
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 33, July 2020

Greetings from Fiona

Greetings.

We are living in extraordinary times. I'm writing this more than 100 days since our last 'normal' service in church on Sunday 15th March. July begins and the pandemic, which has been controlled to a greater extent here in Australia than other parts of the world, is still a very real threat to us all. That is why as a Council and as a congregation at Armadale, we have decided not to open the sanctuary space for the remainder of the winter.

We continue to meet weekly on Sunday mornings for readings, prayer and reflection together. And we have the opportunity on Tuesday and Thursday mornings to catch up via Zoom for coffee and conversation if we wish. (Do let me know if you would like to be included in these Zoom gatherings. You can call me on 0403 662 786)

Contents	
Greetings from Fiona	1
Editorial	2
My Career as a Biochemist	3
Lockdown	5
Zooming along	5
My Love for the Theatre	6
Pentecost	7
Two Books on Christianity	8
Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy	9
Building works	10
J. Arthur Rank	11
Pat Tolson	11
Shalom	12

So, in some ways everything has changed - daily routines, work and leisure activities, the freedom to move around as, when and where we will - these are all altered. And it is yet to be determined when - and indeed if - they will ever resume as before. Life is different, very different.

But there are aspects of life - important aspects of life we may all have been too busy or indifferent to notice - that are gloriously still the same - the sun and moon and stars; the flowers and trees and birds; sunshine and rain. Day and night follow each other. There is food and clean water. For most of us, shelter, diversions, entertainment - and even toilet paper! (Though with rising cases of the virus detected, that has begun again to disappear from the shelves of the supermarkets!)

Greetings from Fiona (cont)

The American poet, Emily Dickinson, wrote that the one commandment she did not mind obeying was Jesus' injunction to 'consider the lilies'. The passages which contain these verses encourage faith in times of trial and testing. Jesus' words resonate today in these anxious, uncertain times. What would that mean for us to 'consider the lilies'?

The Word of God offers an alternative way to look at life – and death. Christ speaks against a culture of fear and despair, and speaks into our human struggle, inviting a response of hope, gratitude and assurance that, no matter what, God knows, understands and cares - for you, for this world, for all creation.

Take a little time – it doesn't have to be long, five or ten dedicated minutes. Sit quietly. Gather yourself. Read slowly and thoughtfully, one or other of the passages: Matthew 6: 25-34 and Luke 12: 22-32. What do you hear?

Spoken to frightened disciples long ago, allow Jesus' timeless words, to speak to you where you are today. And may we each know continued courage, strength and faith for the days ahead.

Fiona Winn – July 2020

'...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.'

Philippians 4: 11, 12

From the Editors

We're living in "different" times, but hopefully *The Mustard Seed* is holding up. In this issue, we learn a little about the careers of two of our number, and we have reviews of a number of important books, including another review of a biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

We've included some images of events around the Church, including a picture given to us by Pat Tolson.

Although it now appears that it might be some time before a degree of normality is resumed, hopefully these times will pass. Until then, keep well.

– Bill and Graeme



Our Men's Breakfast resumed in June

MY CAREER AS A BIOCHEMIST AT THE ALFRED FOR 41 YEARS

Robin Ahin

I started my career as a Biochemist at the Alfred on 8 January, 1973 as a student at RMIT in what was known as the Diploma of Medical Technology majoring in Biochemistry. In those days it was common for people to work for a year or two after graduating then head off overseas for a year travelling the world (usually England or Europe). There were 6 vacancies when I started. Being a student, I earned the princely sum of \$50 a week. To supplement my income I worked in a doughnut van on weekends for \$1 an hour.

Pathology was a relatively manual operation in those days, many tests performed by producing a coloured solution, the intensity of which reflected the concentration of the analyte being measured. We made our own standards and manually drew a “standard curve” from which we read off the quality controls and unknown (patient) samples. The range of tests available in the early 70s was limited and to do a test urgently out of hours required clearance from the on call senior scientist or sometimes, the pathologist (Director of Biochemistry). Biochemistry, then, as now, operated 24/7, so someone had to remain in the hospital at all times to cover any urgent tests from ED or the ICUs and very occasionally from other wards. These days the major analysers do a huge array of tests covering almost all of the urgent work.

Most instruments were stand alone then, doing single tests. Our most complex instrument was a single channel “continuous flow” analyser which had separate modules consisting of a pump to draw reagents from bottles under the bench, a dialyser to separate the serum protein from the compound of interest, mixing coils to combine the sample with the colour reagent and a spectrophotometer to measure the colour and a chart to draw peaks which corresponded to the concentration of the



substance being measured. One of these systems occupied a whole bench top. There were a number of these “systems” to measure various enzymes and things like urea and creatinine for kidney function etc.

The mainframe computer for the lab occupied a whole room, which was the only air conditioned room in the lab. Our interaction with the computer in those days was minimal. Results were printed out on sticky strip labels which we stuck to patients’ result cards manually and a courier would come up twice a day to collect

photocopies of these result cards to deliver to the wards. Now the computers are linked to the analysers and the results transfer automatically to the computers, which are linked to the ward terminals and the medical record department directly after they are validated by the scientists.

As the years went by, the machines and computers gradually became more complex and were able to do more and more tests often on the same small sample. Correspondingly, the number of scientists required to do tests reduced over the years. Being one of the largest teaching hospitals in Melbourne, our range of tests has become quite large. Our major analysers, now worth over a million dollars each, can perform 50 tests on a 0.5ml sample in minutes. The more complex tests take up to an hour to process through the analyser. In the old days they would have taken one dedicated scientist one to two days using a laborious, manual radioimmunoassay (radioactive isotope) method to perform each assay.

I was exceedingly lucky in that shortly after I qualified, they were looking for people to work out of hours. This meant working a lot of overtime, which was paid at double time rates. In fact, I spent a lot of my time at the Alfred working unusual shifts and heaps of overtime. It wasn't unusual for me to work a 16 hour shift. It killed me physically in that my sleep patterns have never recovered. I still often wake up in the middle of the night and can't sleep. However, it set me up financially for life, and for that I am truly grateful. I retired on 23 May, 2014, just short of my 62nd birthday. It is a shame that I can't relate some of the funny things which happened at work over the years. It would take too long.



Robin's 35 year presentation

Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawns.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150 – c.250)

The Lord, he may not come when you want him, but he always comes on time.

Afro-American Spiritual

Lockdown



As Fiona states in her letter, we have had to think of different ways of doing things recently. This included Easter, when we were unable to use the Church building. However, Fiona arranged for an appropriate cross to be mounted on our fence for Easter Sunday (left).

ZOOMING ALONG AND THE SABBATH

On Thursdays at 10 a.m., some of us have shared a Zoom discussion time on varied subjects. Recently the topics have included Justice, Persecution, and on June 17, the discussion revolved around the question, What does it mean to keep the Sabbath in in 2020?

Not keeping the Sabbath in Old Testament times was a capital offence – even for carrying sticks! The New Testament however has a different approach. Jesus was severely criticised by the religious authorities for healing others and for picking corn to eat on the Sabbath Day. On the one hand Jesus insisted that the Law must be fulfilled, but he also affirmed that the Law is intended for us - and for our good. In this vein, Walter Brueggemann writes that it is not simply about keeping rules but rather about each of us becoming a whole person, and for the restoration of a whole society.* .

The Pauline churches, with many Gentile adherents, did not continue to observe the OT Sabbath, but met on Sundays in recognition of the day of the Lord's Resurrection. For them, the Law finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Most contemporary Christians see public worship and our witness to the community around us as the primary activity of Sunday life. However we live in a highly sophisticated urbanised society which, for our wellbeing and functioning, requires a 24 hour, 7 day presence of many people working on Sundays such as ambulance and hospital staff, police, transport operators, people overseeing the supply of electricity, gas, water etc. Some people work part-time and have to fit in with rosters in which they have no say. How then should we live now?

The approach that most Christians take today is that 'Sabbath' is meant for our flourishing and it is up to us to use our time wisely. The American theologian, John Piper, says:

One of the things we should do, is to do things on the Lord's day that refresh us for his service, intellectually, physically and spiritually. So if you sit at your desk all day, probably you should walk or ride a bike on Sunday. And if you work on the farm, breaking your back all week (which is what they did in the Old Testament) then sit down on Sunday and take a long nap!

* 'Sabbath as Resistance'. Walter Brueggemann

My love for the theatre

Silvana Vaxelaire



I remember when I was a child.....I'd close my bedroom door, blare the music on my cassette recorder (I'd recorded the music from the radio's latest hits), and sing at the top of my lungs – trying to reach the highest notes, and to hold them for as long as possible.

I've always loved performing. Like I've heard others say – “It's in my blood”.

I always knew this is what I wanted to do, and so after high school, I studied Dance full-time. It was both exhilarating and exciting at the same time. Although I had a huge passion for it, it re-ignited my passion for acting which I'd had all along, and I felt really at home when I acted.

At 19 I moved to Sydney to study acting full-time, to pursue my dream of performing and becoming a working actor.

During my time there, I worked many casual jobs, including reception, usher, box-office attendant, cashier, waitress, kindergarten assistant, teacher, Drama teacher, retail assistant, and note-taker.

It was hard work, but so exciting – I couldn't wait to go back to classes, to be cast in productions, and learn about the backstage areas, technical areas, costume, make-up – I just loved it.

During this time, I realised why I wanted to act. To move people, help in some way to help people feel comfortable to express their feelings, to feel their feelings, and to show them a different point of view to their own, like a window to other people's lives and views, to expand their knowledge and understanding.

And then I got my first commercial 'gig'. I was chosen to be the face of “Optus” for their Australian launch. They were the first competitor against Telstra in the communications field.

We shot many lengthy commercials, where I spoke about their “excellent customer service”, spoke about how much they care about their products, and tried so hard to do the best I could possible.

I also did many full-page ads for newspapers, and it was a huge print campaign also, as the Commonwealth Games were on in Sydney at that time, and they were the major sponsor.

When people would stare at me on the train, it took me a little while to tweak that they recognised my face – I must admit it felt good – I felt a silent sense of achievement.

Today, I've been in the industry for 27 years. I still love it more than ever. I've mainly worked in stage over the years but have also worked on film & TV. It's taught me so much, and I've enjoyed every step.

As we all have our gifts, I believe Acting, and teaching Drama, especially to children, is mine. I feel totally connected to God when I'm performing and acting and teaching, and I believe I can then express this to others. I've always wanted to create, to imagine, to play and to explore life, and to explore a higher meaning.

Today I also work for Victorian Opera as their administrator/receptionist. I love my job there, the staff are so motivated, creative, and supportive, and I really love the performances and being amongst such creative people. It's really a pleasure to work there.

After having experienced many of life's big challenges in the past four years, and having now recovered, I have picked up my acting, more motivated than ever. Amongst other big lessons which the past few years have taught me, it's shown me just how important it is to follow my calling, my dreams, my gift, and to really embrace all life's gifts and beauties.

My hope is that with God's love, strength, and guidance, I can continue to act, to work, and to try and 'move' people in the best way possible.

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Pentecost

Our fence display, arranged by Fiona, for Pentecost



TWO BOOKS ON CHRISTIANITY

(by two non-theologians)

Reviewed by Bill Rush

DOMINION by Tom Holland

In his new book, historian Tom Holland argues that ‘even those who reject religion – those who hold to atheism, humanism, scientism, secularism – find their beliefs ineradicably shaped by Christian presuppositions’.

The author, who was regularly taken to church as a child, later abandoned the faith as if it were a stage of thinking for a real adult to grow out of. However, as he researched and thought his way into this book, his understanding of the significance of Christianity to Western society underwent a significant change. He began to understand how much of his own values and views had come from Christianity rather than from the pagan societies of Greece and Rome.

In his SMH review of *Dominion*, Barney Schwartz writes that Holland’s most important contribution to this book is to lay waste to the secularist founding myth that reason, evidence and humanism and the like emerged in the Enlightenment – owing nothing to the preceding centuries, but indeed in contrast to them: ‘The idea that science needed to set itself free from dogma and superstition, possible only in the Enlightenment, is another fiction believed only by those ignorant of history’.

Our ideas about human rights for instance, go back to the teaching of Genesis and are by no means self-evident and inalienable as the US Declaration of Independence proclaims. This idea would have attracted contempt in pre-Christian societies such as ancient Rome or China.

His description of the reality of death by crucifixion is horrific and a timely corrective to the disinterest and muted recognition it receives today. There is a fascinating discussion about this book on YouTube with Holland and N T Wright.

UNAPOLOGETIC by Francis Spufford

The book opens with this paragraph:

My daughter has just turned six. Sometime over the next year or so, she will discover that her parents are weird. We’re weird because we go to church. One must read on!

Theologians and other writers sometimes titled their pieces an ‘Apology’. By this they meant a reasoned defence of a position – not an admission of failure or regret. So Spufford’s title suggests that he is trying a different tack here. On the front cover of the book we read: *Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*.

The mind, the author claims, is not the exclusive path to truth – feelings and emotional honesty matter too. Some will find this book confronting as its author is surprisingly free with his expletives. This is not something I have struck before in a book about the Christian faith. For instance, he designates human sin as HPtFtU - i.e. the Human Propensity to F... things Up. Other similar adjectives inhabit the text. If you can cope with his free ranging language you may well find the book fresh and provoking. Chapter 5, on Yeshua (Jesus), is especially good.

BONHOEFFER - PASTOR, MARTYR, PROPHET, SPY.

Author Eric Metaxas.

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act”. Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Starting with his early life to give the context of capacity, achievement, privilege, duty, “high end” culture, wealth and expectation, the book takes us through the formative years where Bonhoeffer, aged 14, decides to commit his life to God through service and exegesis. He did this within a family of “non-believers” who, none the less, encouraged him and supported his chosen path. He trained as a Pastor of the Lutheran Church at Berlin University.

At this time in history, the book shows the parallel and polemic development of Bonhoeffer’s faith and Nazism, leaving the reader breathless from terror and asking, “What would I have done”?

There was an alignment both ways between the German Lutheran church and the government and as Hitler came to power he took this up for his own purposes. He {Hitler} avowed his deep faith in God which engendered confidence and allowed him the power he craved, only to disabuse people once the power imbalance had been cemented. *In short-he lied.*

Ian Thomas reviewed this book in our August 2016 issue, but we’re glad to be able to publish this review by Margo, to enable two different perspectives on an interesting biography.

Bonhoeffer and others saw this for the dangerous path it was leading to and after much unsuccessful protest, worked to create an alternate church {schism} which they named The Confessing Church, *Confessing meaning Truth Telling.*

A large body of believers within The Confessing Church were committed to acting on the issue of discrimination, especially against the Jewish community. This was ecumenical theology in action.

A lifelong habit in his personal faith development was to hear what God was asking of him and to avoid his personal interpretations of the text.

In time, a small group of Confessing Church members and other like minded people came to see that the only way to stop the destructive carnage of the Nazi’s, was to assassinate Hitler. This difficult position was not easy to arrive at and as a Christian took a great deal of soul searching.

A number of attempts were planned and either failed or were not carried out. All the while, Hitler’s men were gathering intelligence on this group and when there was an extremely close attempt made, Hitler’s trousers were burnt off, targeted arrests started.



1906-1945.

Questionnaire

We've asked members of the congregation to complete a short survey about their relationship with the Church. We're very grateful to those who have completed the survey. The results will be helpful to Armadale in thinking about our future, and they'll help us respond to the surveys that we need to complete from time to time.

In time, Bonhoeffer too was taken into custody where his family connections and his engaging character saw him treated “well”. He was visited by family and his fiancée, Maria, was able to write and read and some guards provided him with luxuries.

It is interesting to read here about his love for Maria, for whom he was totally smitten and at the same time he believed he would not survive unless Hitler was murdered and the war ended, so we are asked to imagine the complications of the juxtaposition of love, faith and murder.

Having eventually been moved through different prisons and brought before a “court”, {after midnight with no representation}, where he along with others were sentenced to death---6.00 am the very next morning.

The overseeing doctor reported that he calmly stepped toward his death, taking time to offer prayers to God for showing him his path.

WW 2 ended two weeks later and in one more week, Hitler took his own life. 1945.

This book clearly explains the tension between these two extreme ideologies and does leave the reader breathless from terror asking many questions of self, “*What would I have done*”!!!

Margo Anderson

Building works



Although we’ve been unable to use the Church in recent months, work has been proceeding on essential maintenance, both on the roof (left) and under the floor, to address damp issues (below).



A Welcome to Country means nothing if there is not true relationship, true friendship.

Brooke Prentis

(Indigenous CEO of Common Grace)

J ARTHUR RANK

When you hear his name. what comes first to mind? The man hitting the gong to signify the start of an exciting film? Or the films themselves, the black and white classics, such as Brief Encounter, Great Expectations, Hamlet, and Waterloo Road? And yet he started his career in film making relatively late, when he was in his forties.

Arthur was a member of a very wealthy Methodist flour milling family and after an unsuccessful business venture of his own, worked for his father. He developed an interest in film through his use of the medium in Sunday School teaching in which the Methodist Church was something of a pioneer. He soon saw the potential for reaching wider audiences and set to work making his own films. He set up RFL (Religious Films Ltd) to make films to be shown in cinemas and used in church services. The company was active into the 1970's making films and prints to send out to the churches and providing circuits with projectors so the films could be shown more widely.

Of course, J. Arthur Rank did not confine his interests to religious film making. He was a shrewd businessman, quick to seize opportunities and expand his empire to include studios in which to make a wide range of films, including the Carry On films. But he remained true to his Methodist roots. In 1953 the first British film to be made in the new Eastman Colour was a biography of John Wesley. In the same year he set up the J Arthur Rank Group to promote Christian belief.

Today this is the Rank Foundation, with the triple aims of encouraging and developing leadership among young people, supporting the disadvantaged, frail and elderly – and, as from the very beginning of the Rank empire, promoting Christian principles through film.

With permission from an article by Libby Stone in the magazine of the Fulwood Methodist Church (UK)

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Pat Tolson

This painting (left) which now hangs in the Reta Berry Room is a gift to the parish from Pat Tolson (below), who taught art at MECWA Prahran for many years. Thank you Pat. And we mentioned one of her other pictures in our July 2017 issue.



SHALOM!

The Hebrew word *shalom* occurs in the Bible a number of times where it is usually translated as *peace*. This is its nearest English language equivalent but does not convey the whole flavour of *shalom*. Perhaps *deep or deepest peace* is more like it. A Jewish scholar contrasts them thus:

One can dictate a peace; shalom is a mutual agreement.

Peace is a temporary pact; shalom is a permanent agreement.

One can make a peace treaty; shalom is the condition of peace.

Peace can be negative; the absence of commotion; shalom is positive, the presence of serenity.

Peace can be partial; shalom is whole.

Rabbi Robert Kahn

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.

Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look that becomes a habit.

Peter Ustinov.

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Regular service times: 9.30 am each Sunday, Holy Communion on the 1st Sunday of the month. However, all services at the Church are currently suspended.

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.