

7<sup>th</sup> July 2019

## What we believe

The *Thought for the Day* in a daily email blog I receive reads: "People need to believe, and these days they will believe anything."

I remember a conversation among our work party when in India in 2008 in which we surmised from the little shrines that seemed to be everywhere that it would be easy to start a new religion in India. It felt as though we could perhaps dream up a new deity and start a new religion because it seemed people would believe anything.

It does matter what we believe ... because what we believe determines the choices we make, and thus how we live.

It's been said that you can tell what a person believes by watching how they live. The choice they make in how they live will tell us the true belief system inside. How do they invest their money, and spend their money? How do they apportion their time? Who do they associate with, and who do they avoid? How do they treat important people, and how do they treat people in a tough space? What books do they read? What television shows do they watch?

We sing a song at church that asks the question "How then shall I live?" It really is a searching question. What we believe informs those myriad decisions we make every day? When we read the accounts of Jesus' life, do we sense a correlation with the choices we make? Or do we sense a measure of disjunction between Jesus' priorities and our own?

This weekend our Synod meeting will be held in the Box Hill Town Hall. We will be receiving reports on what has been happening in our church since the last meeting, and making decisions on a number of matters ranging from financial management to social questions like the ethical advice we must provide to our institutions with respect to Voluntary Assisted Dying. We will also be engaging in a conversation about how the church's riches in property might make its best contribution to our vision and identified priorities. What we do with our property will reveal what is most important to us as a church. Do we worship God and serve God's people, or do we worship our property? Our answers to that question will reveal what we really believe as a church.

Please pray for the members of this year's Synod that meets from Friday evening through to Tuesday afternoon.

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14<sup>th</sup> July 2019

## Today's Good Samaritans

Some people are very helpful. I had a very generous offer extended to me during the week. I received an email that read:

*Hello! My name is [REDACTED] and I want to advise you worldwide medical marijuana sale network. We have the most delicious and rare tastes. You just need to copy and paste our address [REDACTED] in your browser.*

This person even went on to offer me a discount. Wasn't that generous? I'm thinking this person is going to feel very dejected and rejected when I don't take up the offer!

What a contrast to the offer made by the main character in the story Jesus told, which we call *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*, when he went to the man lying in the ditch, having been beaten up and discarded by a group of thugs. The supposedly 'good' 'religious' people in that society had walked on by and not lifted a finger to help because it would have inconvenienced them.

In the *Winter Night Shelter Program* we are paying attention to those in our community who have come upon tough times and whom the broader community so often doesn't want to get involved with.

When we read through the Gospel of Luke, one of the things that becomes apparent is the number of times Jesus paused and took cognizance of, and reached out to, people whom the good society of his time consigned to the scrapheap of life. He refused to wear the set of blinkers society seeks to assign to everyone to assuage our conscience by shielding such people from our sight.

Those of us involved in the WNS Program are delighted that one of our guests who arrived in the program so dejected, feeling that he was on the dung heap, having lost everything, and couldn't see a way forward, has through our interactions with him found a new lease on life. He has found a job and has a new zest for life and is filled with hope and happiness. And he is so grateful for the support and assistance that we have extended to him.

I'm sure Jesus' story doesn't only apply to individual 'Good Samaritans' but also to corporate Good Samaritans. The WNS Program has engaged this man in his time of need and supported him to re-establish himself with hope and life. What a joy it is to be part of God's kingdom work in the world.

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**21<sup>st</sup> July 2019**

### **Communing with God**

A friend of mine this morning posted on Facebook her disgust that at having walked all the way from the end of Terminal 4 at Melbourne Airport to the International Terminal, she found she couldn't check in to her international flight for a whole hour. She wasn't happy. What was she going to do for that hour? One person posted back that she could use it to pray. Now there is a novel idea for some people.

I had only just read that when I read of someone else who had to wait an hour for something much bigger and significant than a flight to Bali. I didn't know until I read that article that when Apollo 11's Eagle lunar module landed on the moon on July 20, 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had to do something hard: wait. They were scheduled to open the door of their lunar lander and step onto the unknown surface of a completely different world. But for now, their mission ordered them to take a pause before the big event. And so, Aldrin spent his time doing something unexpected, something no man had ever attempted before. Alone and overwhelmed by anticipation, he took part in the first Christian sacrament ever performed on the moon – a rite of Christian communion. Aldrin's lunar communion has since become shrouded in mystery and confusion, but the rite itself was relatively simple. The astronaut was also an elder at Webster Presbyterian Church, and before he headed into space in 1969, he got special permission to take bread and wine with him to space and give himself communion.

Men had already prayed in space, but Aldrin was about to go one step further – literally and figuratively. Part of his mission was not just to land on the moon, but to walk on it. To prepare, he took communion after the Eagle lunar module landed on the moon's Sea of Tranquillity during an hours-long downtime period designed to let the astronauts recover from their space flight and prepare for their moon walk.

One 'take away' from these two stories is that sometimes the choices disciples of Jesus make are different, and often unexpected and not understood, choices. Both these choices were choices that prepared them for the mission ahead. I've read elsewhere that Aldrin's heartrate was unbelievably normal both as the mission launched and again as he stepped onto the moon. He was not so stressed that he was not in control of himself. Was that because he communed with his God in preparation?



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**28<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

### **Learning experiences**

As we have continued to engage with the folk availing themselves of the Winter Night Shelter, we have been learning many things. We have been reminded of the nature of the ministry of hospitality to involve making our home (our church home) a home for other people for the evening. That is very different to providing a service to these people who for all sorts of reasons find themselves at this point in their life without any other place to call home, so we have made ourselves vulnerable as we have offered opened our building to them, and allowed them to treat it as their home for the evening.

We've learned that it takes a lot of work. Between us we are contributing many, many hours of unpaid labour, but we've discovered that it's a labour of love. Our Venue Coordinators Di and Geoff have worked tirelessly

holding the threads together and coordinating the rest of us to play our particular parts in this adventure. Wonderfully they have had more trouble letting people know they are not required than rousing up enough people to cover the timeslots. Many have been so excited to be part of doing something to help these people in our community who are in a hard place. Good on you all.

And we have learned to still our personal agendas sufficiently to connect with the people who are our guests such that they have trusted us with their stories. They have ceased to be homeless people and have become our friends who unfortunately find themselves homeless – and that is something very different. Chatting with a couple of our volunteers during the week, I have heard them reflecting on what they are learning about themselves, and how they are growing as people through their interactions with these new-found friends. We have been reminded on many occasions that we must be careful about our assumptions, for they have often proven to be so wrong as we have got to know the person behind the statistic. There have been occasions when we've struggled with our emotional responses. Other times, our hearts have soared with joy as we have seen our friends finding new confidence and taking the first steps on a new adventure toward a new future.

We should already be starting to ponder what we at St. Andrew's might do post August 31 when the program concludes for this year to continue to be who we have learned to be in the course of the Winter Night Shelter for 2019. How might we continue to nurture relationship with these existing friends, but also open the doors of our hearts and assets to discover new avenues of service and friendship to our neighbours in their time of misfortune?

I'll be back again on 27th August. In the interim Sue and I are embarking on a different kind of adventure into the Flinders Ranges. I wonder how that might change us?!

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