

Parish Life

DECEMBER 2021

In Lockdown – but not Inactive

Since our last edition of Parish Life we have all spent a significant period in lockdown due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, as this edition attests, as a Parish we have been far from inactive!

The following is the text of the sermon which our Regional Bishop Chris Edwards delivered, via YouTube, for our Patronal Festival of St Luke. His text is *Luke 10:1-9*.

The Journey

The Government's roadmap is leading us through the lockdown to the land of normality. It's a journey we are all willingly on.

In *Luke 10*, Jesus and his disciples commence a journey too, and while different to the roadmap out of lockdown it is a journey nonetheless with some, if only a few, similarities.

No one starts a journey without having a destination. There is an intention about where you're going, decisions about destinations. To journey out of lockdown we need to pass the 70% and 80% vaccination milestones.

To journey for a holiday, to see people or places, people plan and arrange their trip. All journeys have a purpose and a destination.

We live in a time of unprecedented opportunity for travel (save for pandemics of course).

The last century has seen a massive change in travel. We can board an airplane that will take us literally to the other side of the world in under a day.



Bishop Chris Edwards

We can board an ocean liner alongside thousands of people and enjoy luxuries and activities that were once only the realm of the rich and famous.

2,000 years ago there was a similar transformation in travel.

A Roman General named Augustus brought an end to the civil wars that had plagued the Roman world and he established peace across his Empire which enabled travel and trade to flourish. The roads that were built, some still in use today, and the sea lanes that were opened across the Mediterranean transformed travel and commerce exploded. People could embark on all kinds of journeys previously unthinkable.

In *Luke 10* Jesus commences a journey which was made all the easier because of Roman roads.

In *Luke 9:51* Jesus determines he will go to Jerusalem.

But if you look carefully at the text of that verse you will see his journey does not have Jerusalem as the final destination. He is to be "taken up to heaven". That is his destination. It is beyond the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a necessary stopping point in the journey; a milestone that must be reached, but not the destination.

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And nothing will dissuade him from taking this journey. He knew that he would be taken up to be with the Father again. His journey would begin here in Galilee but it would go beyond the holy city and it would see his disciples go to the ends of the earth. The risen Lord would continue his work through these disciples.

As he commences this journey he gives instructions to his disciples, instructions which are applicable and relevant to them, and to us, as we join in this mission and as we continue his work in this world as his disciples.

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In Lockdown—but not Inactive

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The First Point The Important Place of Prayer

It is impossible to imagine we can join him on his journey without prayer. We cannot walk in his footsteps without first committing to prayer. Prayer is the vital first step we take. It is to be part of our experience as a disciple, not only when we gather formally for worship, but at all times and in all places. We should make our requests known to God. We should pray the Lord of the harvest would raise up many more to work in the harvest.

The Second Point It will be Dangerous

I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. (10:3)

Now I know little of animal husbandry but I do know that lambs have no natural defences. Too small to have grown horns, with no claws or fangs to attack or devour. The only blessing God gives them really is the size of their brains! Their brains are so small they wouldn't feel too much pain if they do meet a wolf over dinner – or should I say, as the wolf's dinner!

Isn't it fascinating that God so often refers to His people as lambs, or sheep?

As we consider the New Testament church we see this danger Jesus warned of was very real. The church was

persecuted out of Jerusalem, starting a diaspora that took it to the ends of the earth. The church's early history is a record of martyrdoms and persecutions that entailed savagery that is too distressing to contemplate; barbarous. And today the persecution in many places continues. It is said we are being persecuted more in Australia today. I am not sure that is the case. It is true we are no longer regarded as we once were and we no longer hold seats of honour in the community, but it is hardly persecution.

Jesus warns of danger - so pray. Pray God will raise up more workers, pray God will protect them as they go. Pray also for protection.

Third Point Devotion is Required

Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. (10:4)

Those who embark on this journey with Jesus need to be committed. Half-hearted will not do. Do not rely on your existing resources and wealth. Don't think that they will work for you. And don't just go where you will be known and welcomed. Be prepared to go into the places where you are under-resourced. Be prepared to go in His Name into what is new!

His disciples were astounded, amazed and they rejoiced at what happened



Rev'd Peter Kurti and The Rector

when they went in Jesus' name. When they went with his authority, not relying on their own resources and reputations.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." (10:17)

Conclusion

No one goes to an airport terminal for their holiday. No one holidays at a dock. They are not the destination for a journey. They are merely a necessary stopping point along the way.

How sad it would be to think a church was the destination. It is not the destination for the disciple of Jesus, it is merely a necessary stopping point along the way.

The destination for the disciple is the heavenly kingdom.

Luke who was himself a disciple who understood the need to pray, who knew the risks and dangers of discipleship and who knew the cost of devotion, is mentioned by Paul as Paul endures imprisonment and persecution, as he himself faces death. He commends Luke for his faithful partnership and makes special mention that, despite the desertion of many, "only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11)

Luke knew the need to pray, the dangers ahead, and the devotion required. May we learn much from him today.

Let us, along with Paul and Luke, pray that: The Lord will rescue us from every evil attack and will bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)



Choral Scholars, Nick Sprott & Owen Pearson

All Saints Sermon

Our first guest preacher, in-person in the church, was The Venerable Tiffany Sparks, Diocesan Archdeacon of Grafton, who joined us for the celebration of All Saints. Her sermon challenged us to examine the way we each live, comparing it to the life that Jesus lived during his time on earth. (John 11.32-44)

I have to admit that my favourite Gospel these days is the Gospel of John. It used to be Mark, but I have been gradually converted to John. I enjoy how crafted the story is, the use of metaphors, rhythms and day and night. Because of this, it makes it exceptionally hard to only preach on snippets like our Gospel for today. This snippet is less than half of the story. Jesus is being confronted by the death of Lazarus and the clear distress and accusations of Mary. 'If you had been here, he still would have been alive' and mocked by others. Clearly there is distress and anger at the actions of Jesus and for how long it took for Jesus to show up, and I guess I have a bit of sympathy for that. If I was in Mary's position, I don't know if I would do much differently. Mary is weeping and so is the group that is with her.

What is interesting, and is lost in our English translation is that the word used for weeping in these spots are different to the one used when Jesus weeps. The weeping that is being done by Mary and her people means wailing and lamenting, loudly and ritualistically. This weeping is one of the things that we are told causes Jesus great distress. Now, the word used here for 'great distress' actually has connotations for anger and frustration rather than worry or compassion. Both times when we are told that Jesus is distressed, what we really should be thinking is that Jesus is getting frustrated. After the first time, hearing the wails, Jesus gets frustrated and then Jesus weeps. As any trivia bible buff would know, this is the shortest sentence in the Bible. Jesus weeps. His weeping is different, it's not the

wailing out loud. Instead, it is a silent cry. Tears dripping from his eyes down his face. As tears are dripping down his face, he is getting comments like – see how he loved him? And accusations that Jesus should have been there to save him. This angers and frustrates Jesus again, and he can't take it anymore. He goes to the tomb and says 'Take away the stone'. Mary doesn't understand and points out that there would be a smell. Mary is stuck in the certainty of death. It doesn't cross her mind for one moment that Jesus was the bringer of life, and is not dictated to by death. Death has no dominion over him. Our God is a God of life.

It is not until Lazarus walks from the tomb that the penny drops. Mary had to see it to believe it. This is held in contrast to the way Martha approached the situation, which we don't hear about today. Just before the Mary story, we have Martha coming to Jesus:

John 11.20-26

²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (both women say the same thing, but with different mind set, Martha goes on to say) ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

The tone of Martha and Mary is very different. Martha goes on a journey that opens her eyes to the nature of God. The God that brings fullness of life. A God of resurrection. In true Gospel form, we have a tell and show Jesus, he tells Martha and she believes, he shows Mary and now she believes.

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The Ven Tiffany Sparks, The Rector and The Revd Peter Kurti

Thursday Eucharist

Now that COVID-19 restrictions have eased more, we have moved our Thursday Eucharist back into the Chapel. All parishioners are welcome to attend this mid-week service that provides a quiet, contemplative time in our busy lives. During school term times, some folk then adjourn to Café Jam in Bridgepoint for a light lunch and a continuation of fellowship. Come and join us!



Thursday Eucharist in the Chapel

All Saints Sermon

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Jesus transforms a situation that was based around death, anger, sorrow and disappointment to something that was full of life and restoration. We have been told and shown that as followers of Christ we are also called to be people of transformation.

It was this act of raising Lazarus that has the Pharisees now solidly enacting their plan to have Jesus arrested and killed. Jesus' act of bringing life and restoration is met with effectively people plotting his assassination, and he knows it. Yet this doesn't stop Jesus. Our God is a God of life, that even death cannot stop. Death doesn't get to be the boss of God.

This speaks volumes to how we are the body of Christ in this world. How do we continue on his mission, as bringers of life, people who transform unjust structures around us that cause oppression and destruction and instead bring restoration and dignity? Knowing that in some situations, this could lead to us getting in the firing line? All we have to do is to look to the life of the Saints to see that speaking out and

calling for transformation can get you in all sorts of trouble.

Speaking out against injustice and oppression – things that lead to death, is hard and risk taking. Structures and actions that bring about 'death' can be insidious and systemic. It is up to us as followers of Christ to continually examine our own attitudes and actions, even if that means uncovering our own complacency, complicity and fear. Because one of the things with believing in a God of life, is that we believe that we are forgiven, refined and transformed by God. If we can't self-reflect and be transformed ourselves, then we can't truly be bringers of Christ's love and life into the world.

Jesus shows his love for us and for the world by dedicating himself to the restoration of humanity. He loved people along the way, he fed the hungry, healed the sick, restored people's dignity and brought life where people only saw death. This is our God who loves us still today and this is how we are called to live in the world.



Book Club Dinner – October 2021

Book Club

The St Luke's social studies Book Club finished reading Vivek Murthy's *'Together'* a medical doctor's study of the impact of loneliness on health and wellbeing which offers deep insights into the healing power of human connections. This was particularly pertinent given the extended lockdowns we have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. After a short recess the book club will embark on Hugh Mackay's *'Kindness Revolution'* a reflection on Australia's most loved values of mateship, respect and harmony and a roadmap for entrenching these values solidly into the future. There's still time to join! We were fortunate to be able to celebrate the completion of our first book by enjoying dinner together at an Afghan restaurant in Balgowlah.



Trivia contestants 'zooming in' on the questions!

Trivia Night

On Friday 17 September, St Luke's held its very first Online Trivia night, hosted by Director of Music, Callum Close. This was a fun (and slightly competitive) evening of Fellowship through our isolation, where 15 people came together to compete for the victory crown. How would you score? Here's a few questions from the night:

- What does a funambulist walk on?
- How long is New Zealand's 99 mile beach?
- Who was known as *'The Force's Sweetheart'*?

Congratulations to David and Robyn Burke, who blitzed the competition and were the winners for the evening! If you can answer the above questions, perhaps consider coming along to our next Parish Trivia Night – more details to follow soon!

Remember you
can follow
St Luke's on 

St Luke's is a place of rich and diverse liturgy, where life and faith connect.
We are a progressive community that welcomes all people regardless of gender, age, race, sexual orientation or religion.
We support the full and equal role of women in society and in the ministry of the church.

Editor: The Rev'd Dr Max Wood
Design: Debbie McLeod
Photos: Helen Bell, Callum Close, Max Wood

To stay in touch at St Luke's, check the weekly pew bulletin regularly, read the quarterly *Parish Life*, visit our website www.stlukesmosman.org and follow us on

