

Sapphire Coast Uniting Church 'Lockdown' Newsletter

Week Ending Sunday 29th March

Welcome to the first of our weekly emails, keeping our congregation connected during the Corona Virus shutdown. As we won't be printing our regular pewslip, this email will be part of our approach to keep our folk connected. Contributions, and any items for future inclusion can be forwarded to Jeff, Tony or the church email.

Birthdays next week:

Val Eaton – 2nd April

Cathie Haynes – 3rd April

Ros Williams – 4th April

Why not give them a call!



Church News

*If you have passed by the church this week you may have noticed that the new side fence is now in place, replacing the tired old palings that had seen better days. All that remains is for a gate to be added to the top section, allowing access for the neighbours.

*Due to travel restrictions, John & Becky Blair will be with us a little longer than originally anticipated. Win/win! Their contact number however, is incorrectly recorded on the roster listing. Please note

that the correct mobile is 0477764623.

Elders

We are fortunate to have a strong group of Elders to help us through this time of 'disconnection'. Many folk will greatly miss the regular social contact that our weekly service provided. During this time, it is even more important for Elders to ensure regular contact continues with the small group in their charge. A weekly phone call or even a video call if possible, will let people know we still have them in our thoughts, even if we can't call in personally. (An up to date list of Elders groups is on the notice board in the church). Many of our congregation do not have email addresses recorded on our contacts list. Please check when you call to see if there is now a valid email, and advise Secretary John if so. Many will not receive this email! Perhaps a copy can be dropped in the mailbox of those in your group who don't have an active email address.

Your Weekly Offerings

While our church services are on hold, and we can't meet in person, our regular expenses will still need to be paid. In addition, we will be without our hall rental income for some time and the Op Shop will also be closed for the shutdown period. We rely on your weekly offerings to help meet our ongoing expenses. The Church Council Executive are encouraging the congregation to use direct debit (Giving Direct) if possible, as your mode of regular financial giving; if you would like to set up Giving Direct, please contact treasurer Jeff for details.

We understand that not everyone can do this, and for those of you who prefer to give your offerings in the plate, please could we request that you continue to put your offerings aside in an envelope, that can be placed in the collection when normal activities eventually resume.

Viewpoint Magazine

We have received our usual supply of *Viewpoint*, the quarterly magazine of the Canberra Region Presbytery. Copies are available on the desk beside the entry door at church if anyone would like a hard copy, or an online version can be found on the Presbytery website at <https://canberra.uca.org.au> by clicking on the "Presbytery Dates and Events" tab.

Lectionary readings this week:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

Message

The raising of Lazarus: John 11:1- 45

A reflection by Rev Elizabeth Raine, Minister of Tuggeranong Uniting Church and Chair of Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee



What are we to make of the raising of Lazarus? It is not really a resurrection, though it points to the later death and resurrection of Jesus. In this story, Lazarus is transformed from death to life. He has 'returned to life', showing that not even death can stop the life-giving Spirit of God from moving in strange ways through the world.

It is different for Martha and Mary. Theirs is a resurrection story, as their wailing has turned into dancing; and they have moved from sackcloth to being clothed with joy (Psalm 30:11-12). Their existing life of despair and sadness is rebooted into a life of joy, hope and abundant faith. Their relationship with Jesus moves to a new level of trust, and the

whole conversation between Jesus and Martha sets out this new relationship of true belief in him.

All of the symbols and metaphors the author of the Gospel of John has used, the seven signs or miracles which Jesus' has performed, and all of his teaching climaxes at this moment of decision, when Martha answers Jesus' question: "Do you believe?" The questions of whether he is God's chosen or not are now resolved, eyes are opened and the light of Christ shines clearly.

When we choose to enter this relationship with God as faithful people, we will need to explore this question for ourselves: "Do you believe?" and even "What do you believe?"

Given the exceptional circumstances we find ourselves in right now, with a pandemic working its way through the world, this might be a very difficult question to answer for many of us. I have had conversations already as to whether this virus is part of God's plan, and has God unleashed it to somehow punish us?

I really don't think a God of love would unleash such a destructive force upon the creation. If anyone is to blame, it is ourselves, for the destructive way in which we have treated the creation. What God has given us in this story of Lazarus is the opposite. God, through Jesus, gives us hope, one of the most powerful things we have at the moment.

People of faith and hope can often be accused of being 'naive', 'out of touch' or 'stupid'. On Twitter, I am frequently told that the world is in a mess, the planet is dying, we are spending too much time, money and energy on destroying each other, and now a new disease is threatening the stability of our societies and may cause millions of deaths. They ask me "Where is your God in all of this? Why doesn't he do something if he is real? What reason is there for hope?"

There are many reasons why we could fall into despair, as Mary and Martha did initially. But then Jesus turns up, and unexpectedly offers hope.

Hope can and does make a significant difference in this world. Hope is a flicker of a flame, a glimpse of starlight, a distant glow in the darkness. We all know stories where life was found where we least expected it, where against all explanations, a child, someone with cancer, or a dying person fights for life, and wins, bringing life and light to all around.

We all have moments of despair and doubt. The Psalms are full of the laments of people who face sickness, death and war. Yet these laments are also full of hope:

You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word says Psalm 119:114

Psalm 33:22 reminds us that God's unfailing love is with us, as people who put our hope in God.

All of us probably want to give up at times. Many of us now may be metaphorically where Lazarus was, in space that feels as small and silent and isolated as a first century tomb. Some of us may be feeling a grief like that of Mary and Martha, a grief that comes from fearing that the world is now a different place and may never be the same again.

But life has a powerful upon us, and as people of faith we have a great capacity for hope against hope. All of us have experienced moments when our hope, as foolish as it may have appeared, proved to be grounded in reality. After all, we are people of faith, a faith grounded in hope.

Hold on to your hope. As Paul says in Romans 12:12 "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer, for "surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 23:18).

Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community

Saltbush seeks to encourage and connect smaller, Uniting Christian communities, irrespective of size or location. *Saltbush* seeks to enable us as a broad church to embrace the reality of being Christian community in the 21st. century and to affirm the place and capacity of smaller Christian communities both to gather and be in mission. Their website can be found at <https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/> Scroll down to the section entitled 'The Word around the Bush'. There are 8-10 minute video messages posted each week by the team at Saltbush. Just click on the image to view a video.

Prayers

God of the guiding star, the bush that blazes

Show us your way

God of the stormy seas, the bread that nourishes

Teach us your truth.

God of the still, small voice, the wind that blows where it chooses

Fill us with life God of the elements of our inward and outward journeys

Set our feet on your road today. ~Ruth Burgess

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*God, you are always calling your people to follow you into the future,
inviting them to new ventures, new challenges,
new ways to care, new ways to touch the hearts of all.
When they become fearful of the unknown, give them courage.
When they worry that they are not up to the task,
remind them that you would not call them if you did not believe in them.
When they get tired, or feel disappointed with the way things are going,
remind them that you can bring change and hope out of the most difficult situations.*
~Neil Paynter

Contact Details

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Keep safe,
Ed.

Please let us know if you no longer wish to receive these emails