

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA YASS PARISH



JULY 2020

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As part of God's people we are called by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to share the love and grace of Jesus Christ, within our community through regular worship, faithful witness and humble service.

Minister's Message:

"Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert"
(Isaiah 43:18 – 19)

Can you recall a time when you bought something new that changed the way you did things for the better? Maybe it was an electrical appliance in the kitchen that reduced the time it took to prepare food. It could have been a new TV with a better picture and sound quality, allowing you to enjoy the movies you watch. Sometimes we find something new that completely changes the way we do things.

I recall the time I made the decision to get prescription sunglasses. It was something I had considered, but never did anything about mainly because I had contact lenses, so ordinary sunglasses were good. It was an issue though when I was wearing my glasses and I needed sunglasses as well. So, one visit to the optometrist I decided to order some prescription sunglasses...and my life changed! I walked out of the building into the sun, put my new sunglasses on and I could see. I was wearing glasses and sunglasses at the same time – things were clear and my eyes protected from the sun. I could not believe the difference it made in my life and activities like driving, playing and watching sports, and being at the beach. It was a new thing that allowed me to forget about what had always been done and move forward. I still wear contact lenses and ordinary sunglasses, but no longer do I need to rely on them. Something new occurred and it has changed the way I do things. Something new came into my life, I took hold of it and moved forward with it. My eyesight had not changed, but I was able to take hold of something new to correct it in order to do things in a different way.

In Isaiah 43, the prophet speaks to a people something new that God is doing. The people of Israel have been living in exile in Babylon and now God promises that things are changing as they are led out of exile back to their homeland. This will be life changing and Isaiah likens it to seeing a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. It is something unexpected, yet very life-giving and renewing. The people are encouraged to see this new thing, to perceive it as they are called to move on from the past, from the former things that have bound them and move with the new things that God is showing them.

Over the last few months, we have been living through very different times with restrictions due to the COVID-19 virus. Accordingly, we have been unable to meet in our church building for worship, so

we have had to both be the church and do our church worship services differently. Many things have been learnt during this time including what it is to worship and where the holy spaces of God are. In the midst of it all we have worshipped separately yet together because of technology allowing us to access the same service, whether it be by video or reading copies of the service liturgy. Many people have experienced God in their lounge rooms through prayer, song and hearing the scriptures. We have seen God touch the lives of people who may not usually be part of a worship service in a church building, and we have had different people lead worship whether it be live or recorded. One other thing has been the ability to connect with others in a deep pastoral way through phone calls and video chats. Many new things have been done and we have learned of new ways God has called us and sent us.

As we hear the words of Isaiah, may we think about what new things God is doing in our lives and in the church. Is God calling us to let go of some of the former things and to look at the new things being done? Are there streams in the desert and a way in the wilderness which we are being called to look at? These are important questions for us to ask as we look towards coming back together when it is safe to do so.

May God continue to bless you and those whom you love.

Grace and Peace

David

Reflection: Changing with the Changes

A clerk at a Sydney airline counter picked up the telephone and heard the caller ask, “How long does it take to go from Sydney to Alice Springs?”

She was busy with another customer just then and intended to put the caller on hold.

“Just a minute,” she replied.

As she was about to press the hold button, the caller said, “Thank you,” and hung up.

We live in an age when it seems almost anything is possible. But a trip of a thousand kilometres or so in a few minutes?

Our time is one of unprecedented change. I understand that 2005 was the first year that there were more spam e-mails sent than cans of Spam sold. And if you wonder what a can of Spam is, then you see how much things have changed.

In a restaurant, a mother noticed her eleven-year-old daughter staring at a movie poster on the wall. The picture portrayed Superman standing in a phone booth. The girl’s mother

whispered to her husband, “Doesn’t she know who Superman is?”

He told her it was worse than that. “She doesn’t know what a phone booth is.”

I heard someone mention that he believes most of the changes that will ever take place already have occurred. I am sure that isn’t so. Our new reality is one of constant and unending change.

Some changes can be good and some we may feel are not for the best. Most change is uncomfortable and awkward at first. But, of course, if we don’t occasionally feel awkward with what we’re doing, maybe we are not doing anything new. And unless we’d rather live in the past, we’ll be happiest learning to embrace this world of change and to change and adapt along with it.

The world can still be a wonderful and exciting place to live. Do you believe that? If so, change with the changes. Resist your resistance to changing.
Your attitude toward change is one of the most important measures of determining whether you can be happy. (Steve Goodier)

News from the Chair:

I hope you are still doing OK during this crazy time. Council hasn't met since 12 May, but has been kept informed of NSW regulations and advice from Synod through their emails and websites and we had the opportunity to attend online zoom meetings on creating a Covid-19 Safety Plan and discussion on returning to face to face services.

Your executive plus Rye Park representatives met on 16 June and will meet again on 23 June (after the newsletter deadline) to evaluate what's been happening in our congregation over the last 3 months. Comments a varied, but most were appreciating the online services, zoom coffee times (especially as it has included Rye Park and Yass), the additional phone contact with people, understanding what the shut-in members of our congregations experience. It was also stated that a new mission is happening with the number of people viewing the online services, and the ease at which people can be invited to join. I think we are all missing the eye contact, handshakes/hugs, and singing together. It was also acknowledged a number of people either could not access online services or did not like going to online services. However, it was felt that rushing back to worship was not a good idea for most of our congregation (with most over 70 and others vulnerable in a number of ways) and it could easily be a couple more months before this happens.

Lesley has reported that offerings doing much better since more people have starting giving online through the bank account. However, we are still down from our normal giving.

UCA – Yass Parish Account BSB number: 634 634 Account number: 100039947
with the reference Offering Yass or Offering Rye Park

Lesley has registered for Job Keeper subsidy and we have been successful.

Ways we remain in contact:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/Yass-Uniting-Church-228378387525290/?ref=bookmarks>
- Website - <https://yass.uca.org.au/> for information and to reach us through contacts
- Pastoral Partners – Contact Barry, Della or Sandra for more information
- Our newsletter continues to play an important role and is now on the website – contact Lee for more information or to contribute
- Prayer Group – currently meeting by Zoom on Thursdays at 9:30 – contact Suzie Graham for more information

You can find contact information for these people on our website using the dropdown list on <https://yass.uca.org.au/contact-us/>

If you do need to enter one of our churches or hall during this time, you must sign in and out and sanitise your hands. This is a legal requirement so tracing can be done if we do get a case of Covid-19 in our congregation.

Our next Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, 8 June, at 7:30 on zoom. We will be completing the NSW Covid-19 Safety Plan and working out a tentative opening date.

As always if you have any questions or comments, please contact me or another member of Council. I love hearing your ideas and questions.

Sue Demoor, chair

RYE PARK CONGREGATION



Not just a Church, but a Family.

July 2020

Condolences We extend our sincere sympathy to Joan & Kelvin George & family on the death of their youngest son Scott in Perth. It would be a hard time for any family going through such grief but in this time of COVID19 it has separated the George family for many months with Joan in WA & Kelvin here plus siblings been unable to travel freely to share time with their loved one. Our prayers go out to you all.

We also remember the Mills family with the loss of Bev's mother & Sheree's grandmother Ada. Ada's great love for her family was not restricted but also shared with the community in general. Restrictions again pose challenges to family get togethers & other planning made difficult.

Blessings continue to flow through the community. Everyone is staying safe & well. Communication is continuing & we are caring for each other, mostly by phone. Rain is falling in good quantities & even though this may seem inconvenient when we are shearing or lambing is in full swing, we are grateful for this life-giving water to restore the earth & regenerate the pastures which feed & water us & our livestock.

Life on the land. For those who have never lived on the land & might question the wisdom of shearing or lambing at this time of year, you need to see the full picture of a yearly operation & how it all fits together, which can be whole, very long story. May be a good opening for a chat with a rural family or friend or a reason to visit a rural family as things open up. There really is an individual plan with every farmer having his own version & reasons for it. It doesn't just happen.

BLESSING COME IN MANY GUISES

When troubles come and things go wrong,
And days are cheerless and nights are long,
We find it easy to give into despair
By magnifying the burdens we bear-
We add to our worries by refusing to try
To look for "the rainbows" in an overcast sky-
And the blessing God sent in a "darkened disguise"
Our troubled hearts fail to recognise,
Not knowing God sent it not to distress us
But to strengthen our faith and redeem us and bless us.



Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your cares upon Him; for he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:6

JULY LECTIONARY READINGS:

| DATE | DAY | FIRST READING | PSALM | SECOND READING | GOSPEL |
|------|--------|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 5 | Pent 5 | Gn 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67 | Ps 45: 10-17 or Song 2: 8-13 | Rom 7: 15-25a | Mt 11: 16-19, 25-30 |
| 12 | Pent 6 | Gn 25: 19-34 | Ps 119: 105-112 | Rom 8: 1-11 | Mt 13: 1-9, 18-23 |
| 19 | Pent 7 | Gn 28: 10-19a | Ps 139: 1-12, 23-24 | Rom 8: 12-25 | Mt 13: 24-30, 36-43 |
| 26 | Pent 8 | Gn 29: 15-28 | Ps 105:1-11, 45b or Ps 128 | Rom 8: 26-39 | Mt 13: 31-33, 44-52 |
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A Challenging Time:

Over the past 3 months communication has changed. Some of us had never wished to be joined up with Facebook. Some of us had never heard of Zoom. Some were less savvy than others with technology. Yet we were willing to give it a go. Yes many needed help with the set up procedure. The day was set for the first zoom session. The Host emailed us the Password and ID. This was also new for the Host and a challenge for us all. Some of us had seen the YouTube of how Zoom would work...not sure if we understood how it would all work but willing to give it a try. So the day and time arrived. Some came in only with video but no sound, others with sound but no video. Some had to adjust the screen for all that could be seen was the hair line. Stress mixed with laughter. Advice was flying thick and fast about how to fix this and that. "Click on this" "Oh I haven't got one of those" "Where do I find that" Quick phone calls were made. We discovered devices used were so different, Computers, Laptops, iPad, phones. Eventually everyone was sorted out. We soon learnt, after cutting each other off we quickly discovered that only one person could speak at a time. We found we relaxed and could enjoy our time of fellowship together and our allotted time soon run out and we were glad we persevered. Sunday Mornings have changed as we tune in to worship, may be still in our PJs, or as we sit around the breakfast table. But we find God is still there to bless us, when we open our hearts and our internet.

Della

Reflection: God Works with Mud:

I think it was Nikos Kazantzakis who wrote: "God is a potter. He works with mud."

I find it encouraging that this God of the Bible does the unlikely, not just with people of outstanding gifts (like Isaiah who was a learned adviser at the court of the King, or later, Paul who was extremely

well educated with a brilliant intellect) but also with ordinary people. God works with common clay; mud like us.

Abraham was no genius or saint. As case in point, to save his own hide he at least on one occasion treated Sarah despicably. His son Isaac is not recorded as having any great qualities, rather a boring man in fact. In the next generation Isaac's son Jacob seems to have been a persistent lover as he waited 14 years to marry Rachel, but he was also a rather slippery character.

And that is how the story of the family tree of Abraham, the Jewish tribe and later nation, continues. God uses ordinary people with faults that could have come from our next-door neighbour, or maybe faults that emanate from that person we see eye to eye when we look in a mirror.

I find this most encouraging. You don't have to be a genius or a saint to be used by God for the blessing of this world. The God who achieves the unlikely, often uses very flawed material with which to work. (Rev Bruce Prewer)

Reflection: Some Words of Our Lord for the Journey Ahead.

The long Christian season of Pentecost gives us opportunities to reflect on our Lord's teachings. His words are affirming, encouraging and challenging reminders and assist our faith in and discipleship for him. Today's Lectionary reading from St. Matthew's Tenth Chapter affords us such an opportunity.

So, the invitation is to listen to some of our Lord's words and see how that may be helpful on our journey with him in the days ahead.

Verse 25 reads – "the pupil should be content to share his teacher's lot." "Be content" – each of us is faced with the question – how do I view today my relationship with Jesus?

The Greek word translated "content" can also be translated – "sufficient" – so am I pleased with the sufficiency I receive in my relationship with him? Solidarity with Jesus is central to discipleship. In the face of increasing secularism, hostility and apathy towards things Christian am I still content to be a disciple of Jesus? Do I keep on drawing on the sufficiency he provides me, as Saint Paul would say and later write "I have learned in whatsoever state to be content."

Verse 27 enjoins us – "What I say to you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight." It is significant that in saying this to us today, Jesus uses the same mood as he did the first time – the imperative! No messing about – the good news is not to be whispered – it is to be shouted, as the Greek tells us – it is to be proclaimed publicly. Now, of course, we Christians will do that nicely, I mean we are Protestants – we are called to make protestations by telling great things, lovely things about God and His Son. We are to be a voice for God and his creation – if you like we are to be environmental theologians amongst the many aspects of our discipleship.

Verse 30 tells us “even the hairs of your head have all been counted.” That is bad news for our son and my late father-in-law. However, I am sure that God will find one even if you cannot. What a lovely assurance Jesus offers us for our journey. His word is reminding us – do not forget – you can really appreciate how God sees you as a person of his. It is a lovely reminder of how much God values us.

A powerful reminder of this is how greatly God valued Adam and Eve, how he enjoyed fellowship with them in the Garden and what it cost him to have to send them from the Garden. Yes, we are greatly valued and Jesus asks us not to underestimate that fact.

Verse 32 is quite powerful; no punches pulled the modern cliché says “Whoever then will acknowledge me before men.” Along our journey Jesus asks, even more invites, us to acknowledge him as Lord and Master. Isaac watts, the great hymn writer took up this theme of acknowledgement in his hymn –“I’m not ashamed to own my Lord”. He based it on Saint Paul’s words to his colleague Timothy – “of this Gospel I am not ashamed.” It echoes Paul’s words to his fellow Christians in Philippi – “I have no cause to be ashamed.”

It is a song of discipleship service we can be glad to sing in Church or in our private meditation and prayer times. In the world and communities of today and tomorrow, we have no reason, no reason at all to be ashamed of showing Jesus’ love and care for he will have no reason to be ashamed of us.

Then to the closing of today’s reading – verse 39. For this I am moving us from the wording in the New English Bible and using the similar, but perhaps more familiar words from the old Revised Standard Version in Saint Matthew, Chapter 16 verse 26 – “what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” Jesus’ word to us to look at what we gain through our relationship with him – being content, his sufficiency, the valuing, his identifying with us as we identify with him.

In a world of materialism that measures much by loss and profit, we have opportunities to show those around us in the world how we measure our gain and that in, for and with Jesus we do not lose.

Our Risen Lord calls us anew and sends once again to share the content of our relationship expressed in our discipleship with his example and footsteps on the road for the journey always before us and with us. *(June 21, 2020 The Third Sunday of Pentecost)*

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On the Lighter Side:

A priest and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them. 'Come with me,' said St. Peter to the taxi driver. The taxi driver did as he was told and followed

St Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool. 'Oh my word, thank you,' said the taxi driver. Next, St. Peter led the priest to a rough old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set. 'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up,' said the priest. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a minister, went to church every day, and preached God's word.' 'Yes, that's true.' St Peter replied, 'But during your sermons people dozed. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'

A father was reading Bible stories to his young son. He read, 'The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city, but his wife looked back and was turned to salt.' His son asked, 'What happened to the flea?'

Sam and his family were having Sunday lunch at his grandmother's house. Everyone was seated at the table and when Sam received his plate he started eating straight away. 'Sam, wait until we say grace,' said his father. 'I don't have to,' the five year old replied. 'Of course you do,' his mother insisted. 'We always say a prayer before eating at our house. "That's at our house," Sam explained, 'but this is Grandma's house, and she knows how to cook.'

August Newsletter Items:

Please ensure that the **Editor has items** for the August issue **by Wednesday, 22 July.**

Doing the Jesus "Thing".

When or if we take time to reflect on the past one thing that can often confront us is the fact that over the years some words have changed meaning or taken on additional meaning.

For example, the word "thing." When I was a student at high school (some time ago!) the most common use of the word "thing" just meant some object.

Thing could be a stone (Careful! Don't trip on that thing)
or a tea towel (Here take this thing and get busy. I've done my share)
or a motor car (This thing guzzles fuel at an alarming rate)
or maybe a living creature, such as a horse (I'll never get the hang of riding this thing)
or at times even a person (What a stupid thing you have been!)

About 30 years ago there came a change. "Thing" also became the word for an emotion, an opinion, a way of life, a belief, and most commonly for a characteristic activity. As in "Doing my own thing" or "Go and do your thing somewhere else."

I remember a story I heard about three decades ago. An older minister was in the passenger seat of car driven by a younger minister. He asked the driver "Could you give me an English word that can be used instead of "thing" in the way kids use it today? My youngest daughter was writing an essay last night. She asked me to check it. When I came upon her words, 'Shakespeare had no equal, when it came do doing his thing.' I commented: 'You'll have to do better than that. Find another word to replace 'thing'.' She retorted: 'What other word, Dad? You give me one.' You know, I was stumped. I cannot think of a mainstream equivalent in English".

I decided to take up this challenge. But I too, was stumped! I could think of phrases to convey the same meaning, but no single word. I came to the conclusion that our culture, especially our youth culture, had indeed come up with another shorthand way of speaking which was hard to match. When you think about it “thing” has a remarkable brevity about it.

So, let us consider the Jesus thing. Yes, the Jesus thing. What was his thing? It was actively living the life of loving God and those around him, with characteristic love and good humour.

The Gospel of Matthew has a fine summary of the Jesus thing, at the end of chapter 9.

“Jesus went around all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and curing every infirmity. When he looked at the crowds, he had compassion for them. They were harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd.”

Compassion? Compassion is an essential element of the Jesus thing.

We need to understand that pity and compassion, like humility, were classed as serious faults in one’s character in the Greek-Roman world. The intellectual Greek spurned it as a crude regression into unenlightened human weakness.

The Romans derided it as it as a flaw that would ruin a man’s precious dignity. But Jesus practised compassion. He had compassion on the crowds that gathered around him, desperate for help and guidance.

Imagine trying to look at the crowds through the eyes of Jesus. We would see a picture of the common, down-trodden people of the land, huddled together like a flock under attack. Nowhere to turn, no one to protect them in their extreme vulnerability.

It was a part of **his** thing for Jesus to have compassion on them. His heart went out to them. He travelled around the Galilean region, meeting the common people in open spaces or in towns and synagogues, teaching them the love of God, preaching the presence of God’s kingdom in their midst (a kingdom where each were precious citizens) and healing their diseases and curing their handicaps. (Matthew 4: 23). This was the true Jesus thing.

But genuine compassion comes at a cost. Often, after dealing with the crowds, Jesus felt drained and utterly exhausted. And, as we now know, finally his compassion for the common people cost him his life.

Without genuine compassion there is no true Christianity.

Immediately after Matthew summarises the Jesus thing, he moves on to the sending out of the 12 disciples on their first mission. They are to go and do the “Jesus thing”, to practice the deeds of love displayed by their Master.

Here, for the first time, the disciples are called apostles. Apostle, in New Testament Greek, meant an emissary, a person sent out on a mission with the authority of the sender behind them. The disciples could no longer stay at the point of being learners in the school of Christ. The time came when the disciples must become the practitioners. They became the ambassadors of Christ Jesus.

This first sending out was evidently not to be a protracted one. It was a quick whip around the countryside in order to awaken the people to the good news of Jesus.

Their “marching orders” were not for each of them to “do their own thing” but to do the “Jesus thing.” Not their version of God but to spread the version Jesus taught and embodied. His instructions were

clear: *“Preach as you go,” saying: “The kingdom of God is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, heal the lepers, cast out the demons of the mind.”*

The spreading of this Jesus thing was not always easy; it wasn't throwing a handful of gold coins into a crowd. The going would get tough. Some homes and some towns would reject them. The message of Jesus never was and never will be universally popular in this world of arrogance, greed and delusion that surrounds us. Some might misunderstand the “Jesus thing”, others will understand it well enough to know that it threatens their evil ways.

Jesus told his apostles; Do your best, go to everyone in peace. But if they will not receive you, shake the dust of that place off your feet and try elsewhere.

The apostles would, sooner or later, not only be scorned and rejected but also hounded and persecuted, just as their Lord had been. There was, and is, an inevitable vulnerability in those who try to live with and for Jesus. They would need all their native cunning to read the situations, and all their sincerity to be effective emissaries of the Jesus thing, just as we do need today.

Matthew does not tell us how fruitful the twelve apostles were on their first mission. We don't know how well people received the “Jesus thing” when it was presented to them.

Success is most difficult to define. People's reception of the gospel can be hampered by closed minds. For those first apostles some people would respond to the “Jesus thing”, others would reject it – just as is happening in our world today.

We, today, are the sent-out ones, the emissaries or the apostles. It is not sufficient to be disciples, to be the learners. What we learn must be embodied in how we live each day.

All our lives we will remain disciples, learners in the school of Christ. That should keep us humble as we take up the more difficult commission: Jesus said *“Look, I sent you out like sheep in the midst of wolves. So be as wise as serpents and as sincere as doves.”*

The challenge for the disciples is the same challenge that we have today. The task given to the disciples is the same task that we are given today. We are the modern day disciples and as such we are commissioned to spread the good news of our Lord and Master.

That sounds good or reads well but turning the written word into action is the real challenge. Putting our faith into action is doing the “Jesus thing”. Reflecting the light of Christ into the world in which we live, the area in which we work, in the playgrounds of our schools, in the community in which we reside, this is doing the “Jesus thing”.

So often we can see the challenge but feel it is beyond us. Sometimes we feel that someone better or greater than ourselves can do it. That is exactly when we should try and do the “Jesus Thing”.

Setting out to do the “Jesus Thing” may just be the answer to meeting our challenge to be apostles and to take our place in the job of spreading the good news. As Jesus said to his disciples “The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in”

There is the challenge.

Our world today needs workers who are prepared to do the “Jesus Thing.” Are we ready? Are we willing? Are we prepared to try and do something great?

Never forget - We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. (GMP)