dinner? No! Instead, he threw a huge party, and everyone stayed up way past their bedtime. Cecil the lost sheep had been found!




Isn't that a good story? This is from the Australian production called *The Lost Sheep.* And they allow churches to download this one for free, which is very kind of them.

What is God like? Who is he interested in? To what lengths will God go to redeem people? Shouldn't we too have a great party, knowing that God has saved us! He continues to look for people to save. As God's people, what do we do? We rejoice! We rejoice in a God who loves us and redeems us.

## *Pentecost 15*

21st September 2025

**Luke 16:1–13**

*Sermon by Denise Nicholls*

*16 Jesus told his disciples: 'There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called him in and asked him, "What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer."*

*3 'The manager said to himself, "What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg – 4 I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses."*

*5 'So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?"*

*6 "'Three thousand litres of olive oil," he replied.*

*'The manager told him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifteen hundred."*

*7 'Then he asked the second, "And how much do you owe?"*

*"'Thirty tons of wheat," he replied.*

*'He told him, "Take your bill and make it twenty-four."*

*8 'The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.*

*10 'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?*

*13 'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.'*

Today's New Testament reading of the parable of the unjust steward—or the dishonest manager, as it's variously called—is a challenge, because Jesus commends someone for their dodgy, dishonest dealings. It's also a challenge for us, because it speaks about money—wealth—which is an uncomfortable topic in our culture.

When I was travelling in Pakistan, the topic of money and earnings was treated differently. Two questions people asked me as Lyn and I were travelling around very different parts of Pakistan: One, why aren't you married? Why hasn't your father found you a husband? (And I'm asking that too—not really.) And the second one, how much money do you do you earn? Culturally, it's different.

But for us in the Western world, in Australia, it's a bit uncomfortable, isn't it, talking about money. Because none of us are really rich, are we? Well, we live in Australia, so we've already won the lottery of life. Also we eat more than once a day, which is more than most people in the world do. So we are, in terms of the world's wealth, pretty well off. In Australia, we live in one of the richest countries in the world, with relatively good wealth equality.

Yes, it is true that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. And we can point to people like the 161 billionaires in Australia. Did you hear that? Not millionaires, billionaires. There are 161 billionaires in Australia. That's from the *Australian Financial Review* Rich List in May 2025. Or we can point to someone who was born into wealth and who has continued to make wealth. The richest person in Australia, who is Gina Reinhardt. But then we can read in our papers or see on our TV screens families living in their cars and a man living in his bus. And he said, 'I'm not throwing out my camping gear because I might end up living in a tent.'

In Australia, the gap between rich and poor still exists. So the highest 20% of the income group in Australia receive 42%, or just under half, of all the national income of our country. While the 20% of people who earn the least in our country receive only 6% of all household income. So even here in Australia, we know that there are some people who are going to be richer than us, and some people who are going to be poorer. Most of us are Baby Boomers or even Builders in our generation, and most of us, if you own your own home, know that you are sitting on a gold mine. Yes, you paid for your home and it's yours. Back in 1984, the cost of a house in Australia was 3.3 times someone's average annual income. Now, it's nearly nine and a half times someone's average income.

How do we, as the people of God, as followers of the Lord Jesus, as Jesus calls us, 'children of light'; how do we relate to whatever wealth we have? What do we do with it? How do we regard it? Jesus speaks to us Christians, because in this parable—unlike the previous parables we looked at, where Jesus is speaking to the crowds—in this parable he's speaking to his disciples: that's us. Who is our master in life? Is it God, or is it money? God and money can become rivals in our affection.

So today as we look at the uncomfortable topic of money, let us pray. *Gracious God, we love that old hymn where Frances Havergal wrote about pouring out her life at your feet. Dear God, please help us to handle the Scriptures carefully, to look at how you would have us live in 21st century Australia today, in our parish of Banyule. Speak to us by your Spirit. Where we need encouragement, encourage us. Where we need rebuke, rebuke us. Where we need love for the journey, continue to love us. Amen.*

So, we have the parable of the 'dishonest steward' or the 'dodgy manager', and this reading really comes in two parts. In your Bibles, you will see that in verses 1—8 Jesus tells the parable; and then in verses 9—13 he applies it directly to his disciples.

Now this parable comes directly in Luke after the parables of the lost things. Last week we looked at the lost sheep, and the lost coin. And the other lost thing, that is in chapter 15, is the parable of the prodigal son, the lost son. It is interesting that the language that Luke uses here, in this parable about the dishonest manager, mirrors some of that language. Do you remember the prodigal son? He *wasted* his father's wealth in wild living. Here we have the dishonest manager *wasting* the possessions of the absent owner—he's been negligent. Also in the lost son parable, we have the son *thinking to himself* when he comes to a crossroads. Here again, the manager *thinks to himself:* that same language.

Each of them decides to take a course of action to remedy their terrible situation. So here, we have the picture of the manager being called into the boss's office and he says, 'Give an account of yourself'. He knows he's going to lose his job. It's a right charge that's being brought against him. So, what does he do? He thinks to the future. 'How am I going to survive when I lose this job? I'm too ashamed to beg. I'm not strong enough to work.' And he's 'crafty' or 'cunning' or 'shrewd' or 'prudent'. He calls in each one of the master's debtors. And here we have an example of two that he calls in. 'How much do you owe my master?' '3000 litres of olive oil', he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it 1500.' That's good news for the debtor, isn't it? Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' '30 tons of wheat', he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it 24'.

So the manager, what he was doing was actually cutting out his commission, that he had put on top of what was owed to the master. He used his position to build up opportunities with the owner's debtors, so that they would look upon him with favourable eyes. 'They will welcome me. They will remember the good I've done to them.' And in the parable, what I find challenging, is that Jesus says this one is commended for his shrewdness, his prudence in this situation, for he looks to the future, and he looks to how he can best survive. Jesus applies this to the disciples directly, and to all 'children of light'. Isn't that a lovely phrase that Jesus uses? Children of light. That's who we are. Who've been brought out of darkness and into the light of the son of God.

So Jesus says, 'I tell you'. So here he's applying the parable directly to the disciples. 'Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.' Jesus is saying, 'Whatever worldly wealth you have, use it well.' Among the disciples, there were some that would have been richer than others. Some of Jesus' followers, like Lydia, were very wealthy. We know that because she dressed in purple cloth. She was a very wealthy woman. Jesus says, 'Whatever worldly wealth you have, use it well.'

In life, some people will have more than us, others will have less. It has to do not with their diligence or anything inherently more

deserving. Our earning capacity will be different one person to another. Some people like Gina Reinhardt will inherit wealth. Some people will be given the gift of a brilliant intellect. Some will have more opportunity than others. Some will have a higher education, and whether they choose to pursue that or choose a trade—whatever we have, with whatever we've been given, use it well.

Notice that Jesus says it will go away. 'So that when it is gone': we know that money goes, wealth goes—or we go, and we can't take it with us. And if we belong to God, so does everything we have. So, use it well.

Focus not on the money, Jesus is saying, but on the kingdom of God. We have a king whom we love and serve and who has welcomed us into his kingdom; and to whom we owe everything.

We sang, at my request, that beautiful hymn, *Take My Life and Let It Be*. I love how she goes through everything in her life. Her hands, her feet, her money, her intellect, her will, her heart, as she says, 'Take it all, Lord. Use it for your purposes to build your kingdom.'

Let's get very clear, though: money is not evil. Having money, even lots of it, is not a sign of evil or ungodliness or of miserliness. 1 Timothy 6 states, 'The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.' You might have heard that verse misquoted when people say, 'Money is the root of all evil.' No, it's not. The *love* of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and it can lead to mastery over us.

I said to Xiaoxi when we were robing and praying, 'I've got a big confession to make this morning'. I used to be a very jealous and envious person—and then I became a Christian and everything was fixed! No, I still carried with me those things of jealousy and envy. It struck me when I was at theological college. Friends of mine, they were living in college housing, but it was terrible. It was full of mould. They couldn't continue to live in that housing, but the rules of the College were that married couples needed to live within one kilometre of the college. So, my friend's father-in-law bought them a house to live in. He and his wife came from middle-class families, both of which had money and investments and property. Christian families.

This was such a shock to me, I couldn't stop talking about it. 'Do you know they were given a house? Do you know they were given *a house?* Isn't that extraordinary?' Because it wasn't within my family, or circles, which were very much working class. When my Scottish grandfather died, I remember mum had in front of her on the kitchen table a small suitcase, and that was all that Pop left. It had some letters, some of my auntie's hair when she'd cut it off. And Mum said, 'It's not much to show for a life, is it?' So very working class family. So I was shocked when a house had been bought for the use of someone studying at Bible college. I thought, who can do that? They must be filthy rich!

After college, and when I was in my first curacy, another friend of mine, who was in a similar situation to me—she was also working in a church—she had the resources to buy a townhouse for herself. She had had in her previous working life a much greater earning capacity than I did: I was a teacher, she had been a doctor; and she'd also saved, which I was hopeless at. I thought, oh my goodness, she has spent a huge amount of money, you'll laugh now, $250,000, a quarter of a million dollars on a house! I'll never have that! And I was jealous. But I only ever seemed to notice when people had more than I did, not less than I did. I didn't seem to notice *those* people.

And it wasn't just about money for me. I saw people who wanted to be married, who eventually did get married, and had children. And so sometimes I would think, why was God withholding these good things from me?

Well, I had to wake up to myself. I had to get over myself. Or more importantly, I had to repent and ask God to forgive me for my jealousy and envy; to help me see the reality of life: that just because God gives good things to other people, doesn't mean he's holding out on me. I needed to move from an attitude of scarcity, and looking at what I didn't have, to one of generosity: to what I did have, and what I could share. Thinking about how God is generous to us.

There are Christian people who are very, very wealthy. There are Christian people who are like most of us, pretty comfortable; and there are some Christian people who are very, very poor. Our church has benefited from my time in another church, in an area that was more wealthy than us. When we needed money to support Jono when he first came on board here, we didn't have the resources. The diocese didn't have the resources. So I wrote a letter to some of the friends I knew from a previous parish, and I asked if they could think and pray about supporting us; and they did. With one letter a number of people gave us money so that we could support Jono and Rachel and Zion, when we didn't have the money to take them on, when they first began with us. One letter, $14,500 came to our parish. Wonderful generosity. I was willing to ask because it wasn't for me. It was for God's kingdom work.

Now, I can rejoice with people who have resources and use it well. I see them be very generous. But let's get clear. They are generous not because of their bank balance, but because of the state of their heart.

Now times change, and I have been blessed with property. I have a mortgage on a flat. I have superannuation, which I've been putting extra into. I have life insurance which will benefit whoever gets the stuff when I die, because I don't have any dependents; and I have some savings, and my aim now is to use it well. So for a number of years now, I have set myself a task of figuring out each year my giving budget. I give to church here. I give to organisations: some Christian, some secular. I give to some missionary work.

Now, for me, because I get paid monthly, I set up monthly payments, because it's set and forget for me. So, if it doesn't come into my account, even better. It just goes. But when a new opportunity comes, and I'm asked to consider supporting yet another person, or yet another good cause, it's an opportunity for me to be generous. I don't say yes to every opportunity that comes along. So I pray, and then decide. Sometimes I say, 'No, I'm sorry. I can't help on this occasion.' Other times I might need to rearrange my giving to switch from one organisation to another, or to dip into my savings, or my monthly stipend, and give more. That's one thing I do.

The other thing I do, is thinking about my Will. Now I have no dependents; and I'm worth quite a lot for when I die, because of my superannuation; if I live till about Eileen's age of being 100, there won't be anything left. But look, I went to a funeral on Friday of a dear friend, and she wasn't 60, and she died. None of us know when our time will come, do we? But with my Will, having no dependents and not needing to make family provisions, that most of you do need to make, or want to make, provisions for your family—it's a natural thing to want to leave something to your family. Yes, I want to give certain things like watches, jewellery, art, to certain people in my life. I want to do that. But whatever is left when I die, I want to be able to use it well, and to direct where that money can be used. I'm not going to leave it to my dog, whoever it is at the time. Some people do leave their money to their cat or their dog. Whatever is left when I die, I want to make sure that it can do good.

So that's my confession about jealousy and envy. Now I see people with many more resources than I have, being able to spend it well. Friends of mine, their mother, who was quite a wealthy woman, took the whole family—all the five children she had, their children, their grandchildren—to Italy, to spend time together. She wanted to use her wealth well. She built family relationships. It was a wonderful thing. She was a very generous giver as well. But she used her money well.

What does Jesus say? 'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.'

I've heard it said, 'Master your wealth or it will master you.' I thought, 'Where does that quote come from?' So, I looked it up on the internet last night. Couldn't find it! Everything under 'master your wealth' was about making more money to make yourselves more comfortable. Nothing wrong with that. But brothers and sisters, let us learn from the dishonest manager whom Jesus commended in the parable. Think about our future. Where does our future sit? Our future sits with our King in the kingdom that he has called us into. Whatever we have on earth, whether it's a lot, whether it's a little, it is all temporary, we take none of it with us. But what we have as children of God is eternal. We have in God's kingdom eternity that he has invited us into.

So whatever we need to hear from the dishonest manager, hear it. Allow the Holy Spirit to prick your conscience if it needs that, or to salve your conscience if it needs that. I didn't need a prick, I needed a big kick up the derrière. And I'm very thankful that God gave it to me. So now I can rejoice with my Christian friends, because we share eternity together. Doesn't matter what they have, what I have, whether they have a lot, whether they have little, whether they have nothing, whether I have nothing. We are all children of light, sons and daughters of the King.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, you applied this parable to your followers. Help us to be people who are so grateful and thankful for the good things that you have blessed us with. Help us to use well the money that you have entrusted to us, because it all belongs to you. Help us to use well the time, and the talents, and the gifts that you have given to us, for they belong to you. Help us to pray each day that we follow the lead of your Holy Spirit. And Lord Jesus, we are so thankful for your mercy and comfort to us, and that when we come before you in repentance, heavenly Father, you hold out your hand, not in rebuke, but in blessing. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*The discussion in* Blokes Helping Blokes *encouraged the Editor to find some teaching cartoons:*


"Thank your mother for me, but I have my own lesson plans."


"This semester I'd like to see Tommy concentrate on, well, anything really."


"Instead of calling my mom, how would you feel about exploring a more positive and preventive strategy."


"Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it. Yet those who *do* study history are doomed to stand by helplessly while everyone else repeats it."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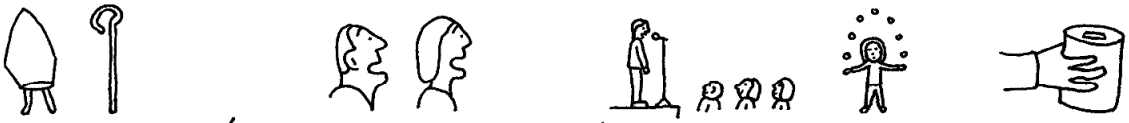

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