
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 32, Lent 2020

Greetings from Fiona

‘So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.’

Ps. 90: 12

We are now well into our Lenten journey. Marked with ash and made aware of our mortality, we travel on in the company of Jesus. At the beginning of the season, we heard again the exhortation in Genesis to remember *‘...you are dust and to dust you shall return’* Genesis 3: 19.

Lent invites us to take seriously, consider and wonder about the precariousness of life – all life - ours, Jesus’, and increasingly, the Earth’s – and to take stock: How do we travel? What are our priorities? Are we prepared, ready for any and all of life’s eventualities? Can we live well and do better for the sake of all creation?

What are we to make of the summer’s unprecedented catastrophic bushfires, the subsequent devastating floods, the ongoing unbroken drought and now the unthinkable world-wide distress of COVID 19, the novel corona virus?

The season of Lent is an opportunity to reflect on what is happening in our world and in our lives – and to get ready for whatever lies ahead. As we journey on, we reflect on the preciousness of our lives - and the preciousness of *all* life.

Christ’s way, reminds us that life is provisional – the provision of, provided by, a loving Creator, and, as gift, not to be taken for granted: the air that we breathe, every breath that we take, the joy and peace and hope we can mysteriously and marvellously experience, through Christ, no matter what confronts us, no matter what we are going through.

Whatever we face - personally, nationally, globally, congregationally – in this season of Lent 2020, may we respond in sober reflection and a deeper appreciation of what God has done, and is doing, for us and all creation in and through the life, death and suffering of Jesus – and then, may we have the courage to live into the future differently, bravely, hopefully.

In all the challenges before us, may we come to trust in God who is faithful, just and merciful; the God who made us, knows us and loves us - for ever.

These are words from the Iona Community...

‘Don’t be afraid. My love is stronger. My love is stronger than your fear.

Don’t be afraid. My love is stronger.

And I have promised, promised to be always near.’

(Wild Goose Worship Group – Iona Community)

Go well in every way.

Blessings.

Fiona

From the Editors

Already we're well into 2020, and the season of Lent is with us. As we prepare for Easter, Fiona's Greetings are on page 1 and we can bear in mind the annual Seven Weeks for Water campaign by the World Council of Churches as part of its Focus on Water. This occurs every Lent, with World Water Day being on 22 March. The poems by Bill Rush are in recognition of this.

In this issue, we also introduce our "Read, Return and Review" program (thanks Margo). We remember both Mioko and Heather, and once again publish a poem by Karel. And there are a number of other pieces which we hope you will find of interest.

– Bill and Graeme

Contents

Greetings from Fiona	1
Editorial	2
Library – Read, Return and Review	2
Water	3
Mioko Wood	4
Christianity in Japan	4
A Prayer for Good Friday	4
.....then Sunday happens	5
"Before I Forget"	6
Around Armadale	7
Thoughts and memories of Heather	8
Church Council Retreat	9
Resurrection - Piero's great painting	10
Lent/Easter services	10
Women in Early Christianity	11
From a Twentieth Century woman	11
Pancakes	12
A Prayer for Easter Day	12

INTRODUCING READ, RETURN and REVIEW.

You may have noticed a new book shelf in the "social" area at Church. It is under the notice board on the south wall, near the washing up window and the Clarendon St door.

The idea is to have a space to share books with each other on the topic of our faith.

Already there are a few books, some old, some new and some very recently written. You are welcome to place some books that have meant something to you on the shelf--this is not a call to clear out your overloaded bookcases, rather a call for books about our faith that you would enjoy sharing.

Please note that we will not be keeping a track of these books, rather they are an offering in good faith so please only give books that you can part with.

If you would like to borrow one or more, please just take it/them, read it, return it and perhaps write a review for *The Mustard Seed* to encourage others to pick it up--our very own "Read-Return-Review".

Our first review is for "*The Bible in Australia*" by Meredith Lake (ABC Radio).

This book is full of wonderful places, events and ways the Bible has been used in Australia since 1788.

Predictably there were many bibles on the first fleet and subsequent ships bringing convicts and others.

One story tells of a convict on way to Australia was fishing from a ship, hooking a shark and finding a Prayer Book in its stomach contents! Early education was solely bible based until the son of the man who started formal education in Australia joined his father in that important work and whilst not excluding biblical texts, he included literature, mathematics and science--there was discord in this family of clerics for some time because of this shift from Bible Only learning. The bible was translated into indigenous languages and today these bibles are being used to reclaim those near lost languages. Did you know that the Methodist Church were the ones who started the Union movement in Australia. They parted ways when the unionists took on collective bargaining which was not how the Methodists believed it should go.

I recommend this historical look at the Bible in Australia and can be heard trotting out fascinating facts everywhere I go.

Margo Anderson

Prayers to the Water of Life

The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Water Network invites us to use Lent 2020 to reflect on water. While water has a strong spiritual significance in the Christian tradition as a gift from God, this scarce resource is threatened and denied to many around the world. World Water Day falls on March 22 this year.

Thirsting

Lord Jesus
here we are again
thirsting
for forgiveness, for love.

Help us to recognise
your presence beside us each day
as once you stood by
the woman at the well.

May we find
refreshment and restoration
in the water you offer
and drink deeply.



Cleansing

Lord Jesus
we live in a world grimy with sin
and have allowed some of its dust
to settle on us.
We want to be like you, to shine
with goodness and grace.

As with great humility
you washed the disciples' feet,
cleanse us of all that is shameful
and unworthy of you.

Drowning

Lord Jesus
sometimes we feel we are being dragged under
by too many responsibilities,
too many demands on our time and patience
and feel little joy or sense of abundant life.

May we give up the struggle to save ourselves.
Help us to be like leaves on the surface of a lake,
buoyed by your promises and grace.

WR

To love someone means to see him as God intended him.
Fyodor Dostoevsky

MIOKO WOOD

In November we were sad to lose Mioko. At her thanksgiving service we remembered her baptism three years earlier, and her pleasure at attending worship even as her health declined. From the eulogies we learnt much about her earlier life: of her birth in China, her membership of a church choir in Tokyo, her love of ballet, her years of teaching Japanese at St Catherine's School, and her authorship of a best-selling educational book.



Mioko's Baptism,
December 2016

CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN

The Jesuits, with St Francis Xavier, first came to Japan in the 16th century but after initial success, were drastically persecuted under the Shogun in the next century. Protestant missionaries arrived in the early 19th century and established many schools which are highly regarded today.

Nevertheless, Christianity is a tiny religion in Japan – about 1% of the population roughly divided between Protestants and Catholics. There is also an Orthodox community of about 30,000. The country is largely secular, the default religion being Shinto or Buddhist. Christmas is widely celebrated but as a secular festival.

The Bach Collegium Japan is a famous world choir which has recorded all the Sunday church cantatas of J S Bach and has given many concerts internationally. Its founder and present musical director is Masaaki Suzuki, a member of the Reformed Church of Japan.

from Wikipedia & other internet sources.

A Prayer for Good Friday

Father in heaven, we wonder how you felt when you heard your Son's cry, 'Why have you abandoned me?' Spare us from such depths of pain. If it be necessary for us to touch even the edges of it, keep us in the knowledge that for our Lord Jesus, it was not the end.

Roger Pickering

... then Sunday happens

A meditation on Easter Sunday

Nothing can be more hopeless than Good Friday; but then Sunday happens
Desmond Tutu

The grapevine's running hot
with news from sources
known to sources
close to the action
that the lad from Nazareth who died last Friday
has popped his tomb
and gone walkabout.

Now I've heard everything!

There are some women who talked to him
though they were told to keep it quiet
and a bloke who touched him
and a couple of guys
who met him on the road
and who ate with him
(a bit of a recognition problem there)

'No doubt about it', they all said,
'The same fellow' they all affirmed
'Dinky-di!' 'Fair dinkum!'
Though he's perfected
his disappearing act
and walks through walls
as if they are not there.

Strangely enough,
there's no succession plan,
no meeting of the Board,
no KPIs
no *Mission Statement* carved in
stone, no power portrait,
and only the vaguest verbal
to-do-list. As for '*The Kingdom*'
there's precious little sign of that!

Surely he's not leaving the baton
in our hands after our
poor showing last Friday!

I suppose we'd better call
a meeting. Shall we invite him
along? Can someone say a few

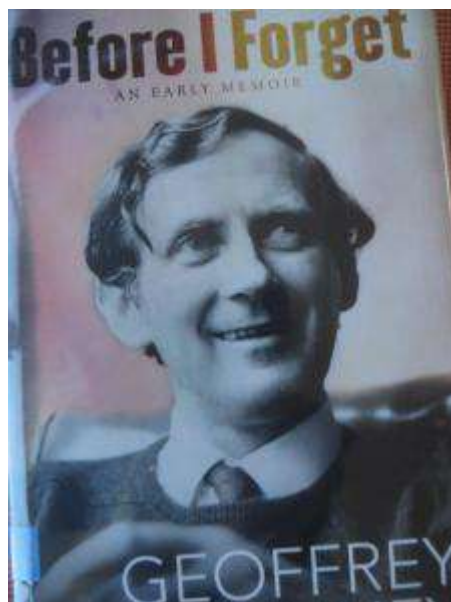
words? Who'll take the minutes?
Do we need a Treasurer ... yet?

*This poem is redacted and is
part three of a triptych by*

Karel Reus

Before I Forget

Graeme Harris



One of the books I read over the recent holidays was Geoffrey Blainey's *Before I Forget*. It's Prof Blainey's reminiscences of his first 40 years, and covers growing up as a son of a Methodist minister, in rural and provincial Victoria in the 1930s and early 1940s. He won a scholarship to Wesley College, followed by time at Queen's College while attending the University of Melbourne. It also deals with his early years as a historian (including his first work compiling a history of mining at Mt Lyell, *The Peaks of Lyell*, published in 1954). His recollection of detail is amazing; who else can remember the comments his English teacher made on an essay written at secondary school – even if that English teacher was the very well-known A. A. (“Tosh”) Phillips? But this was in the context of Blainey's early interest in the politics of those times.

I found the first part of the book of particular interest, in that about a decade and a half later, I more-or-less followed in his footsteps at Wesley and Queen's. To be honest, A. A. Phillips almost certainly didn't see in me the potential that he had seen in Blainey! But by then he was on the cusp of retirement. This is perhaps consistent with my impression, looking back, that the biggest difference between Blainey's time and my own is that in Blainey's era these institutions were appropriate for the times, whereas in my era, they hadn't quite started addressing the great changes that were beginning to occur in the '60s. That said, however, I had then, and still have, the greatest respect for Queen's.

My experiences in that era were very different to Blainey's, but in their own way paralleled his in many respects. I remember fragments of my experiences, but I don't have the extraordinary recall of detail that he has, nor an ability to write about them in an engaging manner. And his interests were different: he read old newspapers at the library to gain insights into earlier years, worked in rural areas during vacations and did a couple of long trips around the country by hitch-hiking. I did different things: steam train trips (both railfan excursions and a couple of trips by goods trains), bush camping and my vacation work experiences were sorting mail and tram conducting. He lived for a time in both Mount Lyell and Mt Isa; I did national service.

One aspect of Blainey's life that isn't mentioned in the book is his relationship with Armadale. Dr Joy Parnaby's history (on the AUC website) states that his father was the minister at the former Armadale Methodist Church in 1963 to 1966. As Blainey explained to me when I asked him, this was well after he had ceased living at home, so perhaps unfortunately Armadale doesn't get a mention in *Before I Forget*. But the book is well worth reading for the insights that it provides to an era that many of us take for granted, yet in so many respects is different to the present day.

Baptism



We were privileged to witness Sophia's Christening on 27 October (above).

Christmas at Armadale

Christmas Eve was "A Night to Wonder". What a wonderful service, complete with a performance by *The Choir of Gentle Taps*



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.

SOME THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES OF HEATHER



A beautiful light has gone out from our lives; but the memories of over fifty years of friendship live on in our minds and hearts.

I first met Heather as she turned her car in our driveway about fifty years ago during our first year of marriage. We had noticed that she only lived two doors away and so made up our minds to say hello next time she returned from work. There began a most wonderful friendship! We became both neighbours and friends and went through so much over the years -both good and bad, joyful and sad. Our kids grew up together and were almost like brothers and sisters.

It was Heather who took me along to St. Andrews U C A one day and this was the church that we became so involved with over the next forty years. Eventually we all decided to go our own ways and, after “shopping around”, Heather and I began worshipping at Armadale Uniting Church about three years ago.

Heather packed such a lot into her life which was exceedingly rich! She only stopped when she needed. to go into Cabrini Hospital for rest and pain management. Heather never complained about her very considerable pain and distress and would only allude to this if asked directly. Instead she would always focus on what was happening for the person she was talking with. Heather as I'm sure you would know was very wise and a very good listener.

Many confided in her including myself, knowing that it would be safe with her and our “problem” would always feel much easier and lighter.

I never knew anyone who had as many friends as Heather: and she managed to keep up with all of them! No wonder that there were about 350 people at her funeral!

Heather loved birds and especially liked to see and hear them at Newstead; her second home. She also loved the countryside there and all things beautiful.

She had an eye for detail, but never let that cloud her vision of the person she was with or the big picture.

She had a “wicked” sense of humour that asserted itself more often after a glass or two of ‘red’. She was good company with or without a glass of vino.

Heather loved music and had a special love of choral music. She sang in choirs for over forty years and this was one of the wonderful joys we shared. Her grand piano took pride of place in the living room and was a multipurpose piece of furniture. If Heather wasn't tinkling the ivories, she might be relaxing with a jigsaw puzzle perched atop the “Grand”.

Heather was a much-loved mother and grandmother and she will sorely miss watching her five grandchildren as they grow up. But they will have so many happy memories of being with their dear “Mor Mor!”

I am missing sitting next to her in church each Sunday, singing next to her in choir, having morning tea and often lunch with her on Saturdays and dinner on Sunday evenings with mutual friends... I could go on.....

Vale my dear friend Heather and thank you for being such a wonderful light in my life.

April

Church Council Retreat

The Church Council held a retreat at Wellspring Ashburton in February. The pleasant facilities provided a good environment in which reflect for a few hours on the issues facing the Church today and Armadale in particular. Although we have much to be grateful for in our society, there's still "a lot going on in our house" (to use the phrase that came up).

Fiona led us through the day. We considered where we've come from and where we're at, and our joys and concerns. But this inevitably leads to "what might be next?", and "how are we going to get there?". One issue that inevitably arises on occasions such as this is, "what more can we do?"

Clearly this is a legitimate and proper question to consider, and an upcoming Presbytery "mission



expo" certainly invites us to consider it. However, it needs to be taken in context. Perhaps the question ought to be, what do we need to "do differently"? We need to preserve what is good in what we're already doing and make sure we're doing that as well as possible but be open to any "adjustments" that may be required.

On a different note, following the recent Congregational AGM, the composition of the Church Council has changed. The members are now – Rev Fiona Winn, Bill Rush (Chair), Ian Thomas (Correspondence secretary), Margo Anderson (Minute Secretary), Janet Atkinson, Susie Condron (Treasurer), and Cheryl Mason.

The state of our spiritual life is healthy, and there are a lot of activities around the Church. And while there will always be challenges for the Church, recent developments have been encouraging on the financial side.

Peaceful garden at Wellspring (left)

Questionnaire

We'll be asking members of the congregation in the near future to complete a short survey about their relationship with the Church. We'd really appreciate everyone's co-operation in completing the survey. Not only will the results be helpful to Armadale in thinking about our future, but they'll help us respond to the surveys that we, in turn, need to complete from time to time.

Resurrection - Piero's great painting

The Resurrection is a fresco painted on a wall in the small town of San Sepolcro by the Italian Renaissance painter Piero della Francesca in 1478. Jesus is the majestic centre of the composition, portrayed at the moment of his resurrection. He steps here out of a Roman sarcophagus, rather than a cave, rising over four sleeping soldiers, representing the difference between the human and divine spheres (or death, defeated by Christ's light). The Umbrian landscape, immersed in the dawn light, has also a symbolic value with the contrast between the flourishing trees on the right and the bare mature ones on the left. Aldous Huxley, though not a Christian believer, described it as 'the greatest painting in the world.' The guards bear all the symbols of power and might ... yet they foolishly sleep, utterly unaware that Rome's power to bring death cannot defeat YHWH's power to bring life.

From Wikipedia, Seedbed, and Faith and Theology.



Lent/Easter services

Each Sunday during Lent: 9.30 am at Kooyong Road (except Sunday 29 March).

Sunday, 29 March 2020: This is a "5th Sunday", so we will be joining the other Stonnington Churches for a combined service at St Andrew's, Gardiner, starting at 10.00 am. No service at Kooyong Road on this day.

Palm Sunday 5 April 2020: 9.30 am at Kooyong Rd with Holy Communion

Maundy Thursday, 9 April 2020: 7.00 pm, Foot washing and Holy Communion.

Good Friday 10 April 2020: 9.30 am, Holy Communion at Kooyong Road.

Holy Saturday, 11 April: 10 am -12 noon, Cleaning and Contemplation.

Easter Day, Sunday 12 April 2020: 9.30 am at Kooyong Rd.

WOMEN IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Women feature prominently in the Gospels and Book of Acts as supporters of Jesus' ministry. The most famous of these is Mary Magdalene, most likely an upper-class woman of means instead of the prostitute label still wrongly attached to her.

The first people recorded as seeing the resurrected Christ were women, and women are integral to the first Christian community as depicted in the Book of Acts.

Jesus himself has nothing to say about the equality of the sexes; he seems to take it as self-evident that there is nothing inherently superior in either.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of Christianity has heard of the term 'Church Fathers' but far less so 'Church Mothers' – and yet, in the early days of Christianity, women were at the forefront. Roman women were the first to take Christianity seriously and there are many stories – preserved in the writings of the Church Fathers themselves and in tales of martyrs – of strong women converting their households to the new faith.

Some of these early Church Mothers embraced Christianity so completely that they gave away whatever they had – often substantial sums of money and large estates – to help the poor, the sick and the needy in compliance with Jesus' directive that 'inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Matthew 25:40). Service to others, especially to those in need, was service to Christ himself.



(Abridged from an article in 'Ten Should-Be Famous Women of Early Christianity' by Joshua J. Mark in *TheAncientHistoryEncyclopedia*).

Mosaic, Basilica of
Sant'Apollinare Nuovo,
Ravenna

* * * * *

FROM A TWENTIETH CENTURY WOMAN

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man – there never has been another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them as "The women, God help us!" or "The ladies, God bless them"; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend, who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about woman's nature.

Dorothy Day (1887- 1980). Catholic social activist and journalist.

PANCAKES!

Pancake Day, or Shrove Tuesday, began in Anglo-Saxon times when Christians went to confession and were 'shriven' (absolved from their sins). Shrove Tuesday was the last opportunity to use up eggs and fats before the Lenten fast began on Ash Wednesday. Pancakes proved to be the perfect way to use up these ingredients and recipes for them have featured in recipe books since 1439.

Their ingredients are said to symbolise four points of significance: Eggs (for creation), Flour (the staff of life), Salt (wholesomeness) and Milk (purity). Shrove Tuesday is also known as Mardi Gras, the French for 'Fat Tuesday' and also comes from the idea of using up household fats before Lent.

Some Orthodox Christians observe 'Cheesefare Sunday' when they use up left over dairy products and begin Clean Monday before approaching the fasting days of Lent.

On Shrove Tuesday this year, Robin, Keith and Bill made pancakes in our kitchen. Some were shared with children and parents from the Gumnuts Music Group.

A Prayer for Easter Day

Dear God, as we rejoice and celebrate the Easter story, bless family and friends with whom we are intimately privileged to share the goodness of life. Bless any strangers who visit us with a sense of your love, through the hospitality and concern of our fellowship.

Brian Haig

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

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

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.