
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 44, Easter 2024

Some thoughts about Lent, Easter and the Gospel of Mark

I came across the following commentary from the Centre for Excellence in Preaching (Lent Resources Year B - Center for Excellence in Preaching (cepreaching.org)). It brings the whole Lent, Easter and the lectionary for Year B into a meaningful focus, and suggests an interesting exercise for us to go through when we reach the end of Year B on Christ the King Sunday – to go back and read the whole of Mark's Gospel in a concentrated sitting and with new eyes. I hope you find it interesting and helpful also.

Ian Thomas

Year B Reflections

The Year B Revised Common Lectionary is the year in the cycle that zooms in the most on The Gospel of Mark. We begin here with a review of this Gospel.

Many think Mark is the original Gospel to be written down and that Matthew and Luke knew of it and made use of it in composing their own Gospel accounts. After all, with the exception of just 30 verses (out of Mark's total of 661 verses), all of Mark can be found in Matthew, Luke, or both. For Lent 2024 the first two Sundays take texts from Mark and then we return to Mark for Palm/Passion Sunday. In between we spend some time in John's Gospel (which does not get a dedicated RCL year but is scattered throughout each of the three years in the cycle). For Easter, Mark 16 is made the optional Gospel text, which is unfortunate as Mark's quirky telling of the resurrection deserves to be preached on. This page will focus its initial ideas on Mark 16.

One thing we preachers know about Mark is that his writing style is very spare—Mark wastes no words and, particularly in the first part of the Gospel, events take off with lightning swiftness, motored along by Mark's favorite Greek adverb of *euthus* – translated as immediately! Mark was in a hurry to get the story of Jesus across. And if Mark's Gospel begins very suddenly with Jesus just emerging from out of nowhere to be baptized by John, it ends with equal suddenness in Mark 16:8 as the terrified women flee the empty tomb, hurtling out into history like projectiles emanating from a terrific explosion. Mark ends in the silence of the women but the story could never have been told had they stayed silent. We know they spoke, we know they witnessed eventually. So must we all, Mark is telling us, so must we all.

Mark is also the Gospel that is clotted with misunderstanding about who Jesus is. No one understood him, no one got Jesus' identity and nature right, and even Jesus himself is constantly asking for silence

every time someone is ready to identify him publicly as God's Christ. Jesus knew that only his death on the cross would unlock his true identity and so once he dies and then is raised again, the angel tells the women to go to Galilee to see Jesus. But as Donald Juel, Thomas G. Long, and Ched Myers remind us, that final instruction is also a cue to us readers: we, too, need to go back to Galilee, back to Mark 1 and then re-read the Gospel. Once we have been to the cross and come to understand the true nature of Jesus as Messiah, then we can re-read the whole story through new eyes.

Scholars have arrived at two, possibly related, schools of thought as to Mark's purpose in writing this gospel the way he did. Some think Mark's church had been persecuted and so was feeling discouraged. Others think that by later in the first century perhaps some churches had become a bit lethargic. Either way, or both ways, Mark presented a gospel designed to shake people up. Mark wanted to wake up the lethargic church and he wanted to boost up the discouraged church by writing a gospel that reminded them of the dramatic power that Jesus possessed and still possesses. Hold your heads up high, Mark is saying. Don't be the least bit blasé about the gospel, Mark is saying. We are part of a grand drama shot through with tremendous power. Take heart!

As we continue in the year 2024, we do so in a world torn by war and, certainly in the American context (and to a lesser but significant Australian context), in a society riven by partisan divides so raw and so deep, violence seems lurking around all-too-many corners. Now more than ever and in this Lenten Season, we need to let Mark race us along to come face to face with the Jesus whose identity and power we absolutely need to recognize and revel in.

From the Editors

This month Ian has provided us with a reflection on Easter and the Gospel of Mark. Robin and Ann have some interesting photos of their recent travels – which connect to recent Old Testament readings during Lent. Westminster Hall is an interesting spot to visit when you are next in London, and Graeme tells us something of its fascinating history. There is more of course! We look forward to Easter Day when we will affirm together 'Christ is Risen'.

– Bill and Graeme

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Easter Services

Rev Barbara Allen will take our Palm Sunday service on 24 March 2024 at 9.30 am.

However, at the time of publication, we have not been able to finalise details of our Easter services. We'll post details on our website as soon as we can.

<https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au>

Mt Nebo

Then the Lord told Moses to make a metal snake and put it on a pole, so that anyone who was bitten could look at it and be healed.

Numbers 21: 8 (Good News translation)



Rob and Ann Ahin recently travelled to Jordan and visited Mt Nebo.

The views from this mountain are believed to be those that Moses saw when he gazed on the Holy Land before his death (Deuteronomy 34:1). He then died there (v 5).

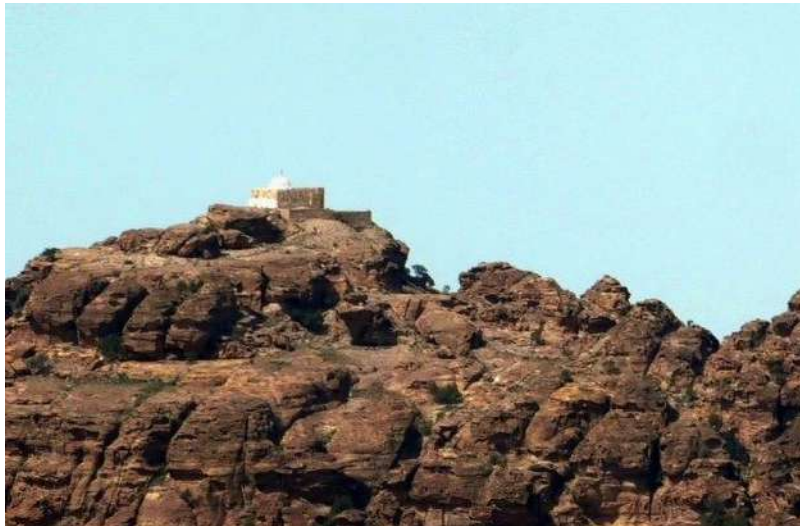
There's a serpentine cross sculpture at the top of Mount Nebo, which was created by Italian artist Gian Paolo Fantoni. It is symbolic of the miracle of the bronze serpent invoked by Moses in the wilderness (Numbers 21: 4–9) and the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.

The sculpture (above) and plaque (right)



View from Mt Nebo towards the land of milk and honey (right).

The supposed crypt of Aaron, brother of Moses (below).



Unlike ourselves, God actually loves the unloveable and desires the undesirable. Such love is able to raise a person from despair to hope, from darkness to light, from misery to blessedness. Such love is able to bring a sense of the beautiful, even to those of us, who, in the world's eyes at least, live not-so-beautiful lives.

Gary Deverell (Indigenous theologian).

YOU ARE WELCOME FOR BREAKFAST!

Women's Breakfast: On the *2nd Friday* of the month. Contact Margo Anderson for details 0447 035 355

Men's Breakfast: On the first *Friday* of the month. Contact Graeme Harris for details 9504 8234

Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

In London, across the road from Westminster Abbey (with United Nations Green in between) is the Methodist Central Hall. Perhaps you've visited it?

The Royal Aquarium originally stood on the site before the Methodist Church purchased it in 1903 for the price of £4 per square foot of land. The Royal Aquarium was highly ornamental and had opened in 1876. It had some fish but it also staged exhibits.

However by 1900 it had ceased to be a viable business, apparently to the joy of many people who thought it was unsuitable for the serious location that it occupied, next to Westminster Abbey and government buildings.

Methodist Central Hall Westminster has its origins in the Wesleyan Methodist Twentieth Century Fund, established at the end of the 19th Century to commemorate the centenary of the death of John Wesley which occurred in 1791.

In 1891 members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church wanted to mark the 100th anniversary of Wesley's death in a spectacular way. Sir Robert Perks, a Liberal MP and a leading Wesleyan layman suggested trying to raise 1 million guineas from 1 million Wesleyan Methodists (even though the membership at this time was approximately 420,000). He proposed using it to finance a huge program of evangelical work and social action as well as building a headquarters in the heart of London to be the world centre for Wesleyan Methodism.

The Twentieth Century or 'Million Guinea Fund' didn't reach its target by 1900, but closed in 1904, having raised £1,075,727.13s.8d. Of this £250,000 was allocated for a public hall and central offices for the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Central London.

The design for Methodist Central Hall Westminster was chosen from an anonymous architects' competition, held in 1904-5, by a panel of judges led by Sir Aston Webb. The design specified that it should not be Gothic, (that is, not like Westminster Abbey or the Palace of Westminster). A total of 132 anonymous designs were entered. From these, nine were chosen to be submitted in more detail for a 100-guinea fee.



The winning design was entered by architects Edwin Alfred Rickards (1872-1920) and Henry Vaughan Lanchester (1863-1953). Lanchester, an engineer, used the new building material of reinforced concrete to create some of the structures in the building. The chosen style was described as Viennese Baroque with Romanesque decoration, as Rickards is said to have been influenced by the design of the Paris Opera House.

Only £242,206 of the amount allocated from the Twentieth Century Fund was used. The site alone cost £340,982 and the building work and fees a further £155,170. The surplus land was sold but the debt on the building was not cleared until 1972.

After many years of planning and three years of building work, Methodist Central Hall Westminster was opened on the 3rd October 1912. There was no royal presence, no Prime Minister or 'celebrity', no great formal opening, no unveiling of anything. It was instead a day of what Methodists do best: prayer, preaching and singing.

continued on next page

Methodist Central Hall (cont)

Over the years, in addition to religious services, many notable events have occurred at Methodist Central Hall. It has been regularly used for political rallies, Famous speakers have included Winnie Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi (1931) and Mikhail Gorbachev (in 1993).

The Uniting Conference of the Methodist Church was held on 20th-24th September 1932, bringing together the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches.

Meetings were held in the building to form the Free French Forces by General Charles de Gaulle in 1940.

During the 'Blitz' of London, the basement was opened to the public who wished to take shelter. At the end of the war in 1945 many people who enjoyed such community in the basement (now Wesley's Café) wanted to stay on!

Prime Minister Clement Attlee celebrated the Labour Party's historic election victory from the Grand Staircase window to thousands of people outside in 1945.

On the 10th January 1946, the inaugural meeting of the United Nations General Assembly took place, and is marked by a plaque.

Revd Dr Martin Luther King addressed the 'Colour prejudice must go' rally in the Great Hall in 1961.



The Dalai Lama addressed a meeting during his visit to London at the invitation of the Dean of Westminster, in 1984.

In 1996 then Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali spoke in the Great Hall, to mark the 50th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations. He also planted a tree on the green opposite the building in front of the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. In 2021 on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, the green where the tree was planted was renamed 'United Nations Green.' 1996

A United Service of Thanksgiving was held for the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in the Great Hall on Sunday, 31st May 1998. The Preacher was His Eminence Cardinal Basil Hume and the service was conducted by the then Superintendent Minister, Revd Dr Peter Graves.

The funeral of Queen Elizabeth II took place on Monday, 19th September 2022 and it served as a media centre throughout the events leading up to the

funeral.

This article is largely based on material on the website <https://www.mchw.live/>

WEDNESDAY REFLECTION

We meet together for Quiet Reflection each Wednesday morning at 10 am in the Church, and then have coffee at a local cafe. You'd be most welcome to join us.

Around Armadale



(left) Rev John Lamont has led us in worship on a number of occasions; April B and Bill R presided at the Christmas Eve service (below left) and Rev. Peter Aumann also provided supply (below).



Rev Ross Pearce and Rev John Tansey, Presbytery's representatives to assist us with the process of finding a new minister, met with members of the congregation on 19 February 2024. Cheryl provided some lovely scones for afternoon tea (right).





Barry Mott's painting imagines the Emmaus meal in a contemporary context

THE UNNAMED DISCIPLE: MARY, THE WIFE OF CLEOPHAS?

Centuries of preaching and art have led us to assume without a thought that the two disciples who travelled from Jerusalem to Emmaus from Jerusalem and dined with the resurrected Jesus, were men. One was Cleophas, but his companion is unnamed. (Luke 24:18).

Some scholars have suggested that Cleopas's fellow traveller was his wife, Mary. Their case is built by conflating the identities of "Mary, mother of James" (Matt 27:56) a witness of the empty tomb, and "Mary, wife of Clopas" (John 19:25), also present at the Crucifixion - and then recognizing Clopas as a variant spelling of Cleophas.

If Cleopas's wife, Mary, was in Jerusalem for the Passover, it makes sense that she would have travelled back home to Emmaus (or stopped there overnight en route to home) with her husband. It wouldn't have been unusual for a married couple, in this relatively private context, to converse with each other along the way about what they had experienced - the rabbi they had been following, dead and rumoured to have risen - and what it might mean.

Mary had seen the empty tomb with her own eyes and even encountered an angel who affirmed "Christ is not here! He is risen!" But, when she told the other disciples, they dismissed her account as too fantastic, perhaps instilling in her a new skepticism; she hadn't after all, seen the body. Or maybe her faith remained fortified, and the trip home was spent trying to convince her husband that Jesus was indeed alive.

Whatever the precise content of their discussion, a "stranger" sidled up alongside them, giving his own interpretation of the weekend's events. They did not notice it was Jesus because "their eyes were kept from recognizing him". It wasn't until they arrived at Emmaus with their invited guest in tow and saw him bless the meal that 'their eyes were opened'.

ART and THEOLOGY

TOYOHICO KAGAWA

(1888 – 1960)

RENEWER OF SOCIETY

Toyohito Kawaga – evangelist, social reformer, author and mystic, lived at a turbulent time of Japanese history – a time of rising militarism and deepening xenophobia.

Born to a mistress of an unsuccessful politician and businessman, he was orphaned at four, and learnt resilience. At sixteen he became a pacifist, influenced by Tolstoy's writings. He was beaten as a traitor, and disowned by his remaining family when he was baptised as a Christian. He became an evangelist and focused his care on the urban poor. He persisted with his pacificism, kneeling before his abusers in the posture of prayer – not a ministry for the faint-hearted.

Kagawa was impatient with those who saw the faith as a mere collection of correct doctrines: the Kingdom of God is to be lived out in every dimension of life. He became an entrepreneur for the poor, starting clinics, low-cost food outlets, and cooperative factories in the slums. He organised trade unions and led strikes in the Mitsubishi and Kagawa shipyards in 1921. He preached "Brotherhood Economics", a peaceful cooperation between capital and labour based on the Cross of Christ. He was the author of 150 books, often drafted on toilet paper. In the five-year period from 1929 he held 1859 evangelistic meetings and made 12 overseas speaking trips.

Kagawa was jailed for several times for his role in the union movement yet during the Depression the Mayor of Tokyo appointed him to head the city's Social Welfare Bureau. He was jailed in 1940 for his apology to China for Japan's attack and in 1941 led an unsuccessful peace mission to the USA.

During Kagawa's Australian tour (1935) Fletcher Jones, a Methodist, who gave his name to an iconic Australian clothing brand, invited Kagawa to address the workers at his Warrnambool factory'. Jones, a Methodist, believed that "spiritual growth was achieved through productive and satisfying work, and that the object of business' should be social advancement rather than individual profit. He visited Kagawa's cooperatives the next year and by the 1970's, over 70% of the shares were owned by the staff.

Kagawa remains a transnational inspiration for all who seek to live the Kingdom on earth.

The Rev. Atsushi Shibouka

THIS ARTICLE WAS TAKEN FROM THE WEBSITE OF THE CHURCH OF MARK THE EVANGELIST (UNITING CHURCH) SOUTH MELBOURNE

April Blackwell leads a Christian Meditation group at the church on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm.

Sessions usually conclude about 9 p.m. For further information contact April @ 0419 807 892



Chris Booth was ordained on 17 March 2024 and a number of us were pleased to be able to attend.

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.

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Offerings

We're grateful for the level of support that we receive through weekly offerings, but have you thought about the amount you contribute? If it hasn't increased for a while, perhaps you might like to consider whether a small increase might be in order. Some of us use envelopes or make direct credits. Envelopes are available on the table as you enter the Church, and you can speak to any member of Council about making direct credits.

EASTER 2020

MALCOLM GUTE

And where is Jesus this strange Easter day?
Not lost in our locked churches, anymore
than he was sealed in that dark sepulchre.
The locks are loosed; the stone is rolled away,
and he is up and risen, long before,
alive, at large, and making his strong way
into the world he gave his life to save.
No need to seek him in an empty grave.

He might have been a wafer in the hands
of priests this day, or music from the lips
of red-robed choristers, instead he slips
away from church, shakes off our linen bands
to don his apron with a nurse: he grips
and lifts a stretcher, soothes with gentle hands
the frail flesh of the dying, gives them hope,
breathes with the breathless, lends them strength to cope.

On Thursday we applauded for he came
and served us in a thousand names and faces
mopping our sickroom floors and catching traces
of that *corona* which was death to him:
Good Friday happened in a thousand places
where Jesus held the helpless, died with them
that they might share his Easter in their need,
now they are risen with him, risen indeed.

Malcolm Gute is a poet, singer, song-writer and Anglican priest.

From the Archives - Extracts from Parish Newsletter

Bill located a copy of a Parish Newsletter from 1989, edited by Ruth Peterschlingman.

In the Annual Report of the Council of Elders, it was stated that worship services were conducted each Sunday at 10.15 am and 7.00 pm., and that "a small band of worshippers continue[d] to loyally support the evening services".

There had been eight baptisms during the year, and the role of the choir under the leadership of Betty Emms was noted as having "contributed significantly to the spiritual atmosphere of each service".

Financially, there was a surplus of \$7708 for the year, even after having made substantial grants to another parish, Prahran Mission and the Presbytery, although there was also a substantial legacy to the Parish. Apparently some efforts had to be made to secure this because it had been originally left to the Grandview Grove Methodist Church.

In additon to the report of the Council of Elders, there were reports from the Choir, the Fellowship and Mission Guild, "Arm-care", the Sunday School and the UCF.

But some things never change. Just like *The Mustard Seed*, there were two accounts of travel that members of the congregation had undertaken!

I thought I'd read a poem by Shakespeare, but then I thought "why should I? He never reads any of mine."
(Spike Milligan).

Armadale Uniting Church

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ARMADALE Vic 3143

Minister: Vacant
Organist: Rowan Kidd
ucarmadale@gmail.com

<https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/>

Regular service times: 9.30 am each Sunday, Holy Communion on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Quiet Contemplation: 10 am each Wednesday (except January).

Children's program: Activities for children are available at every service.

Usually on the 5th 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.