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# The Mustard Seed

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Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 35, Lent 2021

## Greetings from Fiona

Greetings.

It is almost exactly a year since we `closed down` the church due to COVID -19.

Of course, there is nothing and no one can actually `close down` the church! We found that to be true as a small, faithful community of Jesus` friends. Via the mystery of Zoom, we continued to meet and pray, wonder and reflect together on the Word of God, on the story and stories which shape and form us, sustain and challenge us, strengthen and nurture us in our Christian faith. Through text and music and art and discussion we discovered in fresh and surprising ways what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus, in the middle of global pandemic and significant existential fear.

To some degree, we still face the challenges of 2020, so it is perhaps a little early to reflect comprehensively on what we have learned through it all. But as the new year picks up, and in the season of Lent, it is important to review and take stock of what happened last year.

At the beginning of 2020, unaware of what lay ahead, Church Council gathered for its annual retreat day. From that time of prayer and reflection came three priorities:

Deepen Faith. Demonstrate Compassion. Develop Community.

Recently, at the Council retreat this year, we reflected on how and whether we had lived those three priorities. It was good to be able to affirm that we had deepened in faith, demonstrated compassion and developed community, despite circumstances none of us could have envisaged.

This year, at the Council retreat in early March, the words which found us were:

Healing. Belonging. Openness.

As Christians, together and individually, the call and invitation of the Good News of Jesus Christ is to find ways to live into and live out these hopes and aspirations for ourselves and for the whole world in twenty first century Australia.

These priorities touch on many different aspects of life – our relationships, our families and friends, the wider community, life in the Church and outside the Church, those who are accepted by society and those on the margins.

Greetings from Fiona (cont)

As a Christian community, we are called by God and out of love for all creation, to bring the light and love of Christ to bear on the issues of our time; to offer hope and peace and joy in the dark places, the fearful places, the difficult and demanding places.

We journey on through Lent, through difficulties and challenges, personal, communal, global, looking out for each other, and for those who have been forgotten.

Our work, our prayer, our joy - our mission - for this year with all that's still unknown:  
Deep Healing. Warm Belonging. Genuine Openness.  
For us, for all creation, and for the sake of the One who gave Himself  
for the salvation of all things - may it be so.

*'Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation.  
Our God is a God of salvation...'  
Ps. 68, 19, 20*

Fiona Winn – Lent 2021

## From the Editors

Lent is with us and we're back to something like "normal". In this issue, Fiona reflects on some of the challenges that arose with Covid-19 and the leadership provided by the Church Council.

We also have a number of pieces relevant to current season of Lent.

We learn a little about Chris Kunaratnam's interesting career and there's a report about Synod 2021.

We live in challenging times, but we hope that we can all take a little time to reflect on the matters raised in this issue of *The Mustard Seed*.

– Bill and Graeme

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# The Gardener

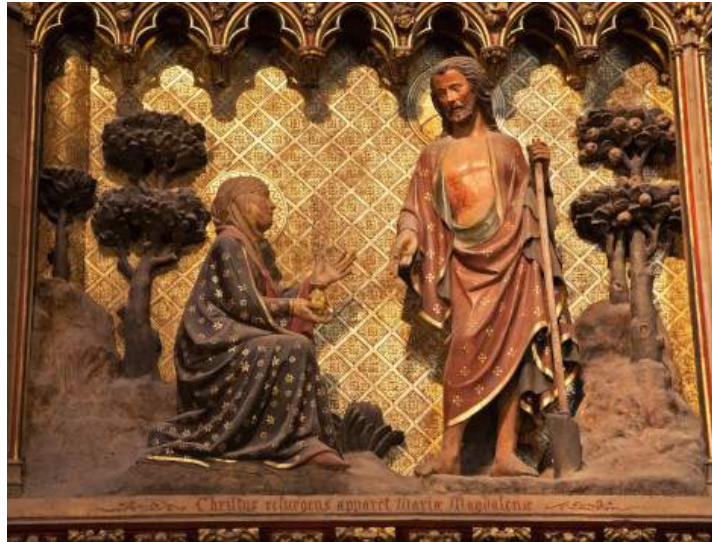
The first shaft of light  
catches each drop of morning dew  
and makes it shine like a pearl.

The dawn is nascent with spring.  
Soon a woman will come  
and think he is the gardener.

The gentlest of breezes  
touches his inexpressible presence  
like a mother's hand.

'Mary' he says,  
and the new-born day  
glows with embodiment.

Bill R



Christ & Mary Magdalene in the garden. This is a sculptured relief on the outside of Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris. Notre-Dame was damaged by fire in April 2019, but restoration work has commenced. It's hoped that it will be completed by (northern) Spring 2024, in time for the opening of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

There are two great days in a person's life: the day he was born and the day he discovers why.

William Barclay

# A New Genesis

Before the beginning began  
there was nothing;  
not just absence  
(for there was nothing to be absent from)  
and there was neither time nor place;  
no when, no was, no where, no sound -  
and there were no questions.  
And then there was light  
and in the light was stuff  
and stuff begat more stuff  
and the stuff spread ever wider  
and obeyed rules  
so that one event followed predictably upon another.  
In the chaos was order  
and light and time -  
but no eyes saw it  
and no mind wondered why.  
And then there was life  
and at a point in time  
a collection of cells  
converting light to energy  
got together  
and became conscious  
and became aware of self  
and thought "I AM".  
And self-centred life was driven by an urge  
to SURVIVE.  
And then there was WE

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and WE became US  
and together made more rules  
and discovered logic  
and exercised imagination  
and exerted power over everything  
without asking why.  
And WE invented gods  
and formed them in our own image  
and WE posed to them the question "Why"  
and abdicated responsibility  
for the answers.  
And WE lost the sense of US-ness  
and became an I  
and I became the measure of all things  
and answered lots of questions  
before they were even asked.  
Then came new light  
showing a way to re-shouldered responsibility  
and US-ness writ large  
and WE were drawn to this light  
as moths to a flame.  
And the flame was LOVE  
and LOVE was dangerous  
because it was illogical  
and because it hurt  
and threatened survival -  
but it generated MEANING  
and re-shaped life.

*Karel Reus has collected together prayers he offered up in worship over the last five or so years. They can be read online for free, or in spiral-bound hard copy for \$20 (for printing and postage). Go to: <https://anyflip.com/hkoa/lpwi/> for the web version, or contact Karel on 0404 882 419 or [kreus@me.com](mailto:kreus@me.com) to arrange for the printed version and payment.*

## Easter Services

**At Kooyong Rd except as noted**

April 1<sup>st</sup> **Maundy Thursday** 7 p.m. – Tenebrae and Holy Communion – *‘Time to say goodbye’*

April 2<sup>nd</sup> **Good Friday** – 9.30 a.m. *‘Time to die’*

**Stations of the Cross – Central Park 11 a.m.**

April 3<sup>rd</sup> **Holy Saturday** – 10-12 noon - Cleaning and Contemplation - *‘Time to keep silence’*

April 4<sup>th</sup> **Easter Sunday** – 9.30 a.m. Easter celebration with Holy Communion -  
*‘Time to rejoice and be glad’*

# A chat with Chris Kunaratnam



## **When did your family come to Australia?**

I was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka. My family migrated in the mid 70's as they wanted to give us kids a good education and a better life. It was very difficult at the start as they left large families, friends and servants!!! Mum had to learn how to make beds and cook as she previously only made cakes and desserts. [She is now a fantastic cook, catering for our large birthdays and other family occasions single-handedly.] Dad wasn't great with housework but loved burning papers in the incinerator every week!!! We lived in Glen Iris and went to the Glen Iris Methodist Church (prior to it becoming Glen Iris Uniting Church). I went to senior school in Armadale, so I haven't moved far.

It was difficult for my parents in the beginning as they could only afford to go back to Sri Lanka every few years and had to learn about the Australia way of doing things whilst still retaining their old customs and values. We kids were more adaptable and made friends easily. We were also lucky as the love of cricket was a great conversation starter!!!

## **What was your career, pre-retirement 1?**

I worked in banking for over 20 years, working in Sydney for some 10 years and then returning to Melbourne and being involved in many of the large infrastructure financings in Australia like Melbourne City Link, Sydney Airport Rail link, wind farms, power stations, toll roads in NSW etc.

It was very innovative and interesting work but the hours were demanding.

## **What was your career, pre-retirement 2?**

After travelling overseas and undertaking some volunteer work, both overseas and in Australia (mainly assisting refugees), I worked in the Australian public service for a few years however it wasn't "me".

I "retired" again but then discovered Financial Counselling, which assists people and small businesses experiencing hardship. I completed a Diploma of Financial Counselling at RMIT last year. I was very thankful that I had the studies to keep me busy during the Covid days. I got a job

in October, working with sole traders, partnerships and small businesses with regards the best grants for their circumstances and assisting them with their business and personal financial issues. The work is fulfilling and in the short time I have been there, I can see the great need for assistance, with every client I have met so far, having different issues and backgrounds.

I have also been working as a volunteer at FareShare, which rescues surplus quality food and cooks more than 2 million meals a year in Australia's largest charity kitchen in Abbotsford, for over 15 years. I have made some great friends there and learnt some great tips (eg no need to peel most vegetables and how to make mass quantities of sausage rolls) but more importantly using surplus ingredients to make nourishing meals for the needy.

I am also the Treasurer and on the Board of Heartbeat Victoria, which provides peer support around Victoria for people with cardiac issues. We have some 380 members and it was challenging to try and get as many members to use Zoom for meetings for the first time in 2020. Our members are looking forward to their walks, lunches, dinners and other social activities starting again in 2021.

### **Why Armadale Uniting Church?**

My family followed the Methodist church in Sri Lanka and when they arrived in Melbourne. Church was familiar and comforting and also provided great community support. After moving to Armadale, I was a mainly an Easter and Christmas attendee. I went to Israel on a tour in 2017 which was eye opening but also made me realise how much I didn't know about the Bible. Although Covid has been challenging for everyone in so many ways, one of the few good things to emerge were the Zoom meetings for worship at Armadale, as a way of staying connected. I did enjoy the listening to the various discussions which improved my knowledge which hopefully will continue to grow.

## **A NEW KIND OF PERSON**

*This is the text of a report given by a pagan official, Aristides, to the Emperor Hadrian in the early second century A.D. Hadrian was looking for justification to outlaw Christianity.*

'They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from them who would hurt them. If a man has something, he gives freely to the man who has nothing, If they see a stranger, Christians take him home as though he were a real brother.

They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense but brothers instead through the spirit of God. And if they hear that one of them is in jail, or persecuted for professing the name of their redeemer, they give him all what he needs, If it is possible, they bail him out. If one of them is poor and there isn't enough food to go around, they fast for several days to give him the food he needs. This is really a new kind of person. There is something divine in them'.

Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.

Martin Luther

# Christmas during Lockdown



We were unable to re-open the Church for our Christmas Day service. However, Fiona and a small technical team live-streamed the service from within the Church. It may not have been perfect, but it was well worth while making the effort.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal ... everyone has an eternal destiny.

C.S.Lewis

# Armadale since Covid-19



We resumed having services in the Church on 24 January 2021, after the Covid-19 lockdown. Here's Fiona presiding at that service.



We had some small “coffee in the park” gatherings during lockdown, but we have now resumed Men’s Breakfasts.

Who else should we go to? Your words have the ring of eternal life.

John 6:68



# Synod 2021



Synod 2021 was the first Synod meeting to be conducted online, for three days in February. Janet Atkinson participated as a representative of Port Phillip East Presbytery.

There are recaps of the proceedings on the Crosslight website – <https://crosslight.org.au/>

Rev Dr Kylie Crabbe (a former minister at Armadale) led a Bible study at the beginning of each day's meeting.

A lot of business was handled, including the election of Rev David Fotheringham as the Synod's next Moderator. David is Minister at High St UC, Frankston and will take up the position of Moderator at the next Synod meeting, in 2022. A new Standing Committee was also elected.

Reports were received from the Synod's Governance Committees and Agencies, including Uniting VicTas and Uniting AgeWell. Proposals calling on the Federal Government to take action in relation to the following issues were discussed and agreed to:

- advertising of on-line gambling
- protecting people on temporary visas from family violence
- climate change
- online safety and preventing online child sexual exploitation.

Members were able to give feedback on a newly released resource on covenanting, Walking Together as First and Second Peoples, which is designed to present opportunities for congregations, presbyteries, individuals and Synod to consider how they could deepen their walk with First Peoples.

In the Synod Standing Committee's report (introduced by General Secretary Mark Lawrence) there was a forecast 2020 Budget deficit of \$2.97m. However, it noted that fell within the financial parameters as set by the Standing Committee in June 2019 which specified a 2020 Budget deficit of no greater than \$3.01m.

It was noted that the Synod Standing Committee has resolved to move into a balanced budget by the 2023 (Synod) Budget. They are looking at a range of cost reductions across the board to achieve that as well as looking at revenue streams that will assist the Church to continue in its ministry and mission and hopefully increase that. However, one item was a reduction in the annual grant payment to the National Assembly from \$1.025m to \$700k from July 1, 2020 (total of \$863k included in 2020 Budget).

National Assembly President Dr Deidre Palmer and General Secretary Colleen Geyer presented a report of Assembly activities. The link to the Assembly website is <https://assembly.uca.org.au/>

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

I We came across a framed certificate in the Church office, and were surprised to see that it was dated 1831. So it's 190 years old! The annotation stated as follows -

“Presented to the Armadale Methodist Sunday School by Miss F E Jackson on the occasion of the dedication of the new S. S. building March 16th 1929.

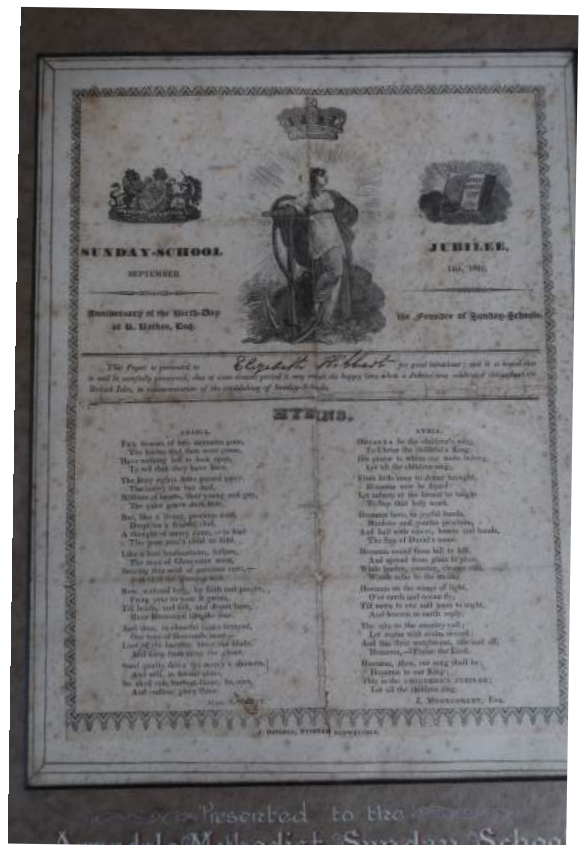
This certificate was given to Miss Jackson's mother in 1831 to commemorate the Jubilee of the Establishment of Sunday Schools in the British Isles, and also the anniversary of the birthday of Robert Raikes founder of the Sunday Schools.”

It's a reminder of two things of historical interest. The first is the establishment of Sunday Schools, and the other is the (re)building of the Church hall in the 1920s.

Sunday Schools first evolved during the 18th century. Robert Raikes (1735 - 1811) a Gloucester newspaper proprietor, was a strong promoter of their spread. They're seen as the forerunner of the State school system, with their intention being to develop literacy, usually using the Bible as the textbook. They were held on Sundays as the boys were often working in the factories the other six days. Wikipedia tells us that, "[t]he movement began in July 1780 in the home of a Mrs Meredith" (although there had been earlier instances). It's fascinating to learn that their foundation was being commemorated as early as 1831, in which year they were schooling 1,250,000 children. After that they were increasingly supplemented by "ragged schools" (charitable provision for the industrial poor), and eventually by publicly funded education under the terms of the Elementary Education Act 1870.



The other thing we're reminded of is the history of the building that is now used as offices. The original hall (believed to have been wooden) was burnt to the ground on 12 January 1928. By November that year, funds had been raised and the foundation stone for the replacement building was laid.



# CHAMPAGNE FOR BREAKFAST?

**A review of *Surprised by Hope* N T Wright SPCK 2007 (5<sup>th</sup> reprint)**

Tom Wright is one of the world's top New Testament scholars. As well as writing for fellow theologians, he writes accessibly for lay people. As a former Anglican bishop, Wright is surprisingly popular in the United States. Many of his lectures are on YouTube.

*Surprised by Hope* deals with two questions: What does the ultimate future look like? And how should we live in the present in the light of that future?

As he addresses the first question, Wright says that it isn't much like the view that many in the Church have - which is more akin to the philosophy of Plato than what Scripture actually teaches. He says that some of our well-known hymns need re-examination in this light.

He claims that many Christians and non-Christians have a distorted picture of what the Bible actually teaches about our future hope. The obsession with 'heaven' he argues is completely misguided, as the scriptures present heaven not as a final home but as a temporary rest until the next stage - the final resurrection and the coming together of Heaven and Earth - which we pray for in the Lord's Prayer each week. Wright clearly believes in a bodily resurrection, and definitely does not believe in a continued state of disembodied existence in ethereal space.

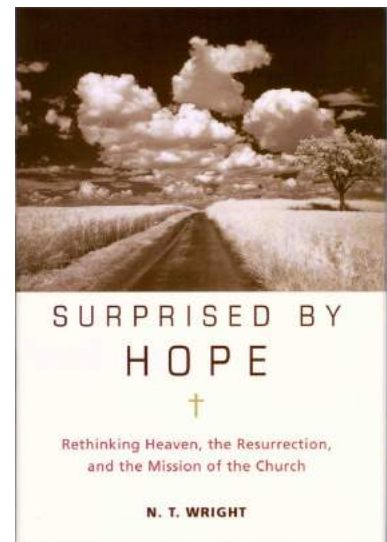
He says that it is important to grasp this because the way we think about our after life, shapes the way we live today. Someone who sees heaven as somewhere in the blue beyond will see the present life differently from someone who believes in the renewal of the present creation.

In his section on Easter, Wright contrasts the way we spend Holy Week with the way we spend the week *after* Easter. He says that for the Church, this time should be one of much greater celebration. He suggests for a start, that during this post- Easter week, we have a glass of champagne with breakfast. (Perhaps this is worth considering as it might begin to dispel the perception of many in the community that Christians are an essentially dour lot).

This is a book of over 300 pages and some might find it too long. However, it contains much that is exciting. It will be interesting to see if it has a real influence long term.

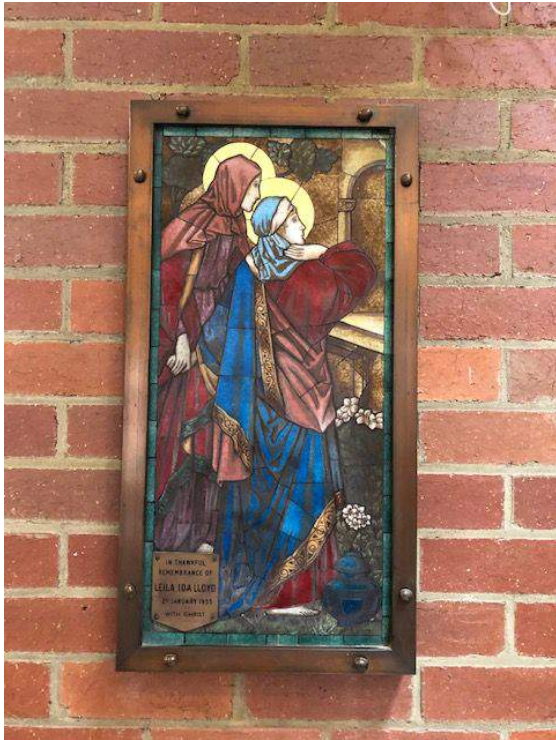
If you are not into theology because you think it is dry and boring, try this author.

WR.



May God protect me from gloomy saints.  
St Teresa of Avila

# Mosaic



Have you looked at the beautiful mosaic attached to the wall opposite the kitchen? All four gospels record that women were the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the mosaic illustrates the event. It was given in memory of Leila Ida Lloyd. Does anyone know who she was? Or who designed and made it? Is it a copy of an original painting? We have no record.

## Website

Don't forget to keep an eye on our website. It's at <https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/>

We try and keep it up-to-date, but we always welcome any feedback (you can send this to Graeme). We would also welcome any items of interest that you think might be suitable to be posted.

## Armadale Uniting Church

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Regular service times: 9.30 am each Sunday, Holy Communion on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month. Services have now resumed following the "Covid" lockdown.

Children's program: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month, during term time.

Usually on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday (where a month has 5 Sundays) we hold a combined service with other Uniting Churches in Stonnington, which are not always at Armadale. If the service is not at Armadale, no service at Armadale on that day. During January, the format of our services may vary.