



# The River of Life

February 2024 Edition



The Uniting Church in Australia  
LODDON MALLEE PRESBYTERY



## Metamorphosis - Transfiguration - Evolution

When reading and thinking about the evocative stories that set us on the path towards Easter, it was a surprise to see the drama of the Transfiguration being translated as the Metamorphosis of Jesus\*. It is interesting how a slight change of language can completely alter perceptions of what is happening.

In the last few months, we've had some changes with the people doing various tasks in the Presbytery that at first seem like striking alterations. However, in the context of the meanings of metamorphosis, transfiguration and evolution as they converge in the clouds of the illustration above, these moments also allow for 'transformation and flowering'.

At our last Presbytery in Council meeting, we acknowledged and celebrated that all of us **are the Presbytery**, and committed to finding

and supporting people amongst us with passion and skills who might help with the transfiguring of various challenges for the flourishing of all our congregations.

This metamorphosis, transfiguration and evolution are already a part of the vitality and life of all of us in our existing community and group engagement, but we recognised that help with specific small and larger tasks and planning, from people with relevant knowledge and understanding, could transform us all.

**METAMORPHOSIS - TRANSFIGURATION - EVOLUTION - are a part of all of us.**

It will be wonderful to be part of the transformation with you again this year.

Shalom - *Libby Gregory*

(Chairperson LMP)

\* Amy Jill Levine *The Gospel of Mark: a Beginner's Guide to the Good News* (p60)

## Choristers bring true joy of Christmas

You can 'Deck the Halls with boughs of plastic Holly' to outdo Myer, but no prelude to Christmas equals a Carol Service. Dunolly UCA held such a service on the afternoon of December 20, 2023.

Residents from the Dunolly Hospital and Nursing Home joined members of the congregation and community for the service. Steve Parish, Pastoral Care Team Leader at MDHS, welcomed everyone and gave a Christmas introduction.



Julie Ramsay and congregation members formed the choir and led the first set of carols. Some choral three-part harmony made a joyful sound along with Rhonda Heather at the electronic organ.



The first Bible reading, Luke 2:1-7 was read by Judy Beale, a resident at the Nursing Home, who has read for several years. It was wonderful to hear her read again.

Another bracket of traditional carols followed.

Glenda Rowland, volunteer supporter, read the second Bible reading, Luke 2:8-20. and more wonderful carols were sung by everyone.



Afternoon tea followed. A fine spread was laid out on white cloths. Church members excelled themselves with a delicious array of Christmas fare, enjoyed with a cuppa.

The choristers were richly rewarded. As they were singing, some of the residents, who sadly, have been unable to communicate for many years, were seen to be mouthing the words along with the choir. The choristers hearts were echoing the true joy of sharing Christmas together.



*Heather Cooper, Dunolly UCA*



# Living by Promises

When I was a new teenage Christian, [many many decades ago] I heard a preacher say this about walking the faith:

*“We don’t live by explanations; we live by promises”.*

In early days that comforted me – “I don’t have to understand why things happens - it all for a reason.” For many years since it has felt like a cop out: “Why should I accept ‘this’ as it is – I can make my own choices here, and I can ask questions – even of God”.

Now, here we are – regional and rural Christians together – in 2024. There’s lots we CAN ‘explain’ of forces combining to affect our day-to-day life. Here’s just a few of them, and you will have others to add to this list:

- Growing regional centres due to ageing rural populations relocating for more services.
- Agri-business growing with more mechanisation and less workforce needed.
- Migration creating more cultural diversity in regional areas but much less so in rural areas.
- Education, health, and financial services reconfiguring how they work in rural areas.
- Changing legislation affecting public buildings and our perceptions of safety.
- Digital communication changing how relationships and workforce operate.

**While there are more explanations, it’s the ‘promises’ that bring spiritual life and hope for me.** We are encountering these promises even in our Sunday reading in these weeks:



**God’s promises to care for ALL creation.** Genesis 9:16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

**God’s promise to hold us in steadfast love.** Psalm 25:10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

**God’s promise that our spiritual life is secure in Christ as we follow.** Mark 8:34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said

to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

These promises don’t tell me “everything will work out the way I want it to”. They DO remind me daily of God’s character and commitment to every one of us: God’s way of steadfast love and commitment, shining

through in the living Christ.

Living by promises is not passive: for me the promises remind me that every day is worth trying to live well, and that every one of us - including me – is far more valuable and loved than we realise.

I am indeed yearning for the faith we cherish to flourish in the new and different world we now live in. But I celebrate life here in our region, I enjoy your friendship, and feel inspired by your lives.

The love of God is with you.

*Rev Gordon Wild.*

## Sharing the Joy at Christmas

Hopetoun and district enjoyed their first community Carols for many years. Situated on the lawns at Lake Lascelles, those gathered were blessed by a Carols Evening that glorified our Lord Jesus Christ. The Carols were initiated by Allan Fenech from the Catholic Church, who was inspired by the love of God, a donation, and a desire to see the churches working together, so he invited the Churches to get together and plan Carols for the Community.

A free event, with a sausage sizzle followed by



the carols, around 200 people attended and shared Carols, Music and Bible Readings. The Warracknabeal and District Band led the



music, the students from the Catholic School sang, and brief reflections from the Catholic, Lutheran and Baptist-Uniting Church Leaders were given.

Individuals took away a Candy Cane with its meaning attached, for their Christmas Trees and a booklet of the Christmas Story for each family, which were provided by The Southern Mallee Cooperative Parish. It was a wonderful opportunity to share the Good News of Emmanuel, "God with Us" and show Christian Unity.

*Rev Susan Pearse*

## Castlemaine & District Parish



*Alison and Rev Adrian Pegler with Rev Sarah Tomilson at Castlemaine with their presentation flowers to mark their 60th wedding anniversary in December.*



*Parish musicians play accompany worship at Harcourt in December*

## **The Quality of a Nation**

Towards the end of 1983, as part of my training as a minister, I spent some three months or so in Kununurra at the top end of Western Australia. During a visit to a small hospital in Wyndham, in my role as hospital Chaplain, I attempted to have a conversation with a white-haired elderly aboriginal man who was sitting quietly on the veranda outside. He was surrounded by a group of much younger aboriginal men. I was ignorant and inexperienced regarding the proper etiquette for speaking with aboriginal people. As I approached this group, one of the younger men rose quickly and you might say he gently and respectfully intercepted my approach. At the same time this elderly man turned his back to me and gazed out across the valley.

I explained why I was visiting the hospital and the young man politely told me that the elderly gentleman would not speak to me.

It seems that when this old man was eight years old, armed white men rode into his tribal camp in the bush and slaughtered every man, woman and child they could find. Few escaped. He was the only member of his family of five who survived this massacre. His family, along with the majority of his tribe had all been killed in this massacre. Following this shocking experience he vowed never to speak to another white man again as long as he lived.

I have since learnt that, for those willing enough to read, there are numerous accounts of this sort of deliberate massacre perpetrated by hunting parties, or by using other tactics such as herding whole tribes over sheer cliffs in coastal regions of NSW and by the poisoning of flour and waterholes in numerous localities across Australia. There were many deliberate attempts in different places and at different times in the history of Australia to eradicate these First Nations' people.

To a young, well-educated and somewhat naïve young white man, this was a shocking thing to learn. I calculated, based on the approximate age of that old man, that this massacre must have taken place sometime between the two great wars in the middle to late 1930s. My own father would have been about fifteen at that time and I was born roughly ten years after this particular event.

I ought not to have been surprised. Even as a very young boy I vividly remember my family driving to Burgess Beach for a swim near Forster NSW. The bush track passed through an aboriginal camp constructed of cardboard, rusted corrugated iron and tar paper. I can still see the little children staring at us with yellow snotty noses, eyes crawling with flies and visible sores on their almost naked bodies. They were commonly referred to by many derogatory terms (that we\* won't print here). Surprisingly it is still not unusual for me to hear some of these terms today.

Many of you will be aware that although many aboriginal men fought and died for Australia in the armed forces during the war, they were not treated in the same way or had their service recognised in the same way as their white mates after the soldiers were demobbed. It took until 1962 for white Australians to give our first nations' people a vote in parliamentary elections. It took until 1966 for them to be granted equal pay with white people, and even this decision was so resisted at the time, that it had to be deferred for another two years until finally enacted in 1968.

With all these memories still fresh in my mind, I wonder now at the depth of prejudice that I witnessed at such a young age. To what extent was I, and perhaps am I still, an unwitting participant in some way in this culture of prejudice? It does not seem reasonable that a cultural community attitude capable of turning a blind eye to such

massacres, could have disappeared during my short life. I know that it hasn't. From listening in recent times to some groups in my local and wider community, I know that racism and deep prejudice is still embedded in the minds of many Australians. I have heard this prejudice emerge regularly and recently in casual conversation between men and women whenever the topic turns toward aboriginal folk and toward other contentious issues such as immigration, asylum seekers, gay relationships and gay marriages and surprisingly, among many men, even towards women in general.

Sadly it is also still prevalent within our church. A short while ago I was shocked and disgusted when, after a church service, I listened to a group of mature age men openly suggest that if our navy simply sank a couple of refugee boats with the people on board then that would solve the problem of people smuggling in our northern borders. You may also remember the most recent heated debates we have had in this church and the strong reaction by other mainstream denominations to issues such as the leadership of women, the ordination of women, the ordination of gay candidates for ministry, and the decision by our church to allow gay marriage. More widely in our community, why but for prejudice, would family violence be so prevalent that so many women are severely injured or even killed each week in Australia? We are told that at least a quarter or more of Australian women experience some form of coercion or family violence during their lifetime. Why but for prejudice, would women still be paid less than men for the same work? Why else would we use the phrase "glass ceiling" in reference to the reality that women are still often restricted from the highest positions of leadership in commerce and industry?

For sure we must recognise and celebrate that there has been much needed change in our time. But the progress made does not mean that deep prejudice does not still exist. It is true that much of the language used to express this sort of prejudice is no longer acceptable publicly. But just because this language, that we commonly describe as being politically incorrect, is now somewhat suppressed, does not mean that the prejudice does not still exist. And if it still exists, how then does prejudice reveal itself when the commonly used language is no longer acceptable?

One part of the answer might be that it reveals itself in fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of the unfamiliar, fear of change, fear of daring to accept something that is different from the past. We can see this fear in the negative reaction to the successive waves of immigration following the war, and more recently the irrational fear that asylum seekers and immigrants from particular countries are taking over Australia.

Many of us in the church are familiar with the biblical concept that the quality of a nation can be measured by the degree to which we respect and care for the widows, the orphans and the strangers within our gates. If this is the case, then we still have a long way to go, especially with regard to the small but mightily disadvantaged people who are the descendants of the folk who inhabited this very land for at least sixty thousand years before our arrival. I long for and pray for a community in which we are all treated equally regardless of colour, class or creed, ethnic background, gender identification or sexual preference. We have come a long way but there is obviously a lot more work that needs to be done.

*Grahame Pogue*

*\*We in this case refers to the editor of the River of Life*

## Sacrededge Festival



Thirty-plus artists and presenters will be coming to this year's festival, including First Nations musicians Amos Roach (son of Uncle Archie), Kutcha Edwards and four-person band Kardajala Kirridarra.

The festival is from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024 in Queenscliff and this year's theme is 'Diversity from the Heart'. Sacrededge is a

lived experience of how we can treasure each other in all our glorious diversity and find our hearts and minds expanded and enriched. For more information about the festival head to: <https://unitingqueenscliff.org.au/sacrededge-festival/>

A promotional poster for 'The Voice Referendum' featuring Rev Sharon Hollis. The poster has a dark brown background with yellow and white text. On the right side, there is a portrait of Rev Sharon Hollis, a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a green turtleneck sweater. The text on the poster reads: 'THE VOICE REFERENDUM' in large yellow letters, 'A UNITING CHURCH REFLECTION' in smaller yellow letters, 'Rev Sharon Hollis, National President UCA' in white, 'SUNDAY 3 MARCH 2024 AT 2.30PM' in yellow, 'FREE EVENT AT:' in yellow, 'Church of All Nations, 180 Palmerston Street, Carlton.' in white, 'Or for a Zoom link, email: ken.barelli@bigpond.com' in yellow, 'For enquiries call Ken on 0418 317 942' in yellow, and 'VICTAS UNITING CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY' in white at the bottom.

## Uniting in Prayer 2024

Uniting in Prayer is on for the second year in 2024! The national prayer event will take place from 19 May-22 June and draw on the theme for the 17th Assembly, 'Threads of Love, Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries' for reflection. You'll be able to participate through daily prayers gathered from around the church, prayer and worship gatherings and a national prayer chain. To register to participate, use the sign-up form on the Act2 website: <https://www.act2uca.com/unitinginprayer2024>

The Act2 team is also seeking prayer submissions in a variety of creative styles, so whether you feel inspired to contribute a poem, song, artwork, video or beautiful written prayer, they'd love to



hear from you. Prayers in language are more than welcome. Prayers are due 31 March 2024; you can submit your prayer via the link on the above webpage or via email: [uca.act2@nat.uca.org.au](mailto:uca.act2@nat.uca.org.au)

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Presbytery of Loddon Mallee pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where we gather and worship. They were the first inhabitants of these places from time beyond remembering. We pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging and to all descendants who have cared for these lands since creation. We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather and worship.

## Social Media Corner



We have our own private group on Facebook. This is a great place to catch up on Presbytery news, between editions of “The River of Life”. Invite your friends to join (Please note this is a closed group).

Search for “Loddon Mallee Presbytery” or use the link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2302440563408439/>

## Cover Photo

*The photo in the banner on the cover is from a series of photos taken of Mount Moliagul in different seasons and at different times of the day. These were taken by the Rev Gordon Wild in his travels throughout the Loddon Mallee Presbytery. These photos will now feature in each edition of The River of Life.*

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## NEXT EDITION—May 2024

Please write to the Presbytery Office by email or snail-mail and send us your contributions ([Impresbytery@lm.victas.uca.org.au](mailto:Impresbytery@lm.victas.uca.org.au)). This is a chance for you to share your news and happenings to unite our mission and connection and the River of Life is all the richer for it!

Please note that the cut-off date for article submissions is the **7<sup>th</sup> May 2024**.

A reminder that Katherine Wall Dobson is the Editor of the River of Life.