
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Edition 16: Advent 2014

From the editors...

In this edition of *The Mustard Seed* we reflect on “Pilgrimages”. Peter Beale’s article introduces us to the topic and to his personal reflections and Susie Condron tells us about the work of the Hagar Foundation in Cambodia. Rob Ahin writes about his and Ann’s “pilgrimage” to Queensland and in particular to Longreach.

Ian Thomas reflects on Mark’s Gospel (which is covered by the lectionary this year).

We’ve also taken the opportunity to include some other items which we trust will be of interest.

Bill Rush and Graeme Harris.

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Pilgrimage

What do we think of when we hear that someone is going on a *pilgrimage*? For me, a pilgrimage is not just a holiday away from home, or a tour of some new location we have never been before, but a journey of deep meaning and significance that has some lasting purpose for our lives. Jenny Byrnes, Principle of the new Pilgrim Theological College, gives the simple definition of a pilgrim as “one who journeys to a sacred place”. I don’t think of a pilgrimage as something restricted to journeys to religious sites, such as Jerusalem and the Holy Land, though for a large group of my colleagues in ministry, that is exactly what they did in September this year, as part of the UCA president’s third Minister’s Conference for 2014. I think of a pilgrimage as something that, more broadly speaking, connects with our roots as individuals, and also to the roots of whatever group or community (or nation) we belong to, whether religious or not. Those roots hold something “sacred” for us, and so become our sacred places.

In this broader definition, I might take a pilgrimage to the place where I was born, or to where my ancestors lived and died. In 1984 I spent three months in the UK, and I felt, even then, that the journey to England and the many trips to various sites of family significance were very much a pilgrimage. After thirty years I have a deep yearning to take that pilgrimage again, and this time take my wife and children with me, if they will come. I want them to connect to their ancestry on my side of the family— something that they had little chance to do until

now. In July this year I accompanied Vicki on her first trip back to Tonga in over twenty years, and we had the chance to visit many of her relatives and places of family significance, and hear stories of her family's life in her early years. I would like my children to do that on their English side too.

My pilgrimage would take me to places connected to my mother: Fordingbridge, where she was born; Southampton, where was sent during the war years; Sandleheath, where her ashes were buried. For my father: Damerham, where my father grew up and some ashes were buried; Kite's Nest Farm, where he farmed and began raising a family; and Corfe Mullen, where we lived for 5 years before coming to Australia (these are in the counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset). I would meet and hear stories from relatives spanning the last three decades, and old stories nearly forgotten of my youth. Perhaps because I grew up in the church I would also visit the religious connections: the Methodist churches that my ancestors worshipped in, and Salisbury Cathedral, the local cathedral. While I am there I would take in Stonehenge as well! In London there are many sites, including Aldersgate St, the birthplace of Methodism.

These are just the beginning of what are sacred places of pilgrimage for me. I would like to go on pilgrimage to Taize and Iona, to Palestine and Rome, to archaeological digs in Egypt and the Middle East, and to the roots of humanity in Africa... there are just so many places I could go—but not on this trip! Money and time will not allow that. Yet there are places people go as pilgrims to which I feel no deep connection, and therefore a trip to such places would not be a pilgrimage for me. Although a trip to Gallipoli or Kokoda would indeed be a place of pilgrimage for many Aus-

tralian, even those that have never been to war, I am not drawn to them. For me, I am more compelled to visit the aboriginal sites around Australia that speak to me of 40,000+ years of adaptation and survival in this land.

Away from the ancient sites, we may go on more modern pilgrimages to places of connection with other parts of our lives. Some go on pilgrimages to wineries, football grounds, universities, beaches, shopping centres, and more, because these places awaken something deep and meaningful within us—indeed, something sacred! As a photographer it was a delight to go to Yosemite National Park (back in 1984) and walk the trails made famous by Ansell Adams and others.

When we go on a pilgrimage we should always do so with a willingness to be changed by it. As a pilgrim we should take our journey slowly, absorb from the experience what we can, and take time to reflect on the significance of it, not just for us, but for all those who have gone before, and the presence of God, journeying with each person along the way. Often, a pilgrimage is something that becomes a landmark in our lives, a journey that we will always look back on as one of the most significant things we have ever done. In the Uniting Church we often use that phrase from the last paragraph of the Basis of Union, “people of God on the way to the promised end.” We often affirm our faith with the words, “we are a pilgrim people...”—as Christians we are all pilgrims, journeying towards the sacred. So, when you next go on a journey, consider it a pilgrimage, rather than a tour. Look for the sacred, take your time to dwell on it, and let it change your life.

Peter Beale



A pilgrimage might also include a visit to the Methodist Central Hall, London, where the first session of the United Nations General Assembly was held in 1946.

Hagar Australia in Cambodia

Susie Condron



As a board member of Hagar Australia, I recently attended our annual Justice Tour in Cambodia.

Hagar is a Christian aftercare agency operating in Cambodia, Afghanistan and Vietnam to deliver wholeness to the lives of women and children torn apart by sexual abuse. Under the mission of “doing what it takes, for as long as it takes, to restore a broken life”, Hagar runs schools, delivers psychological and emotional assistance, provides legal representation and works tirelessly with all of those in its care to restore and improve the lives of those who have suffered the worst of human torments.

The facts are:

21 million people in the world are now in slavery

5.6 million are children

58% of all human trafficking occurs for sexual exploitation

56% occurs within the Asia Pacific region

Hagar runs its annual Justice tour for highly influential people within Australia to see firsthand the works it undertakes. This wonderfully diverse group included a federal judge, an ABC producer, three lawyers, an outback nurse, two property developers, two CEO's of other NGO's and some seriously high wealth individuals. I felt quite humble in the presence of so many people who have made such a real change in the world in which we live. These

people have the capacity to influence such a broad spectrum of society and have achieved such wonderful enormous change.

The itinerary included high level briefings with the Australian Embassy, child protection agencies and other experts in Cambodian law, and included briefings from many of the Hagar staff. One of the highlights was a pizza dinner with many of the older clients of Hagar, including some who have come out the other side and now act as mentors to many of the younger children.

After the Justice tour last year, Elliot Costello (son of Tim Costello and a passionate Hagar supporter) was so moved by his experience with a little girl he met from our school he launched the Polished Man campaign during September this year. This campaign challenged men to end violence against children by painting one fingernail, representing the one in five children who experience violence globally before the age of 18. This campaign raised over \$250,000 for Hagar.

Wow – talk about direct action.

All of us dream of leaving the world a better place than we found it. My exposure to Hagar and the people I have met during my time in my role have allowed me to understand how I can start on that journey and make a real difference.

As a mother of those three beautiful kids, it breaks my heart to see the treatment afforded to too many children in Cambodia. I have read stories and played games with children who are 10 and 12 years old, but look like they are 5 due to years of abuse and neglect. To feel I have contributed to helping even one of those lives is important.

Footnote: Hagar was the Egyptian handmaid of Sarah who gave her to Abraham to bear a child, all as set out in Genesis ch 16.

Here's the link to Hagar Australia's website — <http://hagar.org.au/>

But this journey is just beginning!

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Life's Journey: A Pilgrimage of Hope

Can we learn to hope? I think we can. Because we don't bring this true hope with us from birth, and because our experiences of life may perhaps make us wise but not necessarily hopeful, we have to go out to learn hope.

We learn to hope when we say yes to life. We learn to hope when we say yes to the future. That sounds very simple, but in the diverse circumstances of life it is very difficult indeed. We sense that hope is keeping us alive if, when the outlook is sombre, we say *nevertheless* and dare life. Even if the future of humanity and the earth looks dark, to hope means to live and survive. Long ago the church father Chrysostom said: What plunges us into disaster is not so much sins as despair.

True hope isn't blind. The messianic hope for the new world looks into the future with its eyes open. But it sees more than what can be seen on the horizon of history. The Indonesian word for hope means looking through the horizon to what is beyond. True hope looks beyond our modern world to the new creation of all things in the kingdom of God's glory. We see then this world put to rights and redeemed. We do what we have to do whether we succeed or not. We are acting in accordance with God's future, the future we hope for, even if it brings us into conflict with our own society.

We are acting out of an inner necessity, in the way that roses flower. The roses don't ask why either or what for – they simply bloom. The same is true of life lived out of hope.

(An excerpt from *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* by Jurgen Moltmann)

Grey Nomads on a Mission

Robin Ahin



Ann and I set off on July 6 on a blustery, chilly Melbourne afternoon, the odd rain squall encouraging our departure in search of warmer climes. Our “pilgrimage”, possibly the first of many to sunny Queensland, started as a very sociable one, catching up with 10 separate groups of friends before we had passed the Sunshine Coast and found ourselves alone for the first time.....

Wishing to search out new experiences, we headed west from Rockhampton, heading for Longreach, in search of the Stockman’s Hall of Fame. We figured that it was a reasonable day’s march, about 680 kms along the sealed Capricorn Highway and headed off one fine morning, stopping at Emerald for lunch. We planned to stay a full day and 2 nights in Longreach but found the town far too interesting to see in a day and wound up staying 3 days before moving on.

We started with a lunchtime show about the local famous bushranger “Captain Starlight” and a stagecoach ride near town, showing off the animal han-

dling and manual skills the stockmen needed on the job. As expected the stagecoach ride was dusty and not exactly 5 star comfort, but exciting nonetheless. The thought of spending days on the coach amid the dust and flies made me thankful for our comfortable vehicles today.

The afternoon was spent at the Qantas museum. Qantas is the second oldest airline in the world and had its lowly beginnings as a mail carrier between Longreach and Cloncurry. It opened for business on November 16, 1920, started by 3 returned WW1 fighter pilots, Paul McGuinness, Hudson Fysh and Fergus McMaster, who wanted to use their newly acquired flying skills and saw a need for fast travel across the vast distances of inland Australia. They enlisted the backing of a local grazier, who got caught up in their vision. He put up the money to buy the first plane on condition that he receive a flight every year on one of their routes, which he took till shortly before his death many years later. At one stage, Qantas built a number of their own



planes in their hangar in Longreach. There are a number of aircraft on show including a 747 jumbo jet and earlier model aircraft back to the biplanes used in the 1920's.

We spent the next day at the Stockman's Hall of Fame, which chronicles the history of our early settlers and the stockmen who tended the livestock and performed all sorts of tasks needed to run a farm or cattle station. This included the local Aboriginals, whose animal handling skills are legendary. It is a fascinating museum full of interesting bits of history.

The next day we visited the School of the Air. This school is relatively new and services students from hundreds of kilometres around. These days the internet provides real time classes with video, electronic notes and class work. Corrections and interviews with students happens live, which is a vast improvement on the original pedal power. Once or twice a year, the students come in to the school for a few days so they can interact with their classmates and have activities, access the library and sport. It is also an opportunity for the carers or governesses to meet socially.

Longreach is also a base for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, started by Presbyterian minister, Rev John Flynn in 1928 with a single aircraft operating from Cloncurry, chartered from Qantas. As with the school of the air, the internet has revolutionised the way the Flying doctor interacts with patients and carers in remote places, to assess the urgency of their predicament, whether they need repatriation to hospital or assist remote stations to treat patients as necessary. Every station carries an extensive medical kit which can be used to treat a variety of ailments. The RFDS has truly been a life saver for many patients in remote settlements.

All in all, Longreach was a highlight, giving us a view of life in the outback and those resourceful and brave enough to challenge our beautiful, dry and often inhospitable interior.

To the east of Longreach is Barcaldine, famous as being the birthplace of the ALP. To the west is Winton, where Waltzing Matilda was written and first publicly recited. This area is also in an area previously inhabited by dinosaurs, and many interesting discoveries are being made and displayed.



PEG GRAY

Peg was a much-loved member of the congregation for many years. She died on 28 October 2014, aged 98.



A Memorial Service for Peg was held at the Royal Botanical Gardens on 14 November 2014 (left).

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Thomas Merton's Prayer: A Pilgrimage of Trust

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you, does in fact please you and I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.

And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road although I may know nothing about it.

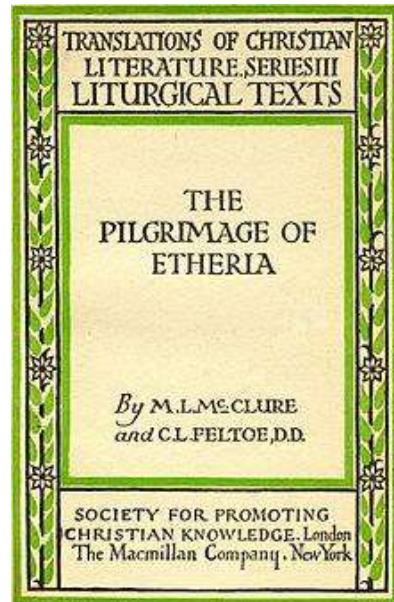
Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are ever with me and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

New phone number

As we will be using Prahran Mission's communications facilities in the future, we will no longer have a landline at the Church (it was 9509 8958). Hence, to contact Rev Peter Beale, please ring 0421 049 374.

EGERIA: A WOMAN ON PILGRIMAGE

Egeria was a pilgrim to the Holy Land in the 4th Century. It is thought she may have been a nun living in western Spain. She must have had access to considerable means as no woman would have travelled without a retinue for protection in those days. Her aim was to visit as many of the sites as she could that were mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. She kept a wonderful diary and she recorded this experience of her visit to Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity on Tuesday, January 5, 394 A.D:



I was fortunate enough to be granted permission to pass through the underground passage in the outer north wall into the very cave itself. By what words, with what voice can I describe it? ... In this little nook of the earth the Founder of the heavens was born, here He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, beheld by the shepherds, shown by the star, adored by the wise men. And as I knelt there ... mingled with joy and tears... I was so uplifted, so that evening came before I was aware of it.

REDEDICATION SERVICE

During our 9.30 am service on Sunday 30 November 2014 (the first Sunday in Advent), we'll rededicate the Worship space, having regard to the work that's occurred over the past year.

Christmas Tree

As in previous years, we'll have a Christmas tree in the Church, and gifts for children may be left under it which will be donated to Prahran Mission. The gifts will be collected and delivered following the service on Sunday 14 December.

Mark's Gospel

As Advent marks the beginning of Year B of the Lectionary, Ian Thomas reminds us of some characteristics of Mark's Gospel (the Gospel for Year B).

Mark's gospel differs from the other three "canonical gospels" in that it contains no stories about Jesus' birth, no stories of the resurrection, and very little in the way of the direct teachings of Jesus – that is, no beatitudes, no Lord's prayer and no golden rule. It is shorter (only 16 Chapters) than the other gospels, and the weight of evidence suggests it was the first of the gospels. Equally clearly it was written after the letters of both Paul and Peter. It was most likely written in Rome, where Mark had spent time with both Peter and Paul. It was most likely written between 60 and 70 AD just before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. It is not certain that Mark was the actual author, but clearly someone close to him who had a gift of writing prepared the text. In many ways the text of the gospel, as a secondary theme, is Peter-centric as he features quite strongly in the stories, and is the one who makes the dramatic assertion (Chapter 8: 29) that Jesus is the Messiah. One suggestion is that it is a carefully collated collection of the things Peter

preached about while in Rome. Mark's gospel is considered a primary source and the other gospels, particularly Matthew and Luke contains quite substantial amounts of identical text.

The gospel begins with a very short "overture" of just 15 verses, that unequivocally declares the purpose of the gospel – to show the humanity of Jesus and at the same time to declare his divine status as the promised Messiah. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus establishes the kingdom of God on earth as a present reality and a future hope. So there is this tension in the narrative about the dual nature of Jesus – human and divine – the "Son of God" and the duality of the Kingdom – present and future – a work in progress – which the disciples did not fully comprehend – and I daresay many of us in the present day do not fully comprehend. Yet, it is the task of the imperfect church to wrestle with and proclaim that God's Kingdom is a real and present alternative to the temporal and unfair, unjust power games of the alternative paradigm. The power and authority of the Kingdom is based on the love, compassion and service that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The fact that the alternative paradigm is still dominant today is mirrored in the demise of Jesus at the hands of the authorities and the power brokers of the time. The glue that binds us to Jesus is the Holy Spirit. It is the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as we get closer to God that reveals the understanding of the enigmas posed in this gospel – not the power of our rational intellect. This is dramatically revealed in the story of Jesus' baptism – the first event recounted as the narrative begins in Chapter 1.

The basic structure of Mark's gospel seems to be;

The Prologue (Abstract) – Chapter 1: 1-15



Fresco, St Mark's Church, Belgrade.

The first year of Jesus' ministry – Chapters 1 – 3

The second year of Jesus' ministry— Chapters 4 – 6

The third year of Jesus' ministry – Chapters 5 – 16

In fact a large part of the Chapters 14 – 16 seem to be the text a lengthy liturgy or ritual that spans the 24 hours of Jesus' passion and crucifixion

There are many resources readily available via a Google search if you want to explore some of the substantial scholarship and commentary on Mark's gospel. If you type in something like "main themes in Mark's gospel" or "understanding Mark's gospel", you will find many such resources covering a range of perspectives from orthodox to hallelujah evangelical.

For me, one of the most informative is a posting from William Loader (<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/mark.html>) who declares how important Mark's gospel is because for Mark the good news is about transforming power which liberates people from powers which oppress them. In Mark's terms it is what occurred in Jesus through the Spirit. It is the coming near of the kingdom of God.

And it is something entrusted to the community of his followers.

Mark tells us that a follower of Jesus in any age is someone involved with God's life in the world bringing healing and freedom. This is the vision of God's reign in the world.

Mark portrays Jesus as radically inclusive. This is part of the message of the kingdom and of Jesus' activity.

The good news, the liberation, is for all. It is radically inclusive and even Scripture cannot stand in its way.

Underlying all of the gospel is a value system according what makes a person great, what constitutes true human being, is self-giving love and compassion. Giving life is the clue to finding life.

Finally, another interesting extract comes from a book by an Anglican theologian, James Woodward, who tells us the best way to get in tune with all the activity and the themes of Mark's gospel is to read the whole gospel in a single sitting (a task that takes about 2 hours) – and a worthwhile experience it is.

Reference

Woodward, J., Pryce, M., and Gooder, P, *Journeying with Mark: Lectionary Year B.*

(right) St Mark the Evangelist Icon from the royal gates of the central iconostasis of the Kazan Cathedral in St.Petersburg, 1804.



Contemplative Worship at Armadale

This group meets in the church lobby on alternate Sundays at 7 p.m. It is based on Ignation meditative practice. For further information contact the Rev. John Bottomley of Creative Ministries Network. 9827 8322.

To Bethlehem

A bureaucratic notion
led to this.
To be counted
requires travel.

Back aching,
she held the donkey's mane.
He, womb-cushioned,
survived till birth.

He lay bound tight.
Lord. King. Saviour.
Restrained by rags.
He would be bound again
by petty rules.

Bound in old-hood.
I reach out,
but wrappings hold me tight.

Release me!
Know me!
See my mighty deeds.
See the dragons slain.
See the golden towers.
See also pits,
and ruins of intentions
good and bad.

Karel Reus

CHRISTMAS AND JANUARY SERVICES AT ARMADALE

Sunday before Christmas – 21 December

In addition to our usual 9.30 am service on this day, there will a carol service at Ewing at 7.30 p.m.

Christmas Eve – Wednesday 24 December 2014

7 pm - a service of carols and readings at Armadale.

Christmas Day – 9 am

We will have a combined service at the Ewing Memorial Church
(Cnr Burke Rd and Coppin Street, East Malvern
(No service at Armadale on this day)

January services

As in previous years, the Uniting Churches in Stonnington will combine for services during January 2015. Details are:

Sunday 28 December, 10 am - Malvern East (Serrell Street)
(time of 10 am is planned, but to be finally confirmed)

January services, to be finalised (please consult website closer to the time).

Open Garden

Marg and Rob Turnbull had their garden open as part of the “Open Gardens” scheme, and some of us visited. It was a lovely spring day. Here are some pictures.



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Regular service times (except January): 9.30 am each Sunday.

January services: see page 11.

Children’s program: 4th Sunday of the month, during term time.

During January, and occasionally at other times, we hold combined services with the other Stonnington region Churches, instead of meeting at Armadale.