

8th September 2019

Sunday Evening gatherings

I invite you consider whether our planned *Sunday Evening Gatherings* might be something that could help you grow as a person of faith. You might already have such a group that meets this need for you.

The vocation of every baptised Christian to be part of a countercultural community ... to sing to a different tune to the dominant culture we live amongst. To be truly Christian is to live out a communal and personal life that sits in some tension with the prevailing culture of the time. Our lives are framed and guided by a peculiar ethical code. To be different, to stand apart on some things, is not easy. A peculiarly Christian spirituality is not easy to define. We need others to help us with that.

Commencing at 6pm on Sunday 6th October, and on the first and third Sunday evenings of each month thereafter, I invite you to be part of a countercultural gathering of people who are curious about matters of faith and spirituality and are looking for an alternate manner of engaging and exploring life.

These evenings will offer a safe space to venture into the 'deep' spaces of life – to be curious, and explore together alternative ways of speaking and thinking about God, mystery, faith, meaning, life.

- ❖ the evenings will include a shared meal
- ❖ you are asked to bring a small plate of savoury food to share at this first gathering
- ❖ soup and rolls will be provided

We know we'll never fully 'get it' but that doesn't excuse us from the endeavour. I recall an article on the Trinity I read at Bible College concluding by saying that we will never accurately define it, but to give up trying "is the greater sloth". William Willimon reminds us of the elusive nature of what we seek to engage when he writes:

"I recommend frequent forays into the Gospel of John. There, the people around Jesus, the beneficiaries of his instruction, hardly ever get the point. Corpses are raised from the dead, and water turns to wine, just by his presence, and nobody gets a handle on Jesus. The one who eluded the grasp of sin and death will not be constrained by us, yet he will, out of love, come to us and eat with us."

If you are one of these curious kinds of people, you might choose to be part of this bunch of seekers.

15th September 2019

Where are you going?

I don't often look in my junk email folder but I happened to glance in there today and something took my attention. The Subject line read: "On The Road: What's Your Next Destination?" Of course I immediately thought Big Brother had been watching again.

I don't know where it came from but obviously something out there knew that we had been travelling lately. My doctor in Ringwood used to say that you shouldn't return to work from one holiday until you have booked your next. I always felt that was okay for him as a doctor to say, not so easy for me. But having had a taste of travelling with a camper trailer and experiencing the freedom of scheduling that allowed, and the freedom to travel virtually anywhere, even into some places not readily accessed by normal road vehicles, that question "What is your next destination?" looms large. Believe me, we will do more travelling with our trailer.

But it's not just the physical roads that we travel along. "What is your next destination?" is actually a good question to ask ourselves in terms of life. Some of us have travelled a long road to where we now find ourselves in life. Maybe we have gotten to a point where we think we have done all our living and it's now time to sit down and let someone else do things. But as disciples of Christ that option is never open to us. Jesus continues to say, "Follow me."

One of the roads our church has travelled down over the years is providing the Kidz Unplugged program. Over its life many children and their carers have been part of this fun activity based around music and sharing the growing up years with others. That program will conclude this school term. Its life cycle has run its course. The question for us is "What's the next destination?" What might the Spirit of God be nudging us to undertake to make use of that missional space that will otherwise sit idle apart from a short time on Sunday mornings?

God is in the business of giving us heart bursts, imagining ways we might contribute to God's kingdom business – ways by which we might enhance the social capital of our community. The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you ... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

The Winter Night Shelter has concluded for 2019 but we continue to live in the Sunbury community in which homelessness remains. If we listen to the prophet Jeremiah our welfare is somehow caught up in the welfare of the homeless. "What's your next destination?" What might we continue to contribute to improve the welfare of such people? It's an interesting question for us to engage together.

22nd September 2019 **Trust in the Lord**

Might I be excused for indulging myself with one last story from our recent time touring in the Flinders Ranges region? We ventured up as far as Arkaroola. It's a fabulous place and well worth a visit. It's a private Wilderness Reserve, a geologist's heaven, a conservationist's delight with the recovery of the yellow footed rock wallabies, and a landscape photographer's utopia. But it takes some effort to get there ... two or three hours driving rough outback roads, being careful to avoid potholes and rocks, regularly dipping through creek beds where every once in a blue moon water drains away. Stones are constantly bouncing noisily under the car.

Having arrived in Arkaroola we walked around the back of the vehicle to find a plethora of electrical wires hanging from the back of the car dragging on the ground, and likewise at the front of the trailer. It seems one of those stones scored a direct hit on the plugs providing not only lights to the trailer but also the trailer's electric brakes. Having been travelling so slowly we hadn't realised we didn't have any trailer brakes. The constant noise of stones under the car meant we hadn't heard anything different. There was nothing left of the plugs. And it took quite some time for inexperienced bush mechanics to figure out the wiring and get new connectors operative.

It's a good metaphor for life. At times something is thrown up at us from left field and really puts a spanner in the works of how we function. It might be a health issue. It might be a relationship issue. It might be a family issue. It might be a work issue. It might be any manner of issues. Perhaps for a time the other things we are coping with in life disguise the intrusion of the new issue. Its seriousness gets lost in the 'noise' of the ongoing regular issues we are negotiating, but eventually we have to face up to its presence and consider what it means for our lives. It might seriously disrupt our plans and emotionally hit us for six. It might take some time to navigate. It might require considerable resources to redress. One thing that won't help is panic.

In these times we need to rest in the peace of God and seek God's Wisdom in charting the course we need to replot and negotiate. By the grace of God, and with the help of God's 'bush mechanic' fellow members of Christ's Church, we reorient our life, and reschedule our agendas. In these times the words of *Proverbs 3:5* beckon our attention:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

Another way of reading that is to 'lean into God'. Let God be for us, the support and resilience we cannot muster within ourselves in our vulnerability. Trust that God is strong enough to hold us up.

29th September 2019 **Shared ideas**

It's Grand Final weekend. We often hear the dictum that a great team will always beat a team of champions. Maybe that is relevant this weekend. But it applies far beyond the football world. A fear of failure won't get a team over the line. It will be a shared joy of challenge. It will be a team that can harness every skill of every player in that team into a shared instinctive creative effort that will win.

Organizations are often run according to 'the superchicken model', where the value is placed on star employees who outperform others. And yet, this isn't what drives the most high-achieving teams. Business leader Margaret Heffernan observes that it is social cohesion — built every coffee break, every time one team member asks another for help — that leads over time to great results. It's a radical rethink of what drives us to do our best

work, and what it means to be a leader, because as Heffernan points out: "Companies don't have ideas. Only people do."

She knows what she's talking about. She is the former CEO of five businesses and explores the all-too-human thought patterns that lead organisations and managers astray.

And that is just as true of us as a church. The church won't have an idea of what mission it feels called to. It will start when maybe just one individual person has a 'heart-burst' for a particular ministry. That 'idea' gets shared. Others might catch the vision and share the passion. That's when the kite catches the wind and flies. The Church Council considers how it can resource that venture, and ensure that idea is protected from the knockers. More and more people are stirred by God's Spirit to bring their giftedness to bear. It won't work if 'star' players hold the reins and keep control. Heffernan currently reminds us that best performance is a product of mutual teams.



Now that Kidz Unplugged has run its course, we have unused missional space. We have people resources that are no longer required to support Kidz Unplugged. What new arena of mission might God be inviting us to explore?

Go the team in black with the faded red stripe!
