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# The Mustard Seed

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*Edition 3: March 2010*

Armadale Uniting Church

## **From the editors...**

In this edition of *The Mustard Seed* we look at some particularly Lenten and Easter themes. Find out some more about Handel's Messiah from our organist (did you know it was probably actually written for Easter, not Christmas?), and be inspired by the story of some amazing women who discovered ancient biblical manuscripts, through Bill Rush's book review.

You can also get to know some members of the congregation a little better – William Purdie, Will Hutchins and Rob Turnbull - and get some quick facts about the Gospel of Luke.

Peace to you all this Lent and Easter. As you read about the Lenten theme of homecoming, and prepare in your own way for Easter, may you know the blessing of the God who always welcomes us home.

Regards, Kylie Crabbe, Bill Rush and Graeme Harris.

## ***Reorienting the compass to home***

**Kylie Crabbe**

In the Christian calendar, the forty days of Lent sit as a reminder and an invitation. They are a time to reconsider and take stock each year, when we have let other things get in the way. I suspect that we all find ourselves in the midst of busy-ness we can't quite see our way out of, longing to find our home, our centre, again.

Traditionally, a big theme of Lent is repentance. This is probably much less popular language than it once was. It can seem intimidating – perhaps reminiscent of a doomsday street-preacher we might try to walk around, or at the very least, something that seems to make us feel guilt ridden. But, actually, while people throughout the church's history have had a very good sense of human sinfulness (which we might think of as a recognition that no one is perfect), the idea of repentance is actually not tied to melodramatic 180-degree about turns, but to the image of a compass. As we try to travel in one direction, we find ourselves constantly reassessing, readjusting, going slightly off-course and then redirecting ourselves back on track. That is the image of faithful life which Lent encourages: an annual reminder to consult the compass again, and reorient our course towards home.

We can see the emphasis on homecoming, rather than on guilt, perhaps most clearly in one of the readings we reflect on during Lent – the parable of two lost sons. (This parable, in Luke 15:11-32, is more commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son. But I think we can see when we explore the story further that both sons are lost, though perhaps in different ways, and the father longs for both of them to return home).

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You will no doubt be familiar with the parable. A younger son asks for his inheritance early – basically, in cultural terms, he says to his father: ‘I wish you were dead.’ He then goes off, spends all the cash and hits an absolute low. He eventually determines he would be better off as hired hand at his father’s property (where he doesn’t imagine he still has any status as son), and so returns. But the father welcomes him with extravagant love; he throws a banquet.

However, the father’s reaction to the younger son’s homecoming in turn draws out the lost-ness of his older brother. The resentment he harbours is so great he even risks cutting himself out of the banquet. He is self-righteous, and lacks compassion for his brother and, perhaps even worse, lacks insight into his own failings. By the end of the parable we are left wondering, from outside the party with the elder son: will he go in? Will he accept the hospitality of his father (who has, after all, said ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours’), given it means also accepting the father’s forgiveness of his younger brother?

And so we remember in Lent that we are all far from home – whether we have travelled a long way having hit an absolute rock bottom low, or are simply hovering

resentfully just outside the door. In Lent, each year, we are invited to wonder: what are the things which get in the way of our acceptance of God’s great love for us, and for all?



“The return of the prodigal” - A Rembrandt etching, done early in his life.

As Lent leads to Easter, we are also reminded, however, that God does not just stay home waiting for us to come to our senses. God comes to us, in the hurt and confusion and violence of the real world. The God who, in Christ, goes to the cross, who knows the heartache of human life, and through whom the brokenness of the world is transformed at Easter – this is the God who runs out to meet any and all of us, as we reorient ourselves towards home. We are reminded that God is aware of our foibles, attentive to our brokenness and still longs to wrap strong arms of welcome around us and urge us to join in the feasting.

May you find yourself, in perhaps even small ways, reorienting yourself towards home as Easter approaches this year. And if that feels like too far a walk, may you know the love of the God who, in Christ, comes out into the real, broken world to meet us, just wherever we are, that we might be brought home rejoicing.

*Lent 2010.*

# *Messiah*: an Easter oratorio



Events in the church year between Ash Wednesday and Easter have inspired some of the finest compositions of Western music. The music expresses a range of emotions from despair and sorrow to joy and triumph.

Handel's *Messiah* is often associated with Christmas. However, it is unlikely that Handel composed it especially for Christmas. There are two reasons for this:

- 1 While Part I of the composition deals with the birth, life and ministry of Jesus, Part II and Part III focus on His death, resurrection, and the final resurrection of all believers.
- 2 The first performance of *Messiah* took place in Dublin on 13 April 1742, nineteen days after Easter. If Handel had intended *Messiah* to be a piece for Christmas, it would have been premiered in that season.

Part II of *Messiah* starts by portraying the suffering and death of Christ. Familiar choruses include "Behold the Lamb of God" and "Surely He hath borne our griefs". Then the narrative moves to the good news of the resurrection with "But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell" and "Lift up your heads". Part II ends in glory with the celebrated Hallelujah Chorus: "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever, King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Part III is based on the aftermath with Christ's final victory over death and sin. It begins with the well-known aria "I know that my Redeemer liveth". Part III includes some of the most joyful and

triumphant music of *Messiah* set to such words as "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible", "O Death, where is they sting?", "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ", and "Worthy is the Lamb".

Handel's *Messiah* dwells more on the death and resurrection of Christ than on the Christmas narrative. It is an Eastertide masterpiece.



## **Congratulations, Christine!**

Christine, our greatly respected and very dedicated organist, has recently successfully completed her Doctor of Education. Her thesis focussed on professional development in technology for music teachers. The conferral ceremony for the degree was held on Saturday 13 March.

**A conversation with**

## **Will and William**

*Kylie had a conversation with Will Hutchins and William Purdie.*



***Where were you born? Do you have brothers and sisters? What about pets?***

Will Hutchins: I was born in Malvern, have one older sister (Brooke) and a cat called Biscuit. (Will is hoping to get a frog soon...).

William Purdie: I was born in Caulfield North, have one younger sister (Eliza) and no pets.

***Do you remember the first time you came to Armadale Uniting Church?***

Will Hutchins (memory from mother, Jude): Will was 8 months old, sitting in a pram in the aisle. He gurgled at the top of his voice whenever the congregation sang!

William Purdie (from mother, Jeanine): William was three when he first came to AUC, when we moved into Armadale. William's own first memory is of kids' club.

***Favourite football team?***

Will Hutchins: Geelong

William Purdie: Richmond

***What would be in your favourite meal?***

Will Hutchins: Tacos, icecream

William Purdie: Beef sausages, chocolate cake

***What is your favourite thing about living in Armadale?***

Will Hutchins: It's close to Luna Park.

William Purdie: It's close to school.

***What is your favourite thing to do at school?***

Will Hutchins: Art (the downside of school is having to get up early).

William Purdie: Sport.

***What after school activities do you like?***

Will Hutchins:           Gymnastics, staying up late on Friday night.

William Purdie:         Tennis

***What do you remember most about church?***

Will Hutchins:         Kids' club.

William Purdie:         Bread and juice, paper aeroplanes, making craft city.

***What else would you tell someone who was wanting to know something about you and what is important to you?***

Will Hutchins:         Art is important to me because I just love it, it's kind of cool.

William Purdie:         Sport is my favourite thing in the world. I love playing football.



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***Easter Service times at Armadale Uniting Church***

**Palm Sunday**         10 am, 28 March

**Maundy Thursday** 8 pm, 1 April  
Tenebrae service

**Good Friday**         9.30 am, 2 April

**Easter Sunday**       10 am, 4 April

**Regular service times** - 10 am each Sunday. Holy Communion on the 1st Sunday of each month. All are very welcome.

***Kylie's Ordination and Induction***

Having completed the Intern phase of Ministry, Kylie will now be ordained as Minister of the Word in a great celebratory service at 2.30 pm on Sunday 30 May 2010, at Armadale Uniting Church. This will be a joint ordination - Martin Wright will also be ordained!

*Kylie will be formally inducted into Ministry at Armadale during a regular Sunday morning service in the weeks following (date to be confirmed). This will be a combined worship service with St Andrew's Uniting Church, Gardiner*

***Harvest Festival Sunday***

This will be on **18 April**. We are invited to bring items of tinned or dry foods for the **Prahran Mission**. Toiletries also welcome.

# Quick facts on the Gospel of Luke

## Author:

The name 'Luke' comes from early Christian tradition, but it is not actually used in Luke-Acts itself. Although this raises questions about whether the author's name was in fact 'Luke,' for ease we normally still use that name.

Other attributes of Luke's which we might deduce from the way in which he writes are: that he is not an eyewitness, but has information from others who were (see Luke 1:2); he's not native to Palestine (he's not great at the local geography, etc); and he's well educated, particularly in his familiarity with Greek language and traditions, and he is very familiar with the Greek version of the Old Testament.

## Audience:

In the actual text of Luke, the Gospel is addressed to 'excellent Theophilus' (Luke 1:3, see also Acts 1:1). Often documents would be dedicated like this to someone who has financially supported the writing of the document. Without discounting this possibility, the name 'Theophilus' is itself interesting. It could have a symbolic meaning, given that the name's literal meaning is 'lover of God'.

Although the Gospel is addressed to Theophilus, the audience is obviously broader than an individual. In order to really understand the writing, it seems likely that the broader audience for whom Luke wrote would have been Christian, Greek-speaking, and familiar enough with the Old Testament to understand what Luke was on about. It is also very likely that there were a lot of gentiles in Luke's community.

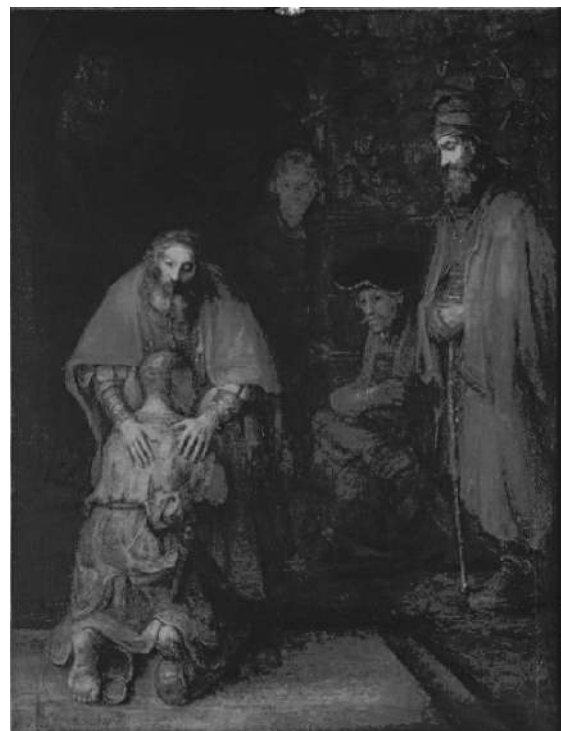
## Date:

There is considerable agreement among scholars that the Gospel of Luke would have been written around 80 to 85AD. Importantly, this dates the writing after the Gospel of Mark, and after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

## General structure:

The Gospel of Luke is the first of the two-part work Luke-Acts. In Luke the story of the life of Jesus is told. The Gospel focuses the reader's attention on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the geographic heart of Israel. In the Acts of the Apostles, the story of the early church is told. In Acts, there is a focus on the expansion of the telling of the gospel beyond Jerusalem, to the gentiles and to the ends of the earth.

Across Luke-Acts the story of God's action in the world is told, with an overarching theme of the way in which this action is frequently rejected. Acts, however, does not conclude in a way which resolves all of the tensions in the text. In fact, the very uncompleted-ness of the narrative invites the reader's response and participation.



"The return of the prodigal" - A Rembrandt painting, from later in his life.

## Some thoughts from .....

# Rob Turnbull

### **Where were you born? Any brothers and sisters?**

I was born at the Mercy and am the older of two brothers. Douglas is 18 months younger and we have always been very close. We have worked together now for over 30 years!

### **How long have you been attending Armadale Uniting Church? Why do you come?**

Margaret and I met as best man and bridesmaid at a wedding at Armadale U.C. in 1975. My father's family attended Church here in the early 1900's. My father was baptised at Armadale on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1910 - 100 years ago! I very much feel that I belong to this particular congregation.

### **Which football team do you favour most – and least?**

My mother's family were Richmond stalwarts and I have remained loyal (big mistake!) Least favourite team – probably Collingwood.

### **Describe your perfect meal.**

I do enjoy fish as long as I don't have to catch and clean it. Atlantic salmon is a favourite. However, the critical ingredient is good company and a glass of wine.

### **How would you describe your personal prayer life?**

I confess to only praying irregularly and obviously not enough during the football season.

### **6. What sort of worship do you prefer ? (a) traditional (b) informal (c) other?**

I am comfortable with a traditional form of worship so long as it is in contemporary language.

### **What has been your main area of work during your life? What else would you have liked to have done?**

I have always been self employed in the construction industry as a construction manager, building consultant and property developer. A career as a barrister or stockbroker could have been exciting – but I guess that the grass is always greener on the other side.

### **What advice would you give a young person about to choose a career?**

Be a barrister or stockbroker!!!!

### **What's something you would like to learn?**

I would love to play the organ well enough to play Blake's Jerusalem with all stops pulled out (or what ever is required for maximum effect).

### **10. Do you have a favourite hymn or hymns? (up to 3).**

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind" is a family favourite, but I think no longer in the Hymn book, Blake's "Jerusalem" and "Immortal, invisible God only wise".

### **Your favourite piece of music or composer?**

The B composers are hard to beat: Bach, Beethoven, Beatles.

### **Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the Church in our society? Any comments?**

I am sure that the Church has a future, but I am not sure what form it will take.

### **What is your favourite TV show?**

We generally love documentaries on Channel 2 or SBS, but our daughters usually get up and leave as soon as they start! Travel and architectural programmes appeal. Good murder mysteries are also favourites.

# *prodigal*

*Luke 15: 1-3; 11b-32*

## **brother two**

can you hear the music  
when you leave with pockets bulging  
filled with all that I can offer  
as you claim it as your right  
take the freedom you've demanded  
take your path of self destruction  
take your pills of dark distraction  
as you leave the realm of light

can you hear the music  
when you're far from home and hungry  
as I wait with ageless patience  
while you find your point of pain  
in the sharpness of your absence  
I will sing a song of longing  
I will sing a song of longing  
I will sing your lost refrain

can you hear the music  
when you turn to face your homeland  
while you formulate your speeches  
as you beg to earn your place  
I am running out to catch you  
you can keep your explanations  
I just need to hear your heartbeat  
feel your life in my embrace

## **brother one**

can you hear the music  
when you're working in the paddock  
you're the one who never squandered  
never wandered from the farm  
but you're lost in fierce resentment  
burning deep through years of labour  
you have always been beside me  
now I need you to come home

## **brothers**

can you hear the music  
when you wake up the next morning  
in the same room as your brother  
and you smell the breaking bread  
can you hear the music  
as you gather round the table  
it's my song of resurrection  
you're alive, who once was dead

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## BOOK REVIEW

# The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels

by Janet Soskice. Published by Alfred A Knopf. New York. 2009

In this informative book, Janet Soskice traces the lives of two women whose contribution to modern biblical translation has been largely forgotten. The author's style is engaging and it is easy for a reader to share her interest in this extraordinary pair.

The story begins in the latter part of the nineteenth century— a disturbing time for many Christians. Apart from the advances in biology and geology which threatened the traditional understanding of Genesis, it became widely known that the Greek text on which the revered King James Bible was based was imperfect. In 1859 in the library of St Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, Constantin von Tischendorf tracked down a much older biblical manuscript. Using this Greek text (the *Codex Sinaiticus* as it became known) and another Codex held at the Vatican, a new translation of the Bible appeared in 1881. There was intense interest in its arrival though not everyone was pleased. Despite improved accuracy, many would rather have seen a revision of Shakespeare than of the KJV with its beautiful cadences.

Then in 1892, two sisters, Agnes and Margaret Smith, identical twins from the quiet Scottish town of Irvine, made another landmark discovery at the same monastery. As well as an astonishing facility for languages which eventually encompassed Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac, the sisters, on the death of their father, inherited a large fortune. This gave

them ample means to travel. This they determined to do after a scholar friend told them of some material in St Catherine's library he had lacked time to examine. Travelling via Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula with a train of camels, servants and tents, these seemingly eccentric women eventually reached the monastery and were granted access to the library.

One day Agnes spotted a dirty volume with its pages stuck together. Daringly, she separated the pages with steam from a kettle. The text was an account of the lives of some female saints, but as she looked more closely she noticed the discernible shadow of another text below. As with many ancient documents, scribes wrote on treated animal skins which were often, for economy's sake, used several times and new text written over the faded letters beneath. Now her study of ancient Syriac paid an exciting dividend for the first words she translated were 'Of Matthew'. All the gospels were there – and written in a language very similar to the one spoken by Jesus. So the manuscript threw additional light on previous gospel texts and confirmed beyond reasonable doubt that chapter 16 of Mark was a later addition by an unknown scribe. It pushed back the date of the early gospels even closer to the primary witness.

The return of the twins to Britain with almost 400 photographs of the text was a sensation. Professors were not happy that this significant discovery had been

unearthed by two non-academic Scottish ladies. This was a time when women were denied admission to higher educational institutions. Eventually, as a number of German universities gave the sisters honorary doctorates, the dons of Cambridge were shamed into doing the same.

As interesting as the discovery itself is the story of the twins' intellectual and spiritual growth. Agnes and Margaret both married rather late, and both their husbands died early. Childless, they remained staunch Presbyterians, believing that Providence intended their wealth to be used for good purpose and that the discovery of the Syriac gospels, hidden for so long, was part of God's plan. Settling in Cambridge, the sisters built housing for the poor and founded Westminster College as a training centre for the English Presbyterian (now United Reform) Church ministry. The Rev. Brian Wren, who is the author of over 20 hymns in *Together in Song*, was a student there.

At Sinai, the sisters came into close contact with Greek Orthodoxy which seemed to them a strange form of Christianity. The icons suggested idolatry and the women felt the monks should have been less concerned with their rituals and more with converting the Bedouin who lived in the desert outside the monastery walls. Mutual respect developed as the twins understood how deeply the monks venerated the scriptures. There was another bond: both parties had a negative view of Rome.

This is a riveting story of two unlikely and largely forgotten heroines. Margaret died in 1920 on the twins' seventy seventh birthday. Agnes died six years later.

**A note about the author:**

Janet Soskice was born in Canada. Once an atheist, she is now Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Cambridge.

Reviewed by Bill Rush



*"I'm giving up Google for Lent."*

Armadale Uniting Church,  
86A Kooyong Road,  
ARMADALE Vic 3143  
[armadaleuc@bigpond.com](mailto:armadaleuc@bigpond.com)  
(03) 9509 8958  
[www.armadale.unitingchurch.org.au](http://www.armadale.unitingchurch.org.au)