

1st March 2020

Easter people

Lent traditionally commences on Ash Wednesday with the imposition of ashes to remind us that “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen 3:19)

That much of our amazing natural environment lies in ashes as we commence our Lenten journey this year, reminds us of this reality in a stark way.

But the story of Lent is one that leads us to Easter. Out of the ashes of our failures and misadventures, there exists the possibility of new life. That is the unparalleled message of the resurrection to which we are journeying. But it begins by acknowledging the ashes of present reality.

These photos hold this tension gently but powerfully. They were taken by the Rev. Ian Ferguson for whom our contributions are helping to fund pastoral support to the fire-affected regions of Gippsland. As well as being a good pastor, he is a good photographer. And he has captured these images in the early days of his placement in Gippsland.

May the promise and hope that is captured in these photos encourage us to embrace the earthy realities of what we are doing to this beautiful habitat through our resistance to changing our lifestyles, and encourage us to attend to our scientific community’s wise and evidence-based advice before the damage we do is irreversible.

We are called to be Easter people – a people of resurrection. A good Lenten discipline would be to find ways we can make our own personal contribution, even as we call on our national decision-makers to find the courage to make the bigger decisions that we know we must make. Let us commit to partnering with our Easter God.



8th March 2020

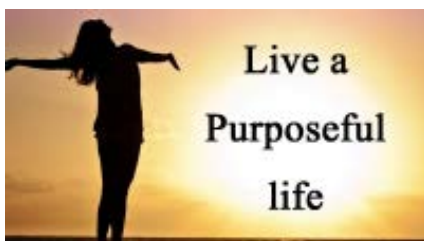
Living purposefully

Technology! It is both a blessing and a curse. I recently had my mobile phone changed. In sorting out my new handpiece I decided I needed to have all my contact information in the one place.

Despite iCloud supposedly showing all the contacts on one device on my other devices, that hasn’t been my experience. And, travelling into the city on the train, when I went to make a pastoral phone call to make use of that time, I discovered that the number I required was not present in the contacts list in this phone. Ugggh!!! Nuisance. Wasted time.

Yet that same technology is an absolute blessing when it comes to watching television, or preparing visuals for Sunday Worship, or sending a text message to someone. As a family we can stay connected like never before. That is especially wonderfully when we can video chat with our grandchildren in Brisbane. So I am far from being a technophobe but technology does have the ability to annoy me and try my patience at times. (I know you’ll find that hard to believe!)

But in sorting my recent inconvenience, I got to pondering the extent to which coping with the vagaries of technology is in some ways similar to our Lenten journey. Our Lenten journey is a following of the relentless, undiverted journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem where a criminal’s cross awaited him. My issues don’t stack up against that in any respect. Rather, I am challenged to reflect on my pilgrimage to the extent that it is a purposeful life of faithful service.



The subject of ‘purposeful living’ has become a popular subject. One definition of it described it this way:

*A **purposeful life** abounds when you **live** from the level of the soul. Stay with me a moment as we go a deeper into this one. **Living** from the soul level means moving past the sprawling thoughts of how **life** should be a certain way. You develop a deeper sense of your **spiritual life**.*

So much for getting frustrated with technology. We can certainly see how Jesus' life was an absolutely purposeful life. May we find our own ways to live purpose-filled lives for the kingdom of God.

18th March 2020

Soar with eagles and trust in God

Last weekend Sue and I were in Cohuna where it was my privilege to marry my niece and her now husband. Some of you will know that we have recently purchased a pair of kayaks. We took them with us last weekend. Each morning we spent an hour or so paddling around the lagoon that surrounds Apex Park and the caravan park. It has a myriad of old trees and grasses and little islands throughout it. It is a fabulous natural setting and is host to a lively population of all sorts of birds.

As we paddled back around to Apex Park to end our paddle, we observed an eagle's eerie high up in one of the trees along the edge of the lagoon. A little further on we were delighted to watch the eagle come in over our heads returning to its home in the heights of that tree with its wings spanned out floating on the current. It was an awesome sight.

What a contrast to the unfolding drama that the coronavirus is stirring around the world. Increasingly, major gatherings of people are being abandoned/precluded, to help mitigate the spread of the disease. Many regular routines are being disrupted in order to work around these inconveniences. At St. Andrew's we have to make contingency plans for various scenarios. At the time of writing, SunFest is going ahead. We are resolving whether it is appropriate to participate or not. Other measures are being put in place. Usual routines and plans are disrupted.

Yet there in the sky that eagle floated by, totally undisturbed, going about its regular routines, unfazed by our problems in our human world.

In Isaiah 40:31 we read:

*those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.*

Let's not give in to the panic and fear that is permeating our community. Let us put our trust in God. That doesn't mean we blunder on regardless trusting in miracles to protect us from infection. Rather let exercise our God-given intelligence and adjust our behaviours appropriately to the known facts, and trust in the Spirit of God to sustain us, even if we do contract the disease. Let us commit to caring for one another. Importantly, let us not give rein to misinformed paranoia.

May we resolve to live with a firm trust in God's presence among us and soar with the eagles on the currents of God's renewing, sustaining Spirit.

22nd March 2020

As I See It

That heading has added significance this week. We read a story of a man who couldn't see, but was enabled to see by Jesus. The story began when Jesus saw the man who happened to be blind, when just about everyone else around him had become blind to his presence. And at the end of the story, the man who used to be blind wonders why those who are supposed to be able to see better than others, remain blind to the wonder that has unfolded under their noses.

There is a wonderful exchange in the *Life of Brian* (yes, I am a Monty Python fan). In one scene, Brian and his mother are being harassed by a group of beggars –

“Alms for a leper” they cry, “Alms for a leper.”

One beggar calls out “Alms for an EX-leper.”

“Did you say EX-leper?” asks Brian.

“That's right, sir. Sixteen years behind the bell, and proud of it, sir.”

“Well what happened?” asks Brian.

“Oh, cured sir ... a miracle sir.”

“Well,” Brian asked, “who cured you?”

“Jesus did, sir. I was hopping along, minding my own business. All of a sudden, up he comes, cures me. One minute I'm a leper with a trade, next minute my livelihood's gone, not so much as a by-your-leave ... You're cured, mate. Interfering do-gooder.”

“Well,” Brian suggests, “why don't you go and tell him that you want to be a leper again.”

“Ah, I could do that, sir. Yeah, yeah. I could do that I suppose. What I was thinking was I was going to ask him if he could make me a bit lame in one leg during the middle of the week. Y'know, something beggable, but not leprosy, which is a real pain, to be blunt ...”

The scene is a good metaphor for the way that even when something wonderful and new is being offered us, it's still hard to let go of what we're used to – even though what we've been used to may have been harmful to us. That's why the stand taken by the formerly blind beggar in John 9 is so remarkable. He goes out into a new world which holds no certainties, without family, without friends, without 'church' – yet believing that God has a new future in store for him, on the basis of the one thing he does know, that Jesus has changed his life.

Like the man in Jesus' story, previously known as the blind beggar, we can look for new life and new mission, and take new hope with us into the future, on the basis of the one thing we know ... that Jesus has engaged us and changed our lives forever.
