



Crookwell Uniting Church

“To Know Christ and Make Christ Known”



*Witnessing to God's love for the world
From the main street to the paddock.*

April 2023

Death Is Not As Impressive As We Thought

This reflection is taken from the sermon Daniel preached at the Canberra Region Presbytery Meeting on 25 March 2023. It is on the raising of Lazarus text. (John 11.1-45)

Despite Mary's passionate worship, and her attentiveness at Jesus' feet; and regardless of the busyness of Martha, and her striving to serve those in need; death *still* came.

No volume of faith nor frenzy could prevent that which they feared: the slowly creeping certainty of death's embrace upon that which they loved most.

And silence. Silence in answer to their prayers, as the one to whom they had pleaded remained stubbornly where he was.

Friends, let us be inescapably clear:

The death of Lazarus did not happen, because Jesus had tried and failed to prevent it – like some ER doctor continuing to compress a chest from which all life has long since drained away.

Nor did it transpire while he was caught up in an unavoidable logjam of human suffering and need.

He did not drop everything to rush heroically to Lazarus' bedside in an effort to drown out the voices of guilt and helplessness, that taunt so many of us.

Rather, he delayed.

Though he loved Mary and Martha and their brother, he delayed.

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Though his presence may have staved off death for a time, or brought some sense of comfort, he delayed.

And though he could have cured the illness that had overcome their family of faith, he delayed.

For two days he waited, while they sealed the tomb and wept for the one they had lost.

And on the third day, he stood up, and walked back into their lives.

Before we rush too quickly to how this story ends, and join in the joyous celebrations of lives restored and bonds of death undone – we need to sit a while with the discomfort of this delay.

We need to wrestle with the grief and anger that comes with loss, and the frustration of a gospel message that fails to prevent death.

We need to ponder why it is we would follow this Christ, who fails to perform the miracles we so desire.

For the cry of Mary and Martha in the passages that follow is one that we too know only too well.

“Lord, if only you had been here...If only the Assembly had changed the regulations...If only the Synod had not enforced so much compliance...If only the Presbytery had acted sooner...If only our Ministers had worked harder...If only we’d

had more volunteers...Lord, if only... Then our church would not have died.”

How often we have longed for that miracle – for the right Minister, or the right programme at the right time to awaken our Church, and keep the embers alive.

Indeed, if we are honest, as we come to this service of induction, many of us will be holding onto hopes that this person in this placement will be what saves the Church.

For the idol of immortality is ever before us, calling us by name, and seeking to lead us into the promise of a beautiful banquet that, once eaten, tastes of naught but ashes. You see, though we live in fear of death, and strive to avoid it, our frantic efforts to stay alive result only in working ourselves and others into the ground, in the very effort to avoid going down into the dust.

For life is a death sentence, and no number of burnt-out souls in our wake can make it otherwise.

But the good news of the Gospel is that Jesus refuses to join in our frenetic work of avoidance. He has not come to indulge our fantasies of immortality.

He knows, as Paul writes, that “the last enemy to be destroyed is death,” and that you do not prove the weakness of something by avoiding it, but through naming and confronting it.

And so, he delays: for two days he delays, even as his friends begin to cry out “Lord – *do something.*”

For two days, he delays, even as the grip of death wraps its binds around Lazarus’ body.

For two days, he delays, even as compliance increases, congregations close, and Christendom chokes on its own contradictions.

For two days, he delays, in order that he might descend into the depths of darkness and come face to face with death itself.

And on the third day...On the third day...

“If Jesus Christ is the Lord of time,” says Kara Slade, **“Then it is not our job to save the Church.”**

So, hear the Word of the Lord, “This illness does not lead to death, but to God’s glory.”

Like those who watch for the morning then, Let us hope in the Lord!

When the days of ministry and witness are at their hardest, Let us hope in the Lord!

And when we cannot see Christ, for all the idols at our door, let us hope in the Lord!

For his promise is resurrection, and death, it turns out, is not as impressive as we thought.

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Meeting the Uniting Church Again for the First Time

Friends, welcome to a new segment in our monthly newsletter. I am conscious that we have had many new members join us over the last twelve months from a variety of Church backgrounds (Catholic, Churches of Christ and Pentecostal, just to name a few). And, even for those of us who have been part of the Uniting Church for a long time, if we were around before 1977, we often still think of ourselves in terms of which predecessor church we belonged to (Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist) and perhaps remain unsure what makes the Uniting Church, the Uniting Church.

So, each month I will share with you a reflection on one part of the theology and life of the Uniting Church. Many of these come from the National Assemblies website if you would like to take a deeper dive in your own time.

Jesus is a Builder of Community (Ecumenism)

Jesus consistently asks his followers to love one another. He challenges us to reach out to others as well – the poor and needy, our neighbours, even to our enemies! The Uniting Church believes that Christ gave Christians unity, and calls

them to live out that unity. That's why ecumenism is part of our DNA.

'Ecumenism' is the commitment to promoting and working toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation. The Uniting Church heritage is of an ecumenical Church which arose from the coming together of three different denominations. We use the name 'Uniting' rather than 'United' because we believe we are still on a journey of coming together.

That journey might involve grass-roots cooperation between local churches of different denominations, or even a further joining of whole denominations. We continually seek to work together with, grow in understanding of, and move closer to our Christian sisters and brothers.

The Uniting Church is also strongly committed to reaching out to those of other faiths in interfaith friendship and support. Finally, we seek common ground with all those of goodwill whether they have any faith commitment or not. As human beings we share many hopes, dreams and sometimes difficulties, and so we seek to join with others around issues of common concern – Uniting for the Common Good!

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Pastoral Drop-In

Come and join Daniel for a cuppa and conversation during the new 'drop-in' times at Crookwell and Goulburn.

Daniel will be available at the Welcome Christian Bookshop on the first and third Wednesdays of each month from 1-4pm.

He will also be at the Red Dove Centre in Goulburn on the second and fourth Monday from 9:30am-12pm.

April Dates

Crookwell

April 5th

April 19th

Goulburn

April 10th

April 24th

Palm Sunday Walk

The Palm Sunday walk will begin at 11:00 am on April 2 at St Mary's Catholic Church. Car pooling from Crookwell Uniting will be available at the end of our Sunday service.

The walk will be from St Mary's past St Bartholomew's and finish here at Uniting Church for a morning tea.

All are welcome to attend.

Worship & Readings

Sunday 2 April

9:30am Crookwell and
crookwelluniting.org

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew
21:1-11

Sunday 9 April

11:00am Crookwell and
crookwelluniting.org

Readings: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-
24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

Sunday 16 April

9:30am Crookwell and
crookwelluniting.org

Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1
Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Sunday 23 April

9:30 Crookwell and
crookwelluniting.org

Readings: Acts 2:14, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4,
12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Sunday 30 April

9:30 Crookwell and
crookwelluniting.org

Readings: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter
2:19-25; John 10:1-10

Easter Services

Maundy Thursday

Thursday 6 April

7pm Goulburn

Readings: Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm
116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
John 13:1-17, 31-35

Good Friday

Friday 7 April

9:30am Crookwell and
crookwelluniting.org

Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22;
Hebrews 16:10-25; John 18:1-19:42

Easter Sunday

Sunday 9 April

9:00am Goulburn
11:00am Crookwell

Readings: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-
24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18
